

**December 2017**



This year marked the Gravesend RSPB Local Group's 40th anniversary. We celebrated this at our October evening meeting with a special guest speaker, the RSPB's Chief Executive Dr Mike Clarke. Mike grew up in North West Kent and gave us an inspiring talk of his personal 45-year journey of birds, nature conservation and the work of the RSPB.

Over the Group's past 40 years I estimate that we have organised 850 outdoor trips including 60 coach trips to approximately 100 different sites. We have held 546 talks, and to keep our guests refreshed, have served over 22,000 cups of tea and coffee! The Group has been active in many national and local campaigns, including, in recent years, the successful 'No Airport at Cliffe' campaign.

The Group promotes the need to 'Give nature a home' through local events, volunteer parties and raising funds for the RSPB's local conservation work. In the last ten years alone, the group has donated a total of £15,332 to the RSPB. We presented a cheque to Mike at our 40th celebration evening.

We continued in our tradition of volunteering our services on an RSPB reserve with our "Volunteering day" in November at Northward Hill reserve. Despite the wet weather and their vicious thorns we cleared a large area of hawthorn saplings along a reedbed which will help protect breeding birds from predators next year.

Our coach trips to Minsmere and Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserves this year proved popular as always; and we have already booked our return trip to Minsmere in June 2018.

Closer to home and looking forward to the Christmas season, please remember to continue to 'Give nature a home'. With this in mind, I recently gave my garden bird feeders a good cleaning and filled with fresh supplies of peanuts, sunflower hearts and fat balls. Along with a supply of fresh water I was quickly rewarded with many garden visitors: blue, great, long-tailed and coal tit (the latter a garden first for me) as well as robin, blackbird and song thrush. Let's hope they continue to visit for the Big Garden Bird Watch at the end of January. Perhaps I'll get a redwing visiting during the winter. Let me know what visitors you see in your garden or local area this winter.

Wishing all our group members seasonal greetings and a happy birding watching New Year!

Paul Yetman,  
Group Leader

## Our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration

On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October we celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with invited guests including the Gravesham Mayor Cllr Harold Craske and Mayoress Veronica Craske, the RSPB Chief Executive Mike Clarke, who was our special guest speaker, as well as guests from the RSPB South East Regional office, Northward Hill RSPB reserve and Bexley, Sevenoaks and Medway RSPB Local Groups. Our special guests included past group leaders and partners: Malcolm and Sally Jennings and Jeff and Wendy Kirk and committee members who were associated with the founding of the group David and Angela Johnson and Penny Leeves.

Mike Clarke gave a passionate and inspiring talk of his own personal journey with nature, having grown up in Gravesend, volunteered at local Kent reserves as a teenager and described how the work of the RSPB has protected the important wildlife areas in North Kent and further afield.

We were pleased to present Mike with the total donations raised by the group over the last 10 years; £15,332 and Neville our treasurer thanked all our supporters for helping us raise this figure.



Mike presented long service awards to Julie and Chris Peeling and Sue Healey (10 years), Wendy Kirk (15 years) and two special 40 year awards to David Johnson and Penny Leeves.

After drinks, a special anniversary cake, nibbles and the raffle, Mike took questions from the audience. I am pleased to say the evening was a great success and thanks all who attended for making it so enjoyable.

All photographs were taken by Mark Batcheldor. If you would like a copy of any of these photographs please contact Paul for further details.

Here's to the next 10 years!!

*Paul Yetman*

## Volunteering day at Northward Hill



Thirteen of the group took up the challenge of the volunteers day at Northward Hill RSPB reserve. Under the direction of Ruby, Ruth and Dave, from the RSPB reserve team, our task was to clear a large area of felled hawthorn saplings that ran along a ditch. Removing these will help ground nesting birds such as lapwing whose young can be predated by corvids which use the hawthorn as vantage points. Despite the rain at the start, Norman and Dave got the bonfire going and soon it was consuming whole saplings as fast as the team could drag them over to it and throw them onto the fire. With a mid-morning fortification provided by Sandra's cupcakes and some coffee we battled on against the vicious thorns, and gradually the piles of hawthorns were cleared.

By 1:15pm we had cleared almost all the hawthorns and the bonfire was blazing away. After a quick group photo we left Dave and Ruth to watch over the fire and we squelched back to our cars bound for warm showers or baths and a well-earned rest.

See our Facebook page for more photos and a mini video.

Following on from our very successful (if a little wet!) Volunteer activity at Northward Hill, we have received the following message from the Reserve.

*“Thank you all for your help on Saturday. I am sorry you all got so wet, but hope you had fun nevertheless. I’m glad you had a good turnout for it too, despite the awful weather. You got through an amazing amount of scrub, which has saved us valuable time, so it is greatly appreciated.”*

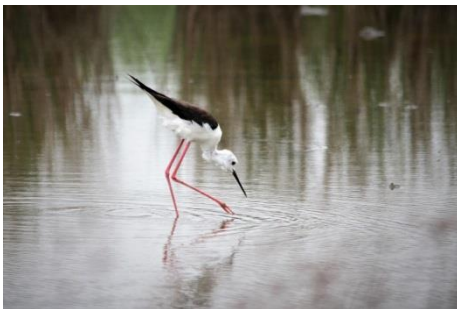
Will Tofts  
Warden, North Kent Marshes

For those keen people who enjoy getting “hands on” we are planning two Volunteer events next year. One in the Summer which will be a little lighter work to complement the usual Autumn scrub clearance/bonfire. Full details will be available in our 2018 Programme and the website.

*Paul Yetman*

### **Volunteering for the RSPB at Northward Hill**

*As you may recall, Norman Hogben has been volunteering at Northward Hill RSPB reserve, carrying out a variety of work with the wardens, including clearing sycamore, hawthorn and brambles. He also keeps an eye out for its inhabitants, as he describes here:*



After flying to and fro across the Thames and checking sites in Essex, two pairs of black-winged stilts nested at Cliffe Pools towards the end of May, each laying four eggs. We were part of a team that worked in shifts to watch over them from dawn until dusk. At 4.30 am Cliffe Pools is a wonderful place, very peaceful and tranquil and we were able to watch barn owl hunting as the sun came up. During the day cuckoo were seen and heard and a young one gave a good view of its red gape as it waited to be fed. By mid-June,

eight stilt chicks were running around feeding and we watched as they grew each day along with the young avocets, redshanks, and lapwings. A pair of ringed plover produced young, and two tiny balls of feathers were running around feeding with the others. Sadly an adult male stilt disappeared, but the female still raised four chicks on her own. The second nest also had four chicks but only three survived. By mid-July the chicks had fledged. It was around this time a marsh sandpiper put in a rare appearance and we had good views. A total of 13 young stilts fledged in the UK, with seven of them at Cliffe Pools. To see them from nest to flight was a very enjoyable and satisfying experience and we look forward to next year.

*Many thanks to Norman for his good work and excellent photograph.*

### **Helping the birds in your garden**

As Winter is now upon us, our wild birds will need all the help that they can get. Ensuring a good supply of fresh food and water is vital for their existence. The good foods include:

Sunflower hearts, whole shelled peanuts, niger seeds, meal worms, suet balls, uncooked oats, grated cheese, raisins, apples, cooked rice, fresh coconut and small amounts of cereal.

Foods to be avoided:

Cooking fat, polyunsaturated margarine, vegetable oils, dog / cat food, milk, dessicated coconut, mouldy or stale food.

Birds have no sweat glands, so they need less water than mammals. However, they do lose water through respiration, and in their droppings. Most small birds need to drink at least twice a day to replace the lost water. They get the liquid they need from their food and by drinking. Many insectivorous birds get most of their water from food but as seed-eating birds have a dry diet they need to drink more.

Further information is available on the RSPB website.

### **Coach trips**

I would like to say, on behalf of all the members, a huge thank you to Sally Jennings for organising the coach trips for many years. Her hard work has meant that many of us have enjoyed trips to some lovely reserves. Although Sally will continue to organise the outdoor programme, she has now handed over responsibility for organising the coach trips to Hazel – so good luck to them both.

### **Trip to RSPB Minsmere on Saturday 2 June 2018**

The coach will leave Gravesend Rail Station, Clive Rd, Gravesend, at **8.00 am** and leaves Minsmere at about **5.00 pm**.

Please take your RSPB membership card if you are a member. Note there is an entry charge for **those who are not RSPB members** of £9.00.

Tickets are **£20.00** each and are available at Group meetings **OR** make cheques payable to Gravesend RSPB Local Group and send, enclosing sae please, to Hazel Cullum, 10 Nursery Road, Meopham, Kent, DA13 0NF (01474 812626)

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

*Hazel Cullum*

### **Notes from the editor**

It's nearly that time of year to **renew our memberships** – the forms should be with us soon.

The **Big Garden Bird Watch** is between 27 – 29 January 2018 and the registration opens on 13 December 2017. The data collected is invaluable to the RSPB as a snapshot to bird numbers and trends in the UK. So, pull up a chair, have a cuppa and enjoy your birdwatching!

### **..... And finally**

Please remember to save your used postage stamps for the RSPB's Albatross appeal. I hope that you all have a very pleasant Christmas and a happy New Year. Looking forward to seeing you soon.

Steve Cullum