

Gravesend and District RSPB Local Group



- nature's voice

Newsletter December 2010

Afternoon meetings: Change of venue

**Tuesday Afternoon meetings in 2011 will be held at
The Kent Room, Woodville Halls, Gravesham Civic Centre, DA12 1DD**

Meetings will start at 2.00 p.m.

There is a cafe in the foyer providing snacks and drinks.

Regular buses passing the hall and car parking is available nearby for which there is a small charge.

More details are available on www.rspbgravesend.org.uk.

Wednesday Evening meetings will continue at St Botolph's Hall, Northfleet, as usual.

Many thanks to Sue and Penny for arranging this new venue which we are sure will be a success.

With this Newsletter you will find the programme of walks and talks for 2011. We try to vary the places we visit but, inevitably, there are many places that we go to every year because that's where we see most birds. We also try to see as many different habitats as possible. For 2011 we revert to Northward Hill for the dawn chorus and have reinstated some places we visited in the past. In 2010 the migrant watch meeting worked well, a sort of organised twitch, so we have retained this. Get your annual list off to a good start by joining us for a visit to Shellness and Capel Fleet on 1 January and blow those cobwebs away!

Please note the change of venue for Tuesday afternoon meetings. We are sorry to be moving from Millbrooks but are sure that using Gravesham Civic Centre will be just as successful – see details above.

The committee is grateful to those members who, over the year, have volunteered for various events and our thanks to them all. However we could do with some additional helpers particularly at our indoor meetings. More specifically we need someone to act as a “meeter and greeter” and to take the admission and raffle monies. If you would like to help in any way please let me know.

I hope you have had a good year birding and have a reasonable list of sightings – I still can't break the 200 target I have set myself! Have a wonderful Christmas and I look forward to seeing everyone again in the New Year!

Jeff Kirk

No airport at Cliffe again! The Sunday Times has been running articles on the possibility of situating a future airport in the Thames estuary either on “Boris Island” or on the Hoo peninsula. The Gravesend Group took part in the successful “No airport at Cliffe” campaign some years ago (photo 2002).



Therefore we took up the issue with the RSPB as North Kent is one of the most important parts of the region for wildlife. We have been told that neither the RSPB's position nor their attitude to any plans of this nature have changed and they remain utterly opposed to such developments as do KCC and local councils. Their view is that these are no more than speculative policies that have no more weight than previous ideas that have been bandied about by Boris Johnson. The RSPB's approach is that there is a fine line to be drawn between reacting strongly against such plans and giving credence/publicity to a non-starter by doing so. Consequently they responded to the Times article and undertook interviews with Radio Kent condemning the plans.

It is to be hoped that David Cameron's response to a Parliamentary Question, put by the local Medway MP, that there were no plans to build any new airports in Kent has put an end to further speculation. *Jeff Kirk*

Sick and injured birds A number of people have asked what they should do if they find a bird that is in distress. The RSPCA is the national charity that should be contacted for help and advice although some local vets may help with injured birds. Further advice may be found on the main RSPB website www.rspb.org.uk, go to "Advice", and "Helping Birds". Unfortunately the RSPB is a bird conservation charity and has no facilities or expertise to deal with sick, orphaned or injured birds.

RSPB

Big Garden Birdwatch over the weekend of 20-30 January 2011 This is one of the largest surveys of birds anywhere in the world and gives a unique picture of the birds visiting our gardens. With natural habitats under threat gardens have become increasingly important havens for birds and other wildlife. You may remember last year when the cold weather brought redwings and fieldfares into suburban gardens! The results help the RSPB to plan their campaigns to help those birds under threat.

Over 500,000 people took part in the 2010 survey counting some 8.5 million birds in 280,000 gardens. For Kent the top 10 birds were house sparrow, blackbird, starling, blue tit, collared dove, wood pigeon, chaffinch, robin, great tit and dunnock.

Many of you take part in this event and will know the format but for beginners it is quite simple. All you need to do is spend an hour watching and recording birds in your garden or local park. Your results can be submitted online, or by post to the RSPB, who will collate the results. Personalised survey forms will be sent to all RSPB members with January's Birds magazine.



Who knows what will turn up in your garden!

North Kent Marshes News The residential volunteer programme is now well established and is proving very successful. Our own Group members are taking on a variety of tasks to maintain and improve the reserves on Thursdays and Fridays. Rolf Williams has been appointed as communication officer and his work will involve liaising with the local community, improving publicity through contacts with the local media, and advertising events at the various North Kent sites. *RSPB*

Cliffe Pools The car park received some attention in late November and a small section of footpath has been laid from its edge towards the reserve entrance. Fencing at the Salt Lane entrance will be replaced and equestrian gates will be provided for the byway. This will permit access for the disabled and exclude motorbikes. The fence along the Omya quarry has been repaired and earthworks and the bike ramps have removed. Increased patrols on the site should curb, hopefully, lingering antisocial behaviour.

As consequence of the ongoing partnership with local authorities, particularly in addressing antisocial behaviour, the Highways Department of Medway Council have offered to improve the dogleg bend on Salt Lane at the Cliffe Pools entrance. This will include repair to the road surface and new road markings, properly delineating the bend and depicting a mini-roundabout. The entrance to the reserve will be properly curbed with posts to improve road safety and stop trucks turning on the entrance ramp.

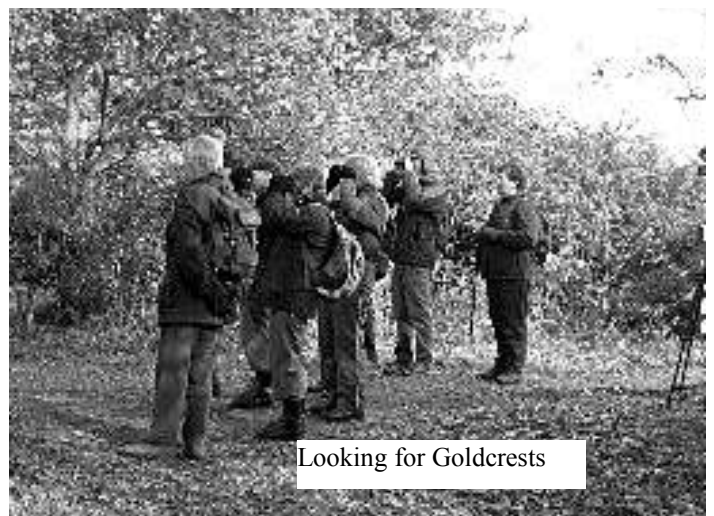
Inter-lagoon sluices were successfully installed in September and work has now started on the planning application for modification/enhancement of the sea wall sluice, the funding is in place, and the work will be completed by the end of next year. The completion of the sluice work will, for the first time, provide control over water circulation in the pools which, in turn, enhance the ecosystem and should mitigate against algal blooms, which were an issue during 2010.

In addition to formal surveys The North Kent Marsh team now conduct focused bird monitoring at Cliffe throughout the week and weekends as a part of a new routine to assess the reserves full “people engagement” potential. Sightings information will be posted on notice boards and the website (there has been a noticeable increase in birdwatchers visiting the reserve). RSPB

Great Bells Farm Developments at this new site just to the north of Windmill Creek at Elmley have continued to be low-key. The Environment Agency bought the 193 hectare farm to provide mitigation habitat for areas of grazing and salt-marsh that are likely to be lost to sea level rise and future development. The RSPB will be managing the site as a reserve in the style of Elmley and are currently developing project, design and management plans. Hopefully we can start actually managing the land next summer but, even then, it will be a while before we can consider advertising the site as a new reserve and inviting visitors to see it. RSPB

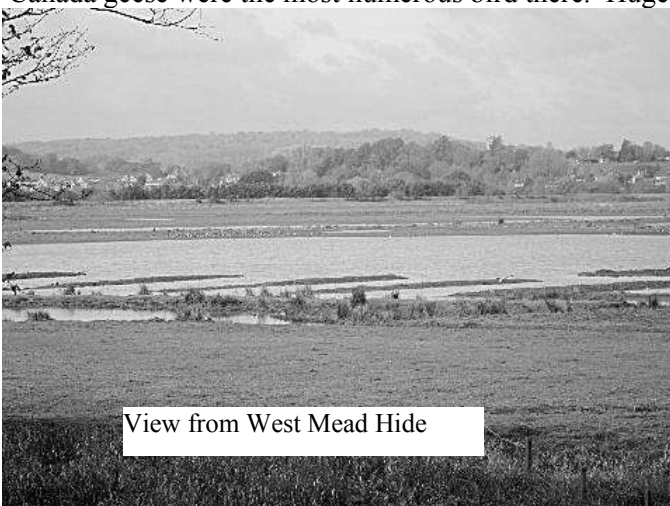
Trip to RSPB Pulborough 2010 A cold morning for our coach trip however, our driver, Bernie, arrived early (despite all the road works around Gravesend) and we were soon on our way to Pulborough Brooks. We had a smooth journey to the reserve with the weather improving all the time.

