

Gravesend and District RSPB Local Group Newsletter September 2012

www.rspbgravesend.org.uk



Passing the baton is a timely remark as I prepare to edit this Newsletter. Jeff suggested I introduce myself... my connections with the group began with the first ever meeting and I was a committee member in those early days.

I'll be at the dinner to celebrate 35 years of the group and hope to meet many of you there.

Booking details on the back page. Good Birding Pauline Heathcote

Jeffrey Kirk, Group Leader, writes ... What a terrible year weather-wise for birds with a well above-average rainfall which has had a devastating effect on the breeding season for many birds, particularly waders. As I write now we seem to be getting an improvement with the sun shining, as it should in the summer, and the emergence of butterflies which have been slow to show this year. Sadly many species of birds have been showing a decline over recent years for reasons that are not fully understood but there are obvious reasons like loss of habitat and changes in farming practices. Although some birds have been declining for some time now others are remarkably resilient so hopefully next year conditions will be more favourable and we see some sort of return to normality.

Airports and the Thames Estuary ...With the government trying to deal with difficult economic problems and at the same time keeping the coalition together, decisions on policy that affect the environment have been fudged if not completely ignored. This means that it is as important as ever for organizations like the RSPB to challenge the government, when necessary, on policies detrimental to the environment. We will feature on our website any appeals for action by members that we receive from the RSPB and I know that you will show your support. A major project that could have huge impact on us all here is the siting of additional airport capacity. The government's consultation will report later this autumn but an airport in the Thames estuary is a very real threat. The RSPB has contingency plans for a campaign to protest against such a project and has consulted widely with others who have similar concerns about this. So for the moment we wait and see.

Despite the weather most of our **outdoor trips** have gone ahead with little disruption and we have welcomed new faces particularly on the Tuesday morning walks which have proved very popular. Our website has all the information about our trips, with appropriate pictures, and I hope everyone has been able to access these even if it means via a library or other computer. And I would encourage you to share your birding adventures with us: instructions on how to do this are on the website. There have been some problems with emails but Alan, later in this Newsletter, tells how to overcome this.

By the time you receive this Newsletter many events will have brightened up our lives, thrilled and entertained us this year despite the weather. We have had the Diamond Jubilee and Olympics, successful events that have captured the public's imagination, and the **RSPB Wildlife Fair at Northward Hill on 9 September** will show us something of the RSPB's work locally. I hope you all have an enjoyable summer and I look forward to seeing you at our events. But, firstly, I am off for two weeks' residential volunteering at Fairburn Ings RSPB reserve in West Yorkshire.



Our 35th Anniversary Dinner

Shorne Village Hall on SATURDAY 6TH OCTOBER



Book NOW!

Sue Healey reports on volunteering *Full report on Website* Some of you will be aware that I have been visiting and supporting a reserve called REGUA (Reserva Ecologica de Guapi Assu) in the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest just north of Rio de Janeiro over the last few years. This year I had the opportunity to stay for a little longer and do some voluntary work as well. I thoroughly enjoyed myself, and there is something very rewarding about putting something back into a place or interest that has given you pleasure, whether it is the exotic setting of Brazil or helping with my local RSPB Group. We are always looking for people to join in with the group in lots of different capacities, leading walks, attending committee meetings, helping with education sessions, stuffing envelopes, writing blogs, taking photographs - whatever your skill or interest, you can always add value, just come along and join us.

Indoor Meetings in September ... take a look at the event card or the website for more future meetings
Wednesday 12th September 7:45pm - 10pm St. Botolph's Hall

WILDLIFE OF THE SOUTH-EAST by Jodie Randall

Tuesday 25th September 2pm - 4pm Woodville Halls

MEXICAN MAGIC by Peter and Pauline Heathcote

A Report on the GRAVESEND RSPB LOCAL GROUP AGM HELD ON 9 MAY 2012

Group leader's report The group had had another successful year with good numbers of members participating in the programme of walks and talks. The two coach trips to Minsmere and Welney WWT, had been well supported. Group members continued to support the RSPB on the North Kent marshes through the Thursday working group, providing help at the wildlife fair and undertaking various surveys and other duties as requested by the RSPB. The committee arranges events that people had said they enjoyed; if there are any additional events that you would like included in the programme please let members of the committee know. The group is now in its 35th year and its continuing success will depend on the help and support of members. A dinner has been arranged for 6 October- see David's advert on the last page – which will celebrate this achievement and the continued need for us to make our voices heard to protect birds and their environment. We are always looking for people to join the committee who would like to help and learn more about the RSPB both locally and nationally. We currently need a Secretary for our meetings, approximately four a year, but would be pleased to welcome anyone who wishes to become more involved in the important work that the RSPB does. Please contact me, or any other committee member know if you are interested.

