

Summer 2019

Welcome to the latest edition and how did you cope with the hottest July on record?

A temperature of 38.7 degrees was recorded on Thursday the 25th and our garden birds decided to stay in the shade – as did we! They only ventured out for a quick feed, drink and wash, then back to their cooler surroundings. We were still fortunate enough to have goldfinch, greenfinch, house sparrow, robin and blackbird fledglings visit us frequently thankfully. How has your garden wildlife endured the weather? – I would be interested to know. Please contact me via newsletter@rspbgravesend.org.uk

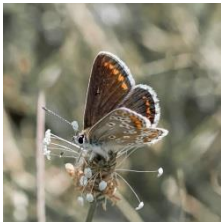
Our outdoor meetings continue to flourish, with visits to RSPB Cliffe Pools, Thursley Common, Oare Marshes, Lullingstone, RSPB Rainham Marshes, Grain and Rye. Not forgetting the coach trip to Wicken Fen of course!

Some of the highlights included nightingale, bryony ladybird and cuckoo at Cliffe. Dartford warbler, goldcrest, redstart, tree pipit and willow warbler at Thursley.

At Oare marshes, Malcolm found a Ground Lackey caterpillar, which is apparently quite rare in Kent. Sedge and reed warblers kept singing, whilst marsh harriers and common buzzards circled overhead. Raven, peregrine, skylark, rock pipit, black redstart and various flora were the stars at Samphire Hoe.



A torrential downpour at RSPB Rainham Marshes didn't dampen our spirits, where sand martins were busy feeding, perhaps for their long journey home and whitethroat gave us their melodic tunes. Dark green fritillary, marbled white, small heath, white-legged damselflies and yellowhammer were some of the species found at Lullingstone, whilst at Grain, there were more butterflies and insects than birds. These included brown argus, small copper and wall



butterflies and a six-spot Burnet moth. An Adonis ladybird, which is sometimes confused with a seven-spot, but a lot smaller, was found by Julie basking in the sunshine.

A very large flock of oystercatchers (collectively known as a parcel) several little egrets, wood sandpiper, wheatear, sand martins and numerous common and sandwich terns displayed very well at Rye.

That is only a taster of the various species that we have seen so far and if you would like to join us on one of our trips, you would be made very welcome.

If you would like to go on one of our outdoor trips and are unable to find transport, why not contact one of the committee members in advance to see if we can help.

OK, time to put your feet up, relax, have a cuppa and enjoy.

Our next indoor meeting is on Thursday 12th September between 7.30pm and 9.45pm at the Northfleet School for Girls. Our guest speaker is Jonathan Forgham – Wildlife of Sri Lanka.

A fine trip report from Keith and Teresa Joblin

My wife Teresa and I decided this year to take a spring holiday to Northern Cyprus to watch the migration of many bird species. We stayed at a friend's villa in Kayalar. It was perfect, a mountain range one side and the Mediterranean Sea the other.

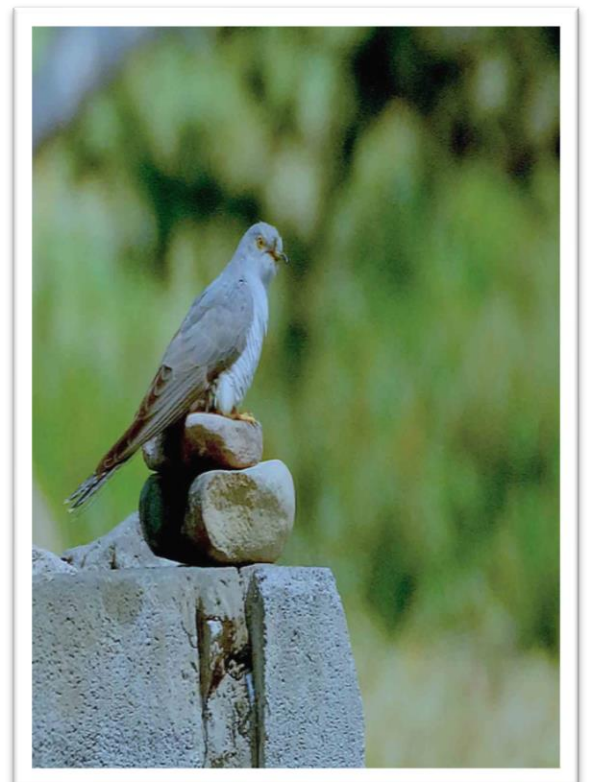
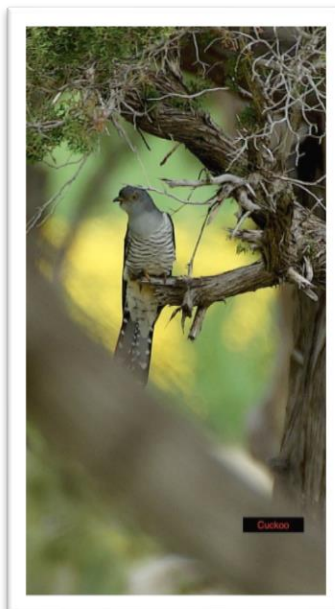
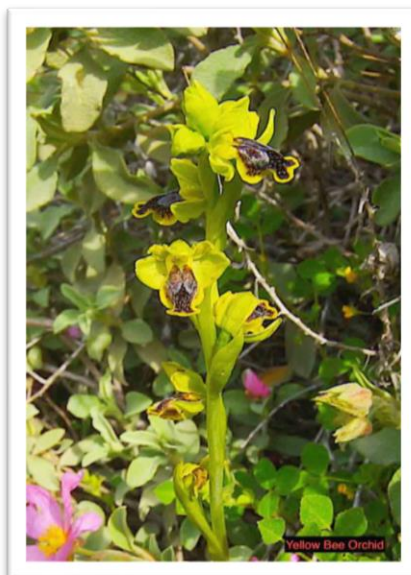
We landed at Larnaca airport in the south and took a 2-hour taxi ride to the northwest side of the island.

That included border control from South to North.

We were both excited with the prospect of seeing hoopoe and hopefully bee-eater but we did see Hoopoe! Wild flowers were abundant with many orchids native to Cyprus.



Whilst driving down to the Karpaz Teresa spotted a Blue Rock Thrush high in the rocks. Later down the road we saw a very showy Cuckoo.



The island is very easy to get around. Driving is on the left and traffic is generally good.

I preferred the North of the island to the South it being much quieter and less populated.

In the two weeks we explored most of the northern part of the island and only touched on the South. We were rewarded with a mass migration of painted lady butterflies, which according to the Jerusalem Post were moving from Israel to Cyprus at a rate of 25,000 per hour.

This was a spectacle I will never forget. The sky was black with butterflies they were literally hitting you in the face. A picture just doesn't do it justice. Some Painted Lady butterflies will stay in Cyprus to complete their life cycle while others will refuel before dispersing to their next destination. The individuals that were flying to the North will not return back to Cyprus but their descendants will.

During our travels around the island, we spotted:

