

Summer 2020

Welcome to the latest edition and I hope this finds you safe and well. Now that the lockdown has eased for some, have you managed to travel out to any local parks or reserves? Have you noticed any difference in wildlife numbers now and before the lockdown? It would be interesting to share your experiences with us, so please contact me via newsletter@rspbgravesend.org.uk Unfortunately, all of our indoor and outdoor meetings are still cancelled until the new year, therefore, sadly, we cannot meet up as a group (I really do miss these meetings) Having said that, Hazel and I do try to get out when we can, especially to find butterflies and we have recently joined the Butterfly Conservation <https://butterfly-conservation.org/> There are some members in the group that are clever Lepidopterists and we have met up with some of them at various venues (keeping within the social distancing guidelines of course) It appears to have been an excellent year for butterflies, including the **Silver-spotted Skipper**.



After visiting Dene Park Woods trying to locate a Purple Emperor, we were given a tip that **White-letter Hairstreaks** were very local to us. So, along with Pete and Karrie Hall, we ventured to Nurstead and found at least four of them in amongst some Elms – great result. Other species there included Skippers, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Commas and various Whites. As it was summer time and the bird activity was quite quiet, we have travelled to other sites locally for our new interest and taken our tally to 32 species.

The season isn't over just yet and hopefully there will be more to come. Have you seen any butterflies in your garden / local area this year – anything new? Have you seen an increase in their numbers? It would be good to know.

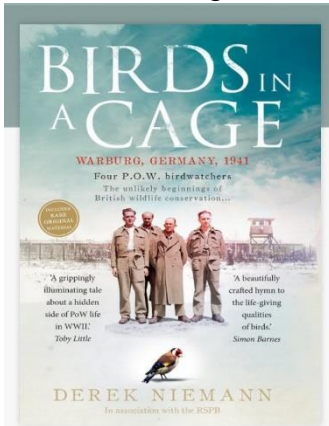
The autumn migration will soon be in full swing and with our changeable, strong winds, there is a possibility that some rarities might turn up. Already noted have been Spotted Flycatchers, Whinchats, Spotted Redshanks, Wood Sandpiper, Dotterel, Curlew Sandpiper, Garganey, Black Tern and Short-eared Owl to name but a few.

Our Facebook page, Gravesend RSPB Nature Watch Group is a great place to visit and now has 52 members. It is full of news, photographs and interesting articles – so why not sign up, say hello and join in the fun. You will be made very welcome.

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

Birds in a Cage by Derek Niemann in association with the RSPB.

This is the true stories of four Prisoner of War birdwatchers during the second World War. Each was captured near the start of WWII and were to spend some five years in various prison camps in Germany and Poland. The book follows the stories of four men who overcame hunger, hardship, fear and boredom to bring purpose to their lives while imprisoned.



*Through watching and recording the natural world around them, especially birds, they regained self-respect and a passion for life. They all eventually returned home determined to make something of themselves. Peter Conder became the director of the RSPB, George Waterson established Fair Isle as a bird observatory, John Buxton wrote *The Redstart* and left a legacy of profound and moving war poems. And John Barret re-paid his debt for the solace natural history gave to him by opening it up for millions to enjoy as the inventor the modern guided walk and author of the most popular seashore guide.*

I read this book during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in April 2020, it having been recommended by Chris Packham on one of his daily YouTube 'Self Isolating Bird Club' live video streams. Here were four men, at times together, but during other periods separated from each other, who took to watching and recording in close detail, the lives of birds and other wildlife, that was happening in their prisons, or just beyond the barbed wire, or flying above them. During the 'stay at home' period of our own lockdown, it resonated and put into perspective our own current situation. We also have found comfort in looking in detail at the nature that lives immediately around us and enjoyment in sharing our discoveries. The book gives a fascinating insight into life in these prison camps and how these four young men were able to overcome the mind-dumbing boredom through the power of nature. A recommended read.

This book can be loaned from the KCC libraries 'electronically' using the Libby application - another discovery for me, thanks to the recommendation of Alan Else, our website editor. If you own a tablet or iPad it is a great way of finding and reading books.

Paul Yetman.

HOW HAS THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AFFECTED UK WILDLIFE?

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has devastated the UK in many different ways. We've mourned tens of thousands of deaths. The country's GDP has fallen by more than 20 per cent. Unemployment has soared. Children have missed months of school, and families have been unable to spend time together.

But if all that bad news has made you desperate for a silver lining, here it is: the Great Lockdown of 2020 appears to have been quite beneficial for UK wildlife.

You've probably seen all the photos of animals venturing into deserted town centres, and while some of those photos are actually fake, there is nevertheless some truth to the much-parodied claim that 'nature is healing'.

Here are three examples from right here in the UK.

HEDGEHOGS

The government's 'stay at home' rules significantly reduced the amount of traffic on British roads - excellent news for hedgehogs!

As we mentioned in our Hedgehog Awareness Week blog, UK hedgehog populations are in decline, and since cars are a major cause of death for hedgehogs (it's thought that 150,000 of them are killed by vehicles each year), these past few months must have been a welcome break for our prickly friends.

There have also been increased sightings of hedgehogs mating in UK gardens, as this BBC article explains.

BEEES

The coronavirus lockdown has helped Britain's embattled bee population in a number of different ways.

For one thing, there are more wildflowers about. The UK's roadside verges have been allowed to grow freely, creating new habitats for busy bees to use.

And hedgehogs aren't the only animals who have benefited from the recent drop in road traffic - insects are frequently struck and killed by vehicles, so the lockdown may prove quite the boon for British bee numbers as well.

Additionally, car fumes make it harder for bees to sniff out nearby flowers, so the decrease in air pollution has enabled them to make shorter, more efficient trips when foraging for nectar and pollen.

BIRDS

The drop in insect-harming practices during lockdown has a nice knock-on effect for UK birds: more food! The warm, dry weather we've seen lately will also have helped to boost the country's insect populations, so bug-eating birds may consider themselves spoiled this year.

We're also hearing that birds have been building their nests in places that would usually be too busy. With fewer people walking around the British countryside of late, ground-nesting birds have had more real estate options than usual - although this could result in conflict now that the country is beginning to open up again!

Courtesy of the Really Wild Birdfood Co.

What's in a name? The Sandwich Tern - *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

If we look at its Latin name *Thalasseus sandvicensis* it contains a whole story about the bird... *Thalasseus* is from the Greek word for Sea, whilst *sandvicensis*, translates as Sandwich. No surprises so far – however, normally, a bird with this word as part of its name comes from the islands of Hawaii, which until the 1840s were known as the Sandwich Islands. Our Tern is a Kentish bird for part of its life and so, yes, the names refers to the town in Kent.

For those of you who are very observant about the scientific names of species you might notice that the Sandwich Tern has different family name from the rest of the family of terns. The Sandwiches names begin with *Thalasseus* whilst all the other terns visiting the UK have *Sterna*. The idea of using Latin names to clearly differentiate families of animals and birds was developed by Carl Linnaeus (1707 – 1778), a Swedish botanist, zoologist, and physician.

Having developed this idea of giving every animal and bird in the world a unique name, shared by no other, he gained the rather snappy title of the 'father of modern taxonomy'.



The Latin names for individual species are written using a system called 'binomial nomenclature'. Each animal, bird, plant, organism has a first name, its genus or family, followed by its own individual name. So, Smith John rather than John Smith. Categorising every living thing in the world is a bit of a tall order for a single scientist, so in subsequent years other individuals joined in, once the format of naming was established. In 1787 the ornithologist John Latham formally named the Sandwich Tern 'Sterna sandvicensis' after the town

where he had observed the Terns, in his county of birth, Kent. However, in 1822 Friedrich Boie, a German scientist decided that as the Sandwich Tern, with its sticky up top knot, should actually be a separate type of tern and gave it the first name Thalasseus.

After a period of calling the Sandwich Tern Thalasseus scientists slipped back into calling it Sterna. However, as late as 2005, when genetic testing was being undertaken on bird DNA, scientists discovered that it was indeed a totally different species of tern, so Thalasseus was brought back into use. Mitochondrial DNA which confