

At our AGM in May I was voted in as the new Group Leader, having been approved as a candidate by South East regional office. It is a humbling thought to be following in the footsteps of previous group leaders who have done so much to make this group the success that it is today.



Below you will find details of our full autumn programme: we have a fascinating talk from Simon Ginnaw, trips to our local RSPB reserves Cliffe and Northward Hill, a volunteering day at Rainham RSPB reserve and a coach trip to the London Wetland centre. All are welcome to these events – please bring along your family and friends, and each new member introduced to the group will receive a ‘What’s that Bird’ guidebook.

In the meantime, I thought I would share this photo of the past group leaders which was taken at our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary meal. This makes me number 6, which has a rather ‘Doctor Who’ like feel about it!

Paul

### **News from North Kent Marshes** Andy Daw – Reserve Warden

It has been a rather good breeding season this year. Following the installation of a new 4km long anti predator fence at Shorne marshes last autumn, breeding lapwing on the site exceeded all expectations, with 46 pairs, 41 of which were within the fenced area. The highest count previously recorded was 28 pairs in 2009. Redshank also had a fantastic year at Shorne with 50 breeding pairs.

Earthworks were undertaken at Higham Marshes last autumn to allow us to flood approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the site in the winter. This led to an increase of breeding lapwing pairs from 2 to 14. Further work will be undertaken in September 2014 to allow us to “wet up” the rest of the site. [Note: RSPB now have a management agreement for part of Higham Marshes]

Marsh Harriers had a fantastic year at Northward Hill, with 6 attempted nests. 5 of the nests successfully produced young, and 14 juveniles fledged the nests.

In the woodland at Northward Hill butterflies have been doing well, with the presence of White-letter hairstreak and Silver-washed fritillary confirmed again.

I’m sure many of you will have heard about the nesting Black-winged Stilts at Cliffe Pools. One pair bred alongside the avocets and Black-headed gulls on the islands. This exciting event however may have detracted many from the record breaking number of avocets breeding on the site. 126 pairs were present this year, which we believe might be the largest colony in the country.

## Shooting Hen Harriers Sue Healey (Photographs by Sue and Peter Alfrey)



On 10<sup>th</sup> August 2014 around 570 people met on a (very wet!) patch of grass by the Derwent Dam in the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire. Our aim was to highlight the illegal persecution of Hen Harriers on grouse shooting estates in the north of England. In 2013 no Hen Harrier chicks fledged and in 2014 there were only three nests. Even if the three pairs managed to fledge young there is no guarantee that they or their young will survive the shooting season which started on the 12<sup>th</sup> August. There is suitable habitat in England to support over 300 breeding pairs.

The meeting was conceived and arranged by Mark Avery, former Conservation Director of the RSPB. His idea was to gather a group of birdwatchers together to bring media attention to the plight of this enigmatic bird. With the shadow of hurricane Bertha hanging over the country we made our way to Derbyshire – in my case a pilgrimage back “home”.

As we all gathered in the pouring rain we were welcomed by Mark, who thanked us for our commitment especially given the terrible weather. He then handed over to Chris Packham who spoke passionately about Hen Harriers and their loss in recent years. He pointed out that it has been illegal to shoot Hen Harriers since the 1950's but the law has not been upheld and they have continued to be persecuted. He said that we were gathering



*“to send a message that we want the law to be respected, upheld and implemented, all we are asking for is an end to persecution and for birds of prey to be a presence in our countryside and our lives”.*

He said that we were *“frustrated, fed up, have done our best to compromise and work creatively ..... but we have failed. The conservation movement of which we are all passionate members has failed. So we have to come up with new methods”.*

One of those new methods is an e-petition, created by Mark Avery which aims; *“to ban the ‘sport’ of driven grouse shoots, believing that the intensive management of upland areas has led to the near-extinction of the protected Hen Harrier in England.”*

At the time of writing over 15,000 people have signed. To sign the petition, follow this link:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/65627> [Full version of this item on our website]

## **Indoor Meetings**

Starting in September our Tuesday afternoon indoor meetings are moving to a new venue. The new meeting place is **Gravesend Masonic Hall**, 25 Wrotham Road, DA11 0PA. It is very close to the Woodville Halls. Some car parking spaces are available.

