

Gravesend and District RSPB Local Group



- nature's voice

Newsletter May 2010

This is my last newsletter as Group Leader. Jeff Kirk will be taking over the leadership from May 2010 and Sue Healey will be the new membership secretary and I will then focus on Publicity.

The changes will be made at our AGM at 7.45pm on Wednesday May 12 at St Botolph's Hall which will be followed by a talk entitled *The present and future work of the RSPB in our area* by Chris Corrigan, the RSPB South East Region Director. Please come along to hear Chris. There will be time for questions!

I have really enjoyed being Group Leader. It has enabled me to achieve so many things for local conservation through birding walks, talks and special events. The last sentence, however, contains an error! What I should have written is that group leadership has enabled me to work with others to achieve so many things. It has always been WE. One other person has always worked with me – Sally. I would not have achieved anything without her. Usually I needed the support of others too. A couple of quick phone calls, an email or two, and several people find themselves working quite hard showing people birds, showing children how to build insect homes or walking along their street pushing RSPB material through letter boxes. **My thanks to all of you.** I have also enjoyed meeting so many new people and making so many new friends. The friendly nature of the Gravesend Group was established many years ago, “before my time”, and I am really pleased to be part of it.

Sally and I will continue with our bird related work but, as some of you already know, we are going to focus our RSPB work on non - avian taxa i.e. insects etc. We aim to build a team to promote and monitor these species on our RSPB reserves. If you would like to help please let me or Sally know.

Malcolm

New RSPB reserve in Kent - Quiz

The RSPB have acquired a new 600 acre reserve in Kent. Where is it? A clue may be found on the skyline on the left-hand picture for those with good eyesight and lots of imagination. What small mammal is the ditch on the right-hand picture being managed for? Clue: look at the shape of the banks. Answers later.



Reminder - Coach trip to RSPB Minsmere Reserve on Saturday 12 June 2010

Tickets are still available for this enjoyable day out.

Join us to see marsh harriers, avocets, terns, sand martins and, maybe, swallowtail butterflies.....! The reserve has hides, trails, a good visitor centre & restaurant.

The coach will leave the Woodville Halls, Gravesend, at 8.00am and leave Minsmere at about 5.00pm. Please remember to take your RSPB membership card.

Tickets £16 each - available at Group meetings or by post. Please make cheques payable to Gravesend RSPB Local Group and send to Sally Jennings, 206 Lower Higham Rd, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN (01474 322171).

Millbrook Garden Centre – Half – term Workshops

It's amazing what you can make with a piece of down-pipe and some cocktail straws! Once provided with these simple bits of equipment all that was needed was some keen children, a creative volunteer or two, and you have the perfect recipe for a fun session making insect homes.

That was one of the activities on the agenda at Millbrook's Garden Centre during the February mid-term break, organised by the Gravesend RSPB Group. Children were drawn to this activity in their dozens and once they had been shown how to cut the straws, assemble them within the pipe off-cut, tape up the back and add a wire to hang the home by, they were well away.

Volunteers explained to the children about the importance of providing cosy, easy to make homes for all types of invertebrates. The tubular straws, once cut, were just right for hibernating ladybirds, lacewings, spiders, bees and other creepy-crawlies that need our help to provide them with a habitat to get them through the winter months and beyond. Children were keen to make a home for their own gardens and to learn about the importance of pollinating insects and about spiders that help to 'keep the balance' in the insect population. Once the children had made their insect homes, other activities on hand were, colour an owl mask and paint your own design on a material bag - reinforcing the message that we should all be getting rid of plastic bags that are so damaging to wildlife and the environment in so many ways.

It was good to see so many young minds involved in a creative activity such as this. I'm pleased that the children went away with something that they themselves had created for invertebrates.

Thanks to everyone that helped with these workshops.

Julie Peeling

Future Indoor Meetings at Millbrook Garden Centre

Many of you will know that for many years the Gravesend Group has organised a programme of indoor meetings at St Botolph's Hall during the winter months on a Tuesday afternoon. Nationally very few RSPB groups do this. These meetings attracted audiences of about 50 members although more recently the attendance was declining. Several years ago we decided to change the venue to Millbrook Garden Centre. Although this did mean that some members were not able to get to the meetings the renewed interest in our afternoon meetings at Millbrook was immense. The first three meetings attracted uncomfortably high numbers of people (120 on one occasion!) and it has only been by diligently NOT promoting these events that we now have a very good regular audience of about 70. The venue has been very good for us. The environment is excellent and it seems to bring out the best in our speakers. The friendly atmosphere is contagious and I, personally, have really enjoyed being the "presenter". The majority of the Millbrook staff have been very supportive and several have made major contributions to the success of our meetings and, working "behind the scenes", their friendly support has made my role so much easier and I am very grateful to them.

Unfortunately Millbrook Garden Company has now told us that, although our meetings in September, October, and November are confirmed, as from January 2011 we will not be able to use their centre. The cafeteria has expanded and requires the space that we use. Clearly I am very disappointed by this and I have made representations to Millbrook. Undoubtedly the venue is good for us but I also think that we add value to Millbrook Garden Centre.

Your committee are now trying to resolve the issue but we have put on hold our bookings for speakers for afternoons in 2011. We are also looking for other venues. Please contact me if you have any suggestions for an alternative venue.

Initially the ending of our agreement with Millbrook was to have immediate effect. I worked quite hard to ensure that the March 2010 meeting could go ahead. Then, as many of you will know, the speaker failed to show up! The meeting was doomed from the start! Still I enjoyed sitting in the café afterwards drinking tea with friends

Malcolm

Trip Report to Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve KWT on Saturday 10 April 2010



The birds were singing and the sun was shining - what more could we ask for.

After what has felt like a long and cold winter twenty six enthusiastic folk met for our sunny walk around the KWT Reserve at Sevenoaks. The weather was bright and warm and we were greeted in the car park by a male great spotted woodpecker that performed well, flying from tree to tree, enabling most of the gathering group to get good views. Migrant chiffchaff and blackcap were singing in the trees. Soon we were watching a little ringed plover and queuing up for telescope views, generously provided by the dedicated chaps prepared to carry them, - you know who you are and a big 'thank you!' The yellow eye-ring showed really well and we spent some time watching at this handsome bird.

As we moved along the side of the first lake we quickly had coot, moorhen, shelduck, cormorant, greylag, Egyptian and Canada goose in our sights. Three long-tailed tits entertained us for a while with their frantic activity, and three blackcaps were actively chasing about in a willow tree. Chiffchaff seemed to be all around us with one pair collecting nesting material along the edge of the track and totally unconcerned as we walked past their new home. Cetti's warbler sang away every now and then, and two gregarious robins came very close, demanding our attention.

As the day warmed up the butterflies came out and we managed to see several comma, peacock, a green-veined white, and brimstone. A bee's nest was spotted in a hole in a tree and the bees were living up to their name busily flying around the area.

After a break for lunch a short walk back to the East Lake and the Tyler Hide where more water birds were spotted, including a snipe which was doing its best not to be seen, giving us rather a challenge in describing its whereabouts - but we got there in the end. Walking back alongside the glistening lake, we chatted over the highlights of the day, some taking a cup of tea in the sunshine, wanting to prolong an excellent day out. Spring is finally here.

Many thanks go to Julie and Chris for leading a very successful walk (especially Chris who was suffering from a bad back - what a hero). Total species seen year to date by the group: 102.

Sue Healey

RSPB are delighted to host a lively open air production by the **Rude Mechanical Theatre Company**

At RSPB Northward Hill, Bromhey Farm, Cooling near Rochester, Kent on Wednesday 28 July 2010.

Gates open at 6.00pm for picnics. Performance starts at 7.30pm. Please bring your own seats or rugs

Tickets £11, with concessions for seniors, children and group bookings.

Box office 01323 501260 or Book online at: www.rudemechanicaltheatre.co.uk

Parking and toilets on site. A beautiful countryside setting for a good laugh and some excellent music on a summer evening. Can get chilly later so bring a jumper or a hot toddy or a hot companion. Probably the best open air theatre event you will see this year!

Answers to Quiz –new RSPB reserve at Lydden near Sandwich Bay



Freshwater wetland nature reserves, particularly reedbeds, are rare and increasingly at risk from drainage, drought and pollution. Ten years ago the RSPB carried out a joint study with the

Environment Agency to identify potential new places where a reedbed might be created. One of the best areas identified was 600 acres of land in Kent between the old Betteshanger Colliery and the village of Worth near Sandwich. Mining subsidence had created a shallow lake, there is a good water supply and it is close to the coast. Much of the local farmland has been designated as an SSSI. Alan Parker, RSPB Kent Reserves Manager (picture right), has been instrumental in acquiring, and managing the land. He showed a group of friends and colleagues round the reserve on 21 April prior to his retirement from the RSPB (top picture). Alan has made his mark in bird conservation in Kent, working as warden at Northward Hill and later as manager of the enlarged Bromhey Farm before promotion to his present position.



Answer 1 – Lydden Valley reserve. Public footpaths are used to view the wetland at present and, as the reserve is developed, access points are planned for the future. This reserve could be a haven for wetland species and could attract birds from the continent being so close to the English Channel.

Answer 2 – A good population of water voles are in the area and, as the ditch is cleared to promote water flow, only one side of the channel has been removed so that water voles can safely use the other side.

Coach trip to RSPB Pulborough Brooks on Sunday 7 November 2010

Set in the Arun Valley with views across wet meadows to the South Downs, Pulborough Brooks can be a haven for wildlife. We hope to see flocks of wintering ducks, fieldfares and redwings feasting on berries and nuthatches & tits on the feeders by the visitor centre. The reserve has hides, trails, and a good visitor centre with tea room.

The coach will leave the Woodville Halls, Gravesend, at 8.30am and leave Pulborough at about 4.00pm. The nearest car park is at Lord Street, Gravesend. Please remember to take your RSPB members card.

Tickets are £13 each and are available at Group meetings OR

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