Avocet

Bonellis Eagle

Blackcap

Black Eared Wheatear

Black Winged Stilt

Chukar

Corn Bunting

Crested Lark

Cyprus Pied Wheatear

Cyprus Warbler

Cyprus Coal Tit

Cormorant

Goldfinch

Greenfinch

Little Grebe

Hooded Crow

Blue Rock Thrush

Hoopoe

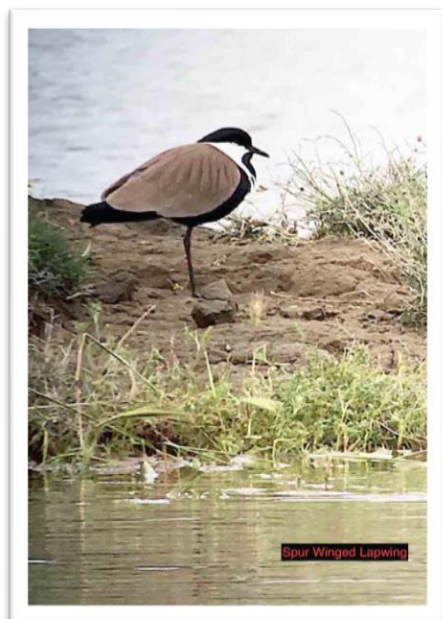
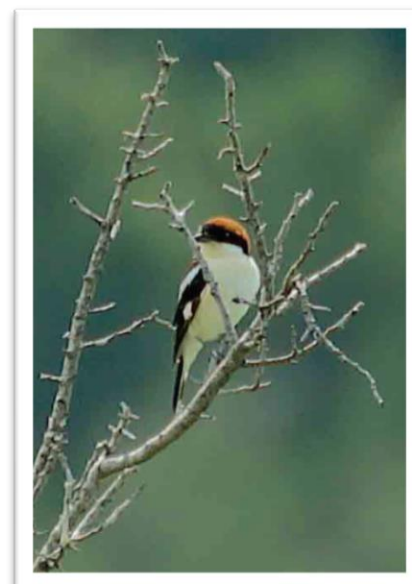
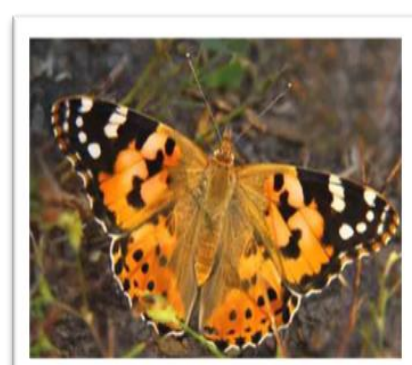
House Martin

Swallow

Spur winged Lapwing

Magpie

Meadow Pipit



Spanish Sparrow

Wheatear

Sardinian Warbler

Lesser Kestrel

Serin



We enjoyed exploring the island so much that we have decided to make a return visit next September, to catch the migration going back. If you are interested in flora and fauna and of course wildlife, I would thoroughly recommend a visit to Northern Cyprus in the spring as the temperature is just right, we had high teens to low 20's c. There is also plenty of history and sightseeing too if you tire of bird watching.

RSPB Rainham Marshes report from Howard Vaughan – Visitor experience officer

Spring at RSPB Rainham Marshes was a fairly undramatic affair and wader passage was unspectacular with just a smattering of high Arctic species such as bar-tailed godwit, knot, whimbrel, grey plover and turnstone but there were no stints or curlew sandpipers. A roseate tern was our first spring record and several sooty black terns, Little and bouncing Arctics headed up river and we were even lucky enough to see two Arctic skuas on such a tern day. Common scoters are also traditional spring passage birds with small groups loafing around on murky days have paused on their overland, overnight migration north.

It was a poor spring for chats with low wheatear numbers and just a couple of whinchats seen although both redstart species made an appearance. Marsh warblers did not return to breed in this British outlier but marsh harriers, bearded tits, wildfowl and all our usual warblers have had an excellent season.

Lapwings and redshanks are our star waders and both increased to 82 nesting pairs apiece and were joined by two pairs of little ringed plovers and our very first pair of avocets that successfully managed to fledge two youngsters. Spoonbill, cattle egret and great white egrets have all dropped in and the regularity of these species will only increase as the breeding population of all three colonisers increase in the UK. Cattle egrets have bred in Essex and Kent for the first time this year and the other two species are now not too far away. I wonder what the next species to colonise will be? The marsh has been superb for dragons and damselfly and our blue eyed hawkers have emerged and are popular and it was good to record scarce chaser once again. Butterflies have



Spoonbill - Andy Tweed

also been prolific with our first wall browns for several years, with good numbers of clouded yellows and painted ladies on the wing. Marsh frogs have been vocal and even water voles have been showing well from the bridges.

The reserve is very dry at the moment (start of August) as we head into autumn and Aveley Pool is the main magnet for returning waders and we have already hosted both races of black-tailed godwit as well as all six regular Tringa sandpipers, ruff and whimbrel. Duck numbers are increasing with a smart juvenile garganey amongst the teal and the first wigeon and pintail are lurking in their eclipse garb while down on the Thames, the annual influx of yellow-legged gulls has already reached the 200 mark.

Who knows what the autumn holds but let's hope we manage to drag in a passing rarity before the season is out.

News from the RSPB

EDF announces fourth round of consultation for Sizewell C nuclear power station.

Earlier this year over 20,000 members of the public told EDF why they Love Minsmere, signing our e-action during Stage 3 of the Sizewell C consultation. This was to be the final public consultation before EDF submitted their application for a Development Consent Order to the Planning Inspectorate.

However, today EDF have launched an unexpected fourth round of public consultation. Running from 18th July to 27th September 2019, this consultation will focus on ecological and transport impacts. The RSPB still believes that Sizewell is not a suitable location for a new nuclear power station. As highlighted in the Government's National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation (EN-6), Sizewell C could have detrimental impacts on internationally and nationally important landscapes, habitats and species of the Suffolk coast and at RSPB Minsmere nature reserve. We are yet to see evidence in full which addresses all our concerns and will not be satisfied until we have been presented with this.

First 'Chough' Chick Born in Kent for 150 years!

The chough, a member of the crow family, is one of the rarest birds in the UK and was driven to extinction in Kent well over 100 years ago. The chough has a long-standing association with Kent and still lives on in the coat of arms of Canterbury City and the University of Kent, and in Shakespeare's King Lear (Act iv – Fields near Dover, Scene 6) where he introduces the chough in his description of the Dover Cliffs.

The Canterbury-based charity Wildwood Trust is part of a ground-breaking project to assess if these amazing birds can be released back into the Kent countryside. Famed as acrobats of the sky, the chough naturally performs majestic flying displays which can now be seen by visitors to Kent's largest bird aviary at the Wildwood Trust Animal park on the A291 between Canterbury and Herne Bay. This is the first success by Wildwood's team of expert keepers in the hope of establishing a long-term breeding programme for the bird's return to Kent.

Leading rewilding expert & Wildwood Trust boss Peter Smith said:

"I am so thrilled we have bred this remarkable baby bird and this marks a landmark in reversing the damage done to our countryside. Our expert Keeper team are on a long and

difficult journey to allow us to breed enough birds to fill Kent's skies once again. The chough is an amazing bird whose aerial acrobatics can now thrill our hundreds of thousands of members and visitors. But the story of the chough gets to the very heart of problems of wildlife in the UK. The chough were driven to extinction by persecution and detrimental farming and landownership systems. We can bring these magnificent birds back to Kent, but to make them thrive in our



countryside we must make some major changes to how we use the land and the chemicals we pour onto it. By rewilding poor agricultural land full of bugs and little beasties, choughs and a host of rare wildlife can once again thrive in Kent."

Courtesy of the wildwood trust. For more information please visit :

<https://wildwoodtrust.org/wildwood-kent>

RSPB North Kent marshes report by Alice McCourt – Conservation Intern

It has been a busy spring/summer season again this year, with lots of highlights from our breeding birds. After much frustration, we have finally been able to confirm the first breeding record of cattle egret for Kent in the woodland at Northward Hill! It has been a very exciting find, and we are grateful for all the hard work by Murray Orchard and Terry Paternoster to survey our heron and egret populations. Nightingales also seem to be having a bumper year, with the Thames Estuary ringing group reporting that they have ringed almost 100 new individuals this year across the Hoo peninsula. Owls, too, have had a great year at Northward Hill, with at least four barn owls having fledged, as well as two little owls and three tawny owls. Unfortunately, our waders haven't been as successful this year in comparison to previous years, though we do set ourselves very high standards! This is largely due to us struggling to maintain water levels in the dry weather, though predation has also been an issue at some of our sites.