The meetings for the rest of the year are:

- 23rd September: "BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND" by Victoria Golding. Victoria, who is a member of the Kent Trust Council and chair of the conservation committee, will take us on an illustrated avian tour of New Zealand.
- 28th October: "WILDLIFE IN A MINSTER GARDEN" by Don Wilks. Don is a retired Customs Officer with a lifelong interest in photography and the natural world. His presentation explores the wildlife that visits his garden in Minster. (NB this is a change from the presentation listed in our original programme)
- 25th November: "WILDLIFE OF PATAGONIA" by Ian Rumley-Dawson. This recently revised and digital presentation will take us on a wildlife tour of Patagonia.

The meetings start at 2pm and finish around 4pm. Admission will be £3.50 which includes refreshments during the interval.

Our next **evening meeting** is

Thursday 11th September at Northfleet School for Girls 7.30pm **MOTE PARK, ITS WILDLIFE AND HISTORY** by Simon Ginnaw [Note change of talk from programme]

**Our meetings are open to all. If you have not been before, please come along and introduce yourself – you will be made very welcome!**

**Volunteer Day – Beach Clean Up Sunday October 26<sup>th</sup> 9am start** Sue Healey

Join us at RSPB **Rainham Marshes** nature reserve for a community clean-up of the foreshore in partnership with the Thames 21.

We aim to clear the rubbish that collects on the foreshore near Rainham Marshes nature reserve along the Thames. Plastic litter blights this area. Let's get together to tackle it!

As well as collecting the litter, we will be sample recording what we find as part of Thames21's Thames River Watch project. This project enables volunteers to better understand the health of the tidal Thames, and what we can do to make it better. More information on Thames River Watch <http://www.thames21.org.uk/project/thames-river-watch/>

Wellies, gloves and tools will be provided, but please wear clothing suitable for the outdoors and weather.

After the event there will be time to visit the reserve.

If you would like to attend, please contact me or Paul via the group website, or at one of our meetings, or phone Paul 01474 332417. I look forward to seeing you there!

## Gravesend RSPB Group at the Regatta! Sally Jennings



On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August, Sue, Cliff and Irene, assisted by Sally, set up an RSPB information and sales table on Gravesend promenade. We were in a prime spot at the front of the green, though rather close to the announcer with his loudspeaker and music...

Various events took place during the day, including the Strong Man competition, a Dog Show and of course, Rowing Boat races. We sold some of our goods and pin badges and

gave out information about our Group's activities. Unfortunately the Regatta was not well attended so we were unable to talk to as many folk as we would have liked. Perhaps the weather was too unsettled.

We did talk to Councillor Tan Dhesi though about various wildlife concerns we have, including the threat of an Estuary Airport.

We enjoyed the day and supported the event by buying numerous cups of tea.

## Coach trip on Saturday, November 15th:

This year we will be visiting the London Wetland Centre.

Visit a wildlife reserve 25 minutes from central London! Owned by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, this reserve supports a wealth of wildlife, including kingfishers, bitterns, water voles & migratory birds. It is also home to collections of the rarest & prettiest ducks, geese and swans from around the world, which you can see close up, along with the wildfowl that WWT are currently helping to conserve, such as red-breasted geese & barnacle geese.

There are hides, trails & a visitor centre serving hot & cold food. A great way to spend a November day!

### **Tickets:**

**Non-WWT members £23 (includes entry)**

**Wildfowl & Wetland members £14 (WWT members please take membership cards)**

We leave Gravesend Railway Station at 8.30am and return about 6pm.

Please make cheques payable to "Gravesend RSPB Local Group" & send to Sally Jennings, 206 Lower Higham Rd, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN (01474 322171), enclosing SAE for tickets please.

Please pay for tickets before the trip as the coach has to be paid for in advance.