Jeff expressed his thanks to the committee and to all those volunteers working behind the scenes for their support in ensuring the group's continued success.

Treasurer's Report presented by Neville Lunness-Barnes There was a net surplus of £170 and £2,140 in the bank at the end of the financial year 31 March 2012. £700 had been donated to the RSPB. Neville thanked Maria Yetman who has been auditing the accounts for several years. Maria has, however, said that circumstances mean she can no longer undertake this task and the group was now looking for someone to take her place. Anyone wishing to volunteer should contact Jeff or Neville.

Election of Committee For the next year Jeff will remain as Group Leader. The present committee has agreed to continue - **Neville Lunness-Barnes** as Treasurer: **Sue Healey** as Membership Secretary: **Penny Leeves**, who arranges speakers: **Paul Yetman** the walks: **Sally Jennings** is Publicity Officer and organizes coach trips: **Julie Peeling** provides advice on educational matters: **David Johnson** runs the raffles (and is organizing the celebratory dinner): **Josie Brown** organizes the sale of RSPB items.

Increase in annual membership fee For the next year we face increased costs. Speakers' travelling expenses are increasing as are other costs and the committee reluctantly proposed an increase in the annual subscription to £3.00 per person effective from 1 January 2013. Members agreed to this unanimously.

After the main business of the AGM, Rolf Williams, RSPB Communications Officer for Kent, talked about Futurescapes. This new initiative brings together all the RSPB's strands of work - nature reserves, farm conservation advice, planning casework and public events - across the UK to step up their effectiveness. The South East is one of the priority regions in the UK where the RSPB and other conservation bodies will work in partnership with landowners to create space for nature. For more details see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/futurescapes>

Having trouble with our "News Feed" email? Alan Else advises ... Over the past couple of months, several of you have reported that you'd stopped getting emails from our automated news email system. After some lengthy investigation, I discovered the root cause of the problem was their email provider had decided that emails from our address were "spam". In this instance, all the people who suffered were "BT Yahoo" users, but it could happen to users of other email providers, so I thought I'd provide some general guidelines in case it happens to others.

You should receive at least 2 emails a month from us (outdoor meeting reminders), so if you notice they've stopped, the first place to look is your "spam" folder. The first thing to say is that you may avoid the problem in the first place if you add our email address as to your "contacts" list: "webmaster@rspbgravesend.org.uk".

Remember that some of you are using a mail "client" that runs on your desktop/laptop (Microsoft outlook, outlook express, windows mail, etc), which will automatically log in to your internet-based email system and retrieve your emails for you.

The spam filter I'm concerned about here is the one on your internet-based email system, so you will have to manually log in to that email system via your web browser (Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, etc) to check the spam folder on there. Be warned, the emails that this filter will trap could contain material that will be very offensive, so you may want to avert your eyes! If you do find our emails in your "spam" folder, you will be able to mark it as "not spam" and it will be moved to your "in box". Spam filters are supposed to be intelligent, so you may have to do this a few times and hopefully the filter will eventually learn that these are not spam.

If you've added us to your contacts, and marked the emails as "not spam" a few times, and it's still happening, you may have to add create a filter (BT Yahoo) or a rule (Google mail) that tells the mail server what to do with emails from our address. For example, you can build a filter/rule that says if the email is from us, move it to your "in box".

I hope I haven't baffled you all with science – if you have any problems with any of this please feel free to contact me (webmaster@rspbgravesend.org.uk) and I'll try to give you help that is specific for your email provider. Home visits can be arranged for the price of a cup of tea and some bikkies!

RSPB Wildlife & Countryside Fair - Sunday 9 September 9, 11am to 4pm

Northward Hill Reserve, Bromhey Farm, Cooling, Rochester, Kent ME3 8DS

FREE ENTRY (suggested car parking donation)

The RSPB's annual flagship event returns promising fun for all the family.

The Fair will feature the great outdoors and healthy living, arts and crafts with a country theme and an Explorers' Trail incorporating hunting for bugs and dipping for aquatic creatures!

Thames Estuary Airport update from the RSPBGiven the potential scale of impact of the current proposals for a Thames Estuary Airport and a 5,000 home development on the Hoo Peninsula, Rolf Williams RSPB Communications Officer for Kent, has provided the following summary the RSPB's position and activity.

- **Government consultation on aviation** The RSPB had hoped that the full consultation on aviation expansion would emerge in July but in the end the Government only published their Aviation Policy Framework. This sets out the conditions under which aviation should exist and expand rather than how, where and if the aviation sector should expand. The broader consultation on aviation expansion is yet to be published. The Government remains non-committal about when this will be and, following a recent statement from David Cameron, it could be the end of the year. Once it does emerge the RSPB will be looking at ways to ensure that a Thames Estuary Airport is not part of the Government's plans.
- **The word on the street**Although the consultation hasn't appeared, it hasn't stopped people talking about the Estuary Airport and there's been a lot in the media. A debate on the issues hosted by the Evening Standard that concluded with a vote on the Estuary Airport option. The result was split 50/50 which, considering the audience was largely London based, wasn't a bad outcome. Mark Reckless, MP, held a Parliamentary debate on aviation on July 4. The RSPB was able to brief him and many of the MPs attending. The RSPB was referenced several times in the debate and, of all the speakers, only one spoke up for Boris Island: Jo Johnson, MP for Orpington, brother of the Mayor of London.
- **The RSPB is working with Medway Council and Kent County Council** to develop arguments against the estuary airport. They have also met the Foster's team behind the airport plan. They didn't expect to convince them to drop their ideas but were able to point out a few flaws in their plans to compensate for the damage they would cause to the wildlife habitats.
- **Friends of North Kent Marshes** attended the Grain Fair on one of the wetter weekends in July. They collected signatures and received considerable support for the opposition stance. This was particularly reassuring as there is a certain amount of vociferous support for the airport from one section of the Grain community.

As the campaign develops the RSPB will be producing a variety of materials to promote our cause. more information about the campaign and downloadable posters available on the RSPB website www.rspb.org.uk/noestuaryairport

Lodge Hill Development Early results from this year's national BTO nightingale survey indicate that around 150 nightingales were on the Hoo peninsula this spring, almost double the number found in the last survey in 1999. Even more remarkable is that this increase dramatically bucks the trend of expected declines elsewhere in the UK. With 84 singing males, the Lodge Hill area looks like one of the most important sites in the country for this iconic songster that has inspired some of our greatest writers.

This news, however, comes just when their very existence is threatened by Medway Council's plan to build up to 5,000 houses at Lodge Hill. The RSPB believes that the development will both destroy habitat and increased disturbance, including predation by cats that would jeopardise the nightingale population. The RSPB is working closely with Kent Wildlife Trust, the Medway Countryside Forum, Natural England and Medway Council to get the best outcome for the nightingales at Lodge Hill and Chattenden Woods, and to promote the Hoo Peninsula as a very special place for people and wildlife.

Roger Kiddie reports Butterflies at Northward Hill, 2012 After a bright start, monitoring of butterfly numbers at Northward Hill has been giving very low numbers of insects.

Late May and early June brought out a good hatch of Orange Tips and there were lots of Peacocks on the wing, the latter having survived a cold winter in good numbers as adult butterflies. After this bright beginning, things went downhill rapidly. There were very few butterflies on every visit right up until mid-July; indeed it was very difficult to find a day when the weather was kind enough to allow a survey to be carried out within the set parameters for temperature, wind and rainfall.

During the third week of July there was a sudden explosion in numbers, especially of the 'Browns' (Ringlet (pictured right), Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper), so that on the 26th July it was difficult to get accurate figures for numbers on the wing.

Our White-letter Hairstreaks have now made a welcome appearance and they seem to be present in good numbers. For the third year running Silver-washed Fritillaries have been recorded.