Tawny Owlet - Alice McCourt

Away from birds, we have been pleased to see that our white-letter hairstreak butterflies continue to be present in our woodland, and we have had a few reported sightings of white admirals too. As white admirals are a UK priority species, and are experiencing dramatic declines, it is encouraging to hear that they are beginning to make use of our habitat. Sadly, however, there has been a regional decline in bumblebee numbers as a result of the hot summer last year. That decline has been apparent in our rare shrill carder and brown-banded carder populations on site. Throughout spring, we have been carrying out a lot of maintenance to our anti-predator fences. Now that the breeding season is wrapping up, we are going to begin the momentous task of moving one of our electrified wires on the fence at Shorne Marshes. As the fence is over 3.5km long, this task could potentially take weeks, but it will allow the fence to work more effectively in future. We have also begun work on path clearance, with paths at Higham, and Northward Hill having now been cleared. Work on the footpaths at Cliffe Pools will probably start at the end of August/beginning of September, once we have completed our repairs to the Shorne Marshes fence. This autumn will also bring some work to improve our hay meadow habitats, with re-seeding being carried out to hopefully introduce some new wildflower species.

We have had numerous wonderful visitor events carried out throughout spring and summer too. Dave Saunders from the Medway Local Group has run his annual nightingale walk events at both Cliffe Pools and Northward Hill, with over 100 attendees across the six walks. The Thames Estuary ringing group, led by Roger Kiddie, has continued to provide ringing events, which is a great opportunity for local people and children to get close to our wonderful species. These have been continuously fully-booked, and the next session with good availability isn't until November! The Medway Local Group will also be welcoming visitors onto the reserve for their Family Fun-Day on the 28th of August, and have lots of fun activities planned for the day!

In our final bit of news, the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that Dave Saunders, along with some of the reserve team, featured in an article in the latest issue of Nature's Home Magazine. Dave has been leading on a plastic clean-up initiative on the sea-wall at Cliffe Pools, and has now carried out five sessions across the last 18 months, which has led to over 5 tonnes of waste being removed from the South Thames foreshore. This has been a huge undertaking, and we must give big thanks to Dave and the 200+ volunteers involved for all their hard work.

As we move into Autumn/Winter, we are anticipating getting stuck back into our winter habitat management programme, and we look forward to welcoming Gravesend local group members back for your work party day!

Why Do Birds Suddenly Disappear? by Lev Parikian – a book review by Steve Cullum

*'At twelve years old, Lev Parikian was an avid birdwatcher. He was also a fraud, a liar and a cheat. Those lists of birds seen and ticked off? Lies. One hundred and thirty species? More like sixty'. These are the words from the inside of Lev's second book, an introduction to the man himself. I was fortunate enough to meet him at one of his book signings and found him down-to-earth, witty and very clever. As a professional music conductor, he uses his skills to describe what it is like to chase birds, have a family life, conduct an orchestra and take a rest – sometimes. Lev talks about his childhood, birds and much more. Then, it all kicks off in 2016 – the year ticks begin. One short passage from his book when he was at RSPB Rainham Marshes: *I'm delighted and amused to see a skylark, its silver chain of music soaring upwards, higher and higher and higher into the boundless sky, just as Ralph Vaughn Williams wrote it. Definitely a skylark and not a nightingale.**

His descriptive narrative, passion and boundless enthusiasm will have you laughing and not wanting to put the book down. A must read for birders and non-birders alike.

John Tradescant the younger – a local celebrity

John Tradescant the Younger (4 August 1608 – 22 April 1662), son of John Tradescant the Elder, was a botanist and gardener, born in Meopham, Kent, and educated at The King's School, Canterbury. Like his father, who collected specimens and rarities on his many trips abroad, he undertook collecting expeditions to Virginia between 1628 and 1637 (and possibly two more trips by 1662). Among the seeds he brought back, to introduce to English gardens were great American trees, including magnolias, bald cypress and tulip tree, and garden plants such as phlox and asters.



Portrait by William Dobson

John Tradescant the Younger added his American acquisitions to the family's cabinet of curiosities, known as The Ark. These included the ceremonial cloak of Chief Powhatan, an important Native American relic. South Lambeth Road in Vauxhall was one of the boundaries of the Tradescant estate, where the collection was kept and Tradescant Road was laid out after the estate was built on in the late 1800s and named after the family. When his father died, he succeeded as head gardener to Charles I and Henrietta Maria of France, making gardens at the Queen's House, Greenwich, designed by Inigo Jones, from 1638 to 1642, when the queen fled the Civil War. He published the contents of his father's celebrated collection as *Musaeum Tradescantianum*—books, coins, weapons, costumes, taxidermy, and other curiosities—dedicating the first edition to the Royal College of Physicians (with whom he was negotiating for the transfer of his botanic garden), and the second edition to the recently restored Charles II. Tradescant bequeathed his library and museum to (or some say it was swindled from him by) Elias Ashmole (1617–1692), whose name it bears as the core of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford where the Tradescant collections remain largely intact. He was buried beside his father in the churchyard of St-Mary-at-Lambeth which is now established as the Garden Museum.

He is the subject of the novel *Virgin Earth* by Philippa Gregory, sequel to *Earthly Joys* about his father. *Courtesy of Wikipedia under licence Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License*

He is the subject of the novel *Virgin Earth* by Philippa Gregory, sequel to *Earthly Joys* about his father. *Courtesy of Wikipedia under licence Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License*

Seven going to Lesbos

After a fantastic holiday in Scotland earlier this year, seven of us will be heading towards this lovely island with Speyside Wildlife in 2020. Our guide for the trip will be none other than Duncan McDonald!

As you know, Duncan has been a guest speaker at our meetings and has over 20 years' experience leading wildlife watching groups – so, no pressure then mate! We hope to see golden oriole, scops owl, pallid harrier, masked shrike, little crane, sombre tit, long-legged buzzard plus many more.



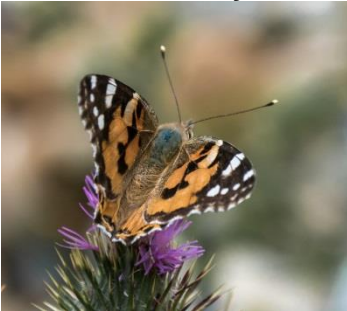
The winner of the spring caption competition is Paul Yetman with 'Cheep cup of tea' Congratulations Paul and enjoy your wine ☺

Minsmere coach trip – Saturday 12th October 2019

The coach will leave Gravesend Rail Station, Clive Rd, Gravesend (opposite Debenhams) at 8.30 am and leave Minsmere at about 4.30 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 £18.00 each and are available at Group meetings or you can e-mail Hazel at coachtrips@rspbgravesend.org.uk. All tickets need to be paid for before the trip, as the coach has to be paid for in advance.

..... **and finally** Would you like to review a book for us? Then please send your article to me via e mail or a copy at a group meeting.



The Painted Lady does indeed migrate south each autumn - but makes this return journey at high altitude out of view of butterfly observers on the ground. Radar records revealed that Painted Ladies fly at an average altitude of over 500 metres on their southbound trip and can clock up speeds of 30 mph by selecting favourable conditions. Have you seen many this year?

Steve Cullum – Newsletter Editor.

The advertisement features a large pink house icon with 'MDB' inside. Below the icon, there is a list of services: New Builds, Re-Modelling, Garage Conversions, Bathrooms, Lofts, Extensions, Electrics, and Plumbing. At the bottom, there are logos for VELUX, safe, and a contractor logo, along with the phone number 07432 291 737 and the website www.mydreambuild.co.uk.

Contact Anthony Sinfield on 01798 306599 or <https://www.cameracal.co.uk/>

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The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

Any advertisements enclosed in this newsletter are not specifically endorsed by the RSPB or the Gravesend local group.