

October 2017

40th anniversary celebration

This year is the **40th anniversary** of the Gravesend RSPB local group!

On **Thursday 19th October 2017**, to celebrate this occasion, we have invited **Dr Mike Clarke** as our special guest speaker at our indoor meeting. Mike was appointed as the RSPB Chief Executive in 2010 and grew up in our area. He says, “My love affair with nature started in childhood, and only grew stronger after spending my teenage years volunteering at many wonderful sites in my local area”. His talk will be a personal account of a 45-year journey of birds, nature conservation and the work of the RSPB.



Mike Clarke RSPB Chief Executive, (c) RSPB

The talk will be at our usual evening venue: **Northfleet School for Girls**, Hall Rd, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8AQ. **Doors open at 7pm for a 7:30pm start.** Please note this will be on the third Thursday in October. Entry is £3.50 to members and £4.50 to non-members; all are welcome. If you have not been to an indoor meeting before, this will be a great opportunity to come out and meet us! There is parking at the school – use the ‘A’ entrance off Hall Road, and park there, then enter via the main school entrance and follow the RSPB signs.

There will be cake, drinks and nibbles, presentations, raffle prizes and a chance to ask Mike your burning questions about the RSPB. We have also invited past group leaders, other local groups and RSPB staff members from our local area. It is going to be a great evening!

Cliffe Pools and Black-winged Stilts

During the summer, Norman and Sandra Hogben were part of the RSPB team on the “Black-winged Stilt watch” at Cliffe Pools. Two pairs of black-winged stilts laid eggs and volunteers were assisting RSPB staff to ensure that the birds were not disturbed (or worse). Each pair had four young and seven have survived. So well done to the black-winged stilts and the volunteer team!



Black-winged stilt, (c) Norman & Sandra Hogben

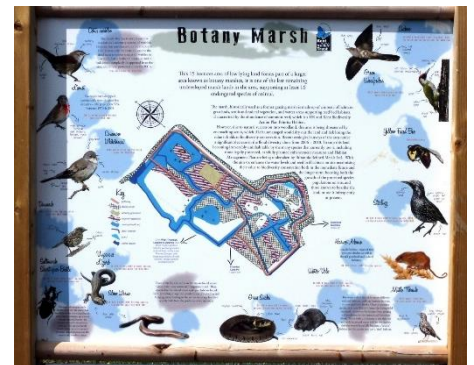
Black-winged stilts, little egrets, Mediterranean gulls and Cetti’s warblers at a brackish lagoon – it sounds like somewhere in the south of France but it is here on our doorstep at Cliffe Pools RSPB reserve! Perhaps another sign of climate change?

Thanks to Norman and Sandra for the wonderful photograph.

New places and a regular favourite

Each year the committee introduces a few new places to our outdoor programme. This year we visited Swanscombe Marshes in May, Broadwater Warren in June, and Dagenham Chase in July. Here is a brief reminder of what we saw.

Swanscombe Marshes is an area under threat from development and is next to a new housing area. However, the large reed bed and pools revealed many species including marsh harrier, reed, sedge and Cetti's warblers, bearded reedlings, cuckoo, grey herons and, nesting on top of the pylons, four raucous ravens. We also saw green hairstreak butterfly and latticed heath moth and some of the group managed to see a Wall butterfly, which is a declining species and is a speciality of the north Kent coast.



Reserve sign at Swanscombe Marshes, (c) Sally Jennings

Broadwater Warren is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Beauty near to Tunbridge Wells. Since taking over the management in 2007, the RSPB has recreated 65 hectares of open heathland by removing



Beautiful Demoiselle (c) Chris Peeling

and thinning out the conifer plantations. Lowland heath is now a rarer habitat than rainforest with almost 80% of the UK's heathland lost since the 1800s. On our visit there we heard and saw both chiff-chaff and willow warbler – the latter being difficult to find in recent years in the south east. We had views of tree pipit performing its parachuting display, yellowhammer, tree creeper, coal tit, goldcrest and eventually caught up with a pair of woodlarks. In addition, around Decoy Pond, the group had terrific views of beautiful demoiselles, emperor dragonfly, broad-bodied chaser and large red damselflies.

At **Dagenham Chase** the group found an abundance of flora and fauna. A total of 51 bird species were seen with many plants, insects and butterflies identified. Highlights included a kingfisher demonstrating its masterful fishing skills, a 50+ mixed flock of tits, warblers and woodpecker, and great views of little ringed plover. Even the place names there sound intriguing: - Tom Thumb, Bardag, Chase Water and Wheeler's Pond.

And finally, to our perennial favourite, our coach trip to the RSPB's flagship reserve,



Bittern at Minsmere, (c) Peter Charles

Minsmere on the Suffolk coast in June. Our coach trips to further away sites are always popular and with Minsmere being one of the RSPB's 'crown jewels', this one filled up quickly. There is always plenty to see here and on this trip most people managed to get great views of bittern, including this fantastic photograph taken by Peter Charles. In total, across the group, 82 species of birds and other wildlife were recorded, including white admiral butterfly, Savi's warbler calling, hobby and ringed plover chicks.

Coach trip to RSPB Pulborough Brooks on Saturday 21st October 2017

Our next coach trip is to RSPB Pulborough Brooks. This lovely reserve is set in the Arun Valley with views across wet meadows to the South Downs. We hope to see nuthatches and tits on the feeders by the visitor centre and fieldfares and redwings feasting on the berries in the hedgerows. On the brooks we anticipate seeing geese, swans, passage waders and a variety of ducks including wigeon, teal and shoveler who will be arriving to spend the winter there.

The reserve has hides, trails and a good visitor centre with tea room.

The coach will leave Gravesend Railway Station, Clive Rd, Gravesend, at 8.30 am and leave Pulborough at about 4.00 pm.

Please take your RSPB membership card if you are a member. Please note that there is an additional entry charge for those who are not RSPB members of £5.

Tickets are £18.50 each and are available at Group meetings OR

Please make a cheque payable to Gravesend RSPB Local Group and send to Hazel Cullum, 10 Nursery Road, Meopham, Kent, DA13 0NF (01474 812626).

At the time of writing there were a few places still left, so book quickly if you have not done so already to avoid disappointment. Please pay for tickets before the trip as the coach must be paid for in advance.

Volunteering Day – Saturday 4th November 2017

Our next “Volunteering Day” takes place on Saturday, 4th November at Northward Hill.

The main tasks will be clearing woodland areas including raking, tidying and making a bonfire with the cuttings, so you might like to bring some marshmallows to toast! If you want to bring drinks and snacks that would be a great idea.

The **meeting point is the main car park at Bromhey Farm at 9:30 am**, this will allow for the walk to the area where we will be working for a 10:00 am start. The plan is to work until 1:30 pm, lunch can be taken around the bonfire, or you may prefer to use the picnic benches at the farm - where there are toilet facilities.

Please bring suitable footwear for working in the woodland. Any tools required will be provided by the RSPB.

Social Evening – Thursday 14th December 2017

And finally, make a note in your diary or calendar on the kitchen wall, we will be hosting another **social evening** at our last indoor meeting of year with fun quizzes, prizes to win, time to chat, share photos, drink and eat. We invite you to bring and share cakes – the more the merrier! **Thursday 14th December from 7:30pm**, at our usual Northfleet school for Girls venue.



Lapwings, gulls and Highland cattle at Pulborough Brooks, (c) Paul Yetman

News from North Kent RSPB reserves

The breeding season across the RSPB reserves in North Kent has been a mixed bag in 2017. The very dry winter and spring made it hard work to get the grazing marsh into the right condition for breeding waders. Numbers of Lapwing and Redshank were down at Shorne Marshes and Cliffe Pools, but slightly up at Higham Marshes and Northward Hill. Despite this productivity across the board was reasonable at 1 fledged young per pair for Lapwing from 130 pairs and 0.95 for redshank from 175 pairs.

Avocet had a great year, 137 pairs across Northward Hill (35) and Cliffe Pools (102) fledged 114 young, the highest productivity rate we have ever had in North Kent.

Nightingale numbers were down at both Northward Hill and Cliffe Pools, which seems to match the national trend this year, possibly due to the strong northerly winds we had in April impeding their migration. Unfortunately, 2017 is the first time that Turtle Dove failed to breed at Northward Hill. We have put a lot of work into improving habitat for them, but well-known problems elsewhere are impacting on their numbers.

The highlight was the successful breeding of Black-winged Stilts at Cliffe Pools, where they nested for the 4th year, fledging 7 young from 2 pairs. So much hard work has been put into helping these birds colonise by the reserve team, investigations and reserves ecology teams and of course our amazing volunteers who work so hard every Tuesday and Thursday for the reserves and put in countless hours watching over the nests and young.

Will Toft, Warden of the North Kent RSPB reserves

In Memory

This year several group members have passed away including two previous group committee members: David Arnold and Brenda Ambridge. David was a founding member of the group and our second group leader. Under David's leadership the group established the organisation and routines that we still use today. But he also did so much more and he was given the RSPB President's Award in 1995. The photograph to the right shows David and Brenda at David's retirement as group leader.



David Arnold and Brenda Ambridge, (c) P Yetman

Brenda was part of David's committee, being membership secretary for many years. Until recently, when ill health prevented her, Brenda was almost always present at our indoor and outdoor meetings. She had a keen eye for birds and interest in everyone and everything around her.

Position vacancy: Newsletter editor

You may have noticed this is the first newsletter for 2017. We are currently seeking a newsletter editor, so if you would like to help produce our next newsletter, please contact a member of the committee.

“See you all at the 40th anniversary evening on the 19th October!”

Paul Yetman, Gravesend RSPB Local Group Leader