The big butterfly event of the summer (so far) has been the sighting of White Admiral within the wood. Although not a rare butterfly, its distribution locally is patchy with just a few records in recent years. The larval food-plant is honeysuckle (especially growing in shady situations) and Northward Hill should be a suitable habitat. We can only hope that this splendid butterfly will now be seen regularly on the reserve.



Image Peter Heathcote

Outdoor meeting Saturday 15th September 10am - 4pm

SEVENOAKS WILDLIFE RESERVE KWT & BOUGH BEECH KWT

Leader: Sue Healey

Sue Healey reports on a local community initiative

The Group have been given funds by RBS to support "local community initiatives" and after much debate in committee meetings we finally decided to support Northfleet School for Girls who have an allotment and wildlife area at their school which needs renovating. The long term plan is that the wildlife and pond area will provide an outdoor classroom area for various scientific, geography and mathematical projects. The allotments will eventually be open to householders nearby so that they can support the pupils by helping on the allotments and also share in the produce.

Therefore Malcolm and I turned up at the school to help a group of pupils who will be the mentors for the rest of the school in years to come. Led by their teacher, the girls started to map out the area surrounding the pond. As they progressed Malcolm pointed out items that needed to be logged, measured and described.

As we wandered around the area with the girls we decided what made up the various strategic parts of the garden. We found a huge area behind trees and hedging which was being mown in the centre but left with broad grassy edges. An allotment was also being developed with various vegetables and fruits being grown. Many samples of leaves and flowers were taken which were then scanned and filed for future investigation. We found two mallows, orchids, caterpillars, snails, many differing trees and shrubs.

After a morning of mapping, measuring and photography, the afternoon was spent pond dipping and once again, photographing the species found which included leeches, water-boatmen, beetles, and common newt tadpoles. The plan is to track the pond area initially and then in the next few years work on the rest - hopefully leaving the school to take on this project fully after the initial input from ourselves. *Here's wishing them well*

Change of date for afternoon meeting in November If you turn up and see rehearsals for Jack and the Beanstalk you will have missed Malcolm's excellent presentation of the latest RSPB film!
Note the change of date for Tuesday afternoon meeting from from 27 to 20 November

An urgent reminder from David Johnson

TIME IS RUNNING OUT!

Our 35th Anniversary Dinner is to be held at Shorne Village Hall on SATURDAY 6TH OCTOBER

Bookings to date are a little disappointing and the closing date is 6th September.

I'm sure you will have a great time whether you are a long-standing member, or whether you have only recently joined Gravesend Group. There will be a delicious meal and an interesting and fun evening for all when we will not only be looking back to glories past, but seeing some of our recent escapades and looking forward to what the future may have in store.

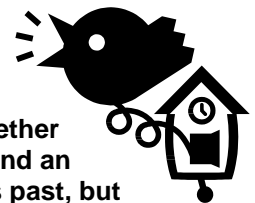
What of Boris Island and the Estuary Airport?

Great value at only £15 a head

so please fill in the slip on the enclosed form (also available at www.rspbgravesend.org.uk) NOW!

.... and send it with your cheque to David Johnson, 5 John's Road, Meopham, Kent DA13 0LP

Don't miss out on your slice of Anniversary Cake!



Coach Trip to Fingrinhoe Wick and Abberton Reservoir Saturday 17th November 2012

Sally Jennings writes.... On this trip we will visit two Essex Wildlife Trust reserves.

We will spend the morning at Fingrinhoe Wick on the River Colne which has 125 acres of woodland, grassland, heath and estuary. With this range of different habitats we should see a variety of winter birds and other wildlife.

A heated observation room gives panoramic views. Later we will visit Abberton Reservoir where a brand new 15-sided visitor centre has recently been opened. This wetland is of international importance as a safe haven for wintering wildfowl and, when water levels are low, for large numbers of waders too.

Both reserves have hides, trails & serve light refreshments in the visitor centres. We leave Gravesend Railway Station at 8.30am and return at about 6pm

Tickets £17 each (this includes a donation to Essex Wildlife Trust).

Make cheque payable to *Gravesend RSPB Local Group*

Book tickets, giving your name, address and telephone number, with Sally. Remember to tell her how many tickets you require!

**Send to
Sally Jennings,
206 Lower Higham Rd,
Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN
01474 322171
enclosing SAE for tickets
please**