At the feeders in front of the centre we watched both blue and great tits. As we went off along the trail a herd of roe deer were sighted in the fields and Malcolm explained how to identify them from the markings on their rear, and Louise explained the history and significance of their colouring. The herd were formerly on a private estate and have bred specifically in a dark form. Moving off around the trail redwing, mistle thrush, song thrush, and goldfinch vied for our attention with lesser redpoll and greenfinch. A kestrel hovered above us and nuthatch and goldcrest were feeding in the trees. We watched some blackbirds in the hedgerows, and discussed the difference in bill colour with juvenile and migrant birds having a dark bill rather than the usual yellow.



At a viewpoint over the scrapes we had our first view of the waterfowl that winter here. Hundreds of wigeon making their lovely sounds; mallard and teal fed, slept and preened, with pintail, shelduck and shoveler adding to the activity. Black-tailed godwit were spotted in the distance, identified by the white bars on the wings as they flew around, whilst groups of moorhen were feeding in front of the hide.

As we moved around the reserve, from Netley's Hide to Little Hanger and Winpenny, it became apparent that Canada geese were the most numerous bird there. Huge numbers were feeding on the grass around the pools, and more flying in as we watched. As the biting wind was chilling some of us we decided to take lunch in Winpenny and some were lucky enough to see a buzzard flying over. Moving on to West Mead Hide the front-runners disturbed a sparrowhawk which had been drinking or bathing in a small stream at the side of the path. The bird flew to take cover in the base of a nearby hedge and promptly disappeared from sight!



We walked back towards the centre - and thoughts of a welcome cup of tea in the cafe to warm us up - we discussed the previous sightings of bullfinch in that area on earlier visits. True to her usual

form Sally immediately spotted one, in the area that Josie had been referring to, its beautiful pink/red chest colour looking superb in the bright sunshine. With our usual generosity of spirit, we were soon pointing the bird out to several other visitors to the reserve.

Back at the centre the group disbanded with some taking warming refreshments, others browsing in the shop, and the rest deciding between a second circuit or a walk around the heathland trails behind the car park. Whilst we sorted ourselves out there were marsh tit, coal tit, blue and great tit on the feeders and then a nuthatch came into the ground feeder, rather nervously at first, but after the main group had moved off, others spotted two at the same time.

From the heathland trails, we saw lesser redpoll and goldcrest, along with great views of treecreeper, with their lovely white fronts.

Everyone delighted with the day out as we gathered back at the coach for our efficient trip back to Gravesend. Thanks Sally, for arranging another great trip. *Year To Date bird species total: 161*

Sue Healey



Country Fair – Sunday 5 September 2010 This popular event took place at Bromhey Farm once again this year. It is now one of the largest wildlife fairs in Kent. The success of the fair was largely due to the enthusiasm of the many volunteers from local RSPB groups who ran various stalls and helped generally. There were a number of volunteers from our group and I know that the RSPB were extremely grateful for their help.

Coach trip to RSPB Minsmere Reserve on Sunday 22 May 2011

The RSPB's Minsmere Reserve is hard to beat for a good day out so we have decided to visit again this year. Hopefully we will get our annual dose of marsh harriers, bitterns, avocets and bearded tits, with perhaps a spoonbill thrown in too! The reserve has hides, trails, a good visitor centre and restaurant. Please take your RSPB membership card if you are a member.

The coach will leave the Woodville Halls, Gravesend, at 8.00am and leave Minsmere at about 5.00pm. The nearest car park is at Lord St. with parking free at weekends.

Tickets are **£16** each and are available at Group meetings

OR

Make cheques payable to Gravesend RSPB Local Group and send to Sally Jennings, 206 Lower Higham Rd, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN (01474 322171).

RSPB members please take your card.



Photographs and Illustrations

“No airport at Cliffe” by Pauline Heathcote, *redwing, looking for goldcrests, view from West Mead hide and autumnal scene* by Sue Healey.

Admission charge for Indoor meetings 2011

Because of increasing costs and the necessary relocation of our Tuesday meetings the committee has reluctantly taken the decision to increase the admission charge for all our indoor meetings to £2.50 per person.