

December 2016

Getting involved

The saying that “the more you put into something the more you get out of it” is as true of nature conservation and the RSPB as with many other aspects of life.



One way is by giving your time: there are many ways to volunteer with the RSPB including being on the local committee, running the sales stall, managing a pin badge collection box, helping on a charity stall, making the tea, leading walks or even giving talks.

Another way to give time is by volunteering on an RSPB reserve. This year, as part of our outdoor programme, we had a volunteering day at Northward Hill RSPB reserve. Our mission was to clear about a dozen or so Ash trees that had been

felled. It involved a lot of chopping, heaving and throwing wood onto a bonfire. Good, honest, if hot, work and after three and half hours, as I wrote on our website post, the ash trees had been reduced to a pile of smouldering ashes.

Following on from our bonfire working party, Norman Hogben contacted the RSPB team at Northward Hill and has since started volunteering there regularly once a week; you can read about Norman’s first hand experiences in this newsletter.

You can also give time by campaigning and lobbying. This is at the heart of the mission of the RSPB. A hundred years ago the founders of the RSPB started by campaigning against the milliner industry killing birds such as great-crested grebe and egrets to supply feathers for the latest fashion in headwear.

Today the battles are no less important. The illegal persecution of Hen Harriers is one such battle. Many of our members went to the Hen Harrier Day held at Rainham Marshes RSPB reserve in August. Many more signed the on-line petition to ban driven grouse shooting which resulted in a debate in parliament at the end of October. Although Defra remain committed to legal sustainable grouse shooting, the debate highlighted six action areas to deliver a recovery plan of the hen harrier population. You can find out more here:
<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125003>

Perhaps closer to home are the imminent development plans in our area such as the second lower Thames crossing and the housing development at Lodge Hill (a nightingale strong hold). Together with the changes that will inevitably come with Brexit, we all should be prepared to lend our voice, our pen or our ‘on-line’ click to add to the lobbying voice of the RSPB.

However, the RSPB and its members will not be enough to save our precious environment and the wildlife that inhabits it. We need to share our passion with others, inspire them, let them know why these environments are special and needing of their protection.

TV programmes such as the glorious cinegraphic delights of the BBC's "Plant Earth 2", or the animal antics shown on Springwatch & Autumnwatch all raise awareness and showcase the beauty and diversity of nature, but they also can seem to be exotic or difficult to access. As a



local RSPB group, we need to anchor these themes to our own local stories, so that our community knows of and values the wealth of wildlife that surrounds us.

Engaging with the community at public events and at schools is part of our community programme. This summer we again ran a successful stall at the Gravesend Regatta, not selling anything, but sharing our passion for wildlife and birds through simple means – talking to parents and their children while they were making wildlife masks. As Group Leader, I would like us to do more of these, but we need more helpers. If you are interested in helping in 2017 please contact me.

So, I hope you will join me in making a New Year resolution to get involved in helping wildlife in whatever way you can in 2017.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Paul Yetman

Geoff Wright, pictured here on a group bird watching trip in 2008, died this year. For many years, Geoff was at the heart of our group - as Group Treasurer, trips leader and much, much more. Geoff, with Cynthia, must have attended more talks, been on more group trips, and volunteered at more RSPB fetes and school visits, than any other group member. Geoff was inspirational. His passion for birds, wildlife and conservation never left him.



Malcolm Jennings

Volunteering for the RSPB at Northward Hill

Norman Hogben describes his recent volunteering at Northward Hill RSPB reserve.

I chose Northward Hill as it is my nearest reserve and I'm able to cycle each way. You can do Tuesdays or Thursdays or both, all day or half a day as and when you are able to.

From Northward Hill they also cover Cliffe Pools and the Higham marshes but at this time of the year we are opening up small pockets of woodland at Northward Hill by clearing sycamore, hawthorn and brambles etc. This is to encourage new growth and let more light into the area and create different habitat and height in the woodland. This is all part of the long term management plan and different areas are cut each year. At the moment, there are a lot of bonfires!

Join us on our birdwatching outdoor trips

Steve and Hazel Cullum describe what it has been like to join us on our birdwatching trips.

We had our first outing with the Gravesend Group about 2 years ago as complete beginners to bird watching. Our first trip was to Cliffe Pools where we met Paul in the car park and went over and introduced ourselves to him. We had no idea what to expect from the trip and could not have foreseen how much our interest would develop. The Group were all so friendly and knowledgeable and everyone went out of their way to help us. So here we are 2 years down the line and we still class ourselves as novices compared to the rest of the Group but we try to turn up to as many of the weekend meetings as possible to meet our new friends and mentors.

As the newest members of the Gravesend Group we would just like to say a big thank you to everyone who has been so patient with us and we look forward to consolidating our knowledge over the coming year!

Hen Harriers on Sheppey

Image courtesy of <http://henharrierday.org>

On one of my first visits to Cliffe Pools, probably in about 1978, I saw my first male hen harrier. Ever since then it has been, by a long way, my favourite bird of prey. A few years later, at Shellness on the Isle of Sheppey at dusk, Sally and I watched as several males and ringtails came in to a communal roost. Last week history repeated itself! Sue saw them first, and as the light faded, we all watched as first one male and then two ringtails dropped into the same roost site. Amazing. I have been lucky enough to see hen harriers occasionally over the years -and on two or three occasions I have seen them on their breeding grounds in Scotland. But they are not doing well. In England, there are only a handful of breeding pairs. It has been estimated that over 300 pairs could breed in England.

Persecution and inappropriate habitat management has brought the hen harrier almost to extinction in England. It's time for a change.

Malcolm Jennings

Group Website www.rspbgravesend.org.uk

Our group website is now our main way of communicating with group members and the public. It is a great place to find out about our events and read news of our trips and talks. We are also on Facebook. However, we are very much aware that not everyone is glued to their computer, tablet, or smart phone (or all three)! So, with this newsletter, you should also have received a paper copy of our programme. Take a look, put it somewhere "safe" and come along to some of our events. We think they are pretty good!



40 Years Old

In October 2017 the Gravesend RSPB Local Group will be celebrating our **40th anniversary!** To mark the occasion **Mark Clarke**, the RSPB chief executive and an alumnus of Gravesend Grammar school, will be joining us on **Thursday 19th October from 7:30pm**. Make a note in your diary and keep the evening clear to join us! During this period I estimate the group has organised over 950 birdwatching outings around Kent and beyond, held over 650 talks and run many working parties at our local reserves.

Paul Yetman

Coach Trips – And Minsmere in June



Our coach trips, to more distant wildlife reserves, are always well supported. Many of us have not missed a trip for years. Sally has organised the last 35 coach trips and her next one is advertised below. Our last trip was to Titchfield Haven in Hampshire – a new venue for us. The weather was really kind and the reserve was a wonderful mix of wet woodland, freshwater pools and scrapes, and flood meadows. We saw lots of birds. Thanks Sally!

You can read the full trip report at <http://www.rspbgravesend.org.uk/2016/10/autumn-coach-trip-to-titchfield-haven/>

Coach trip to RSPB Minsmere on Saturday 17th June 2017

Join us on another wildlife visit to the Suffolk coast. This lovely reserve has sea shore, woodland, sandy heaths and reed beds full of birds, bees & butterflies. We hope to see terns & avocets feeding young, marsh harriers, hobbies and possibly bitterns over the reed beds and song birds everywhere.

The reserve has hides, trails, a good visitor centre & cafeteria.

Please take your RSPB membership card if you are a member. Note there is an entry charge for **those who are not RSPB members**

Tickets are **£18** each and are available at Group meetings **OR**

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

Please pay for tickets in advance as we have to pay for the coach beforehand. Minsmere is our most popular coach trip destination so book early to avoid disappointment!

The coach will leave Gravesend Railway Station, Clive Rd, at **8.00am** and leave Minsmere at about 5.00pm (back in Gravesend at about 7.30pm)

Sally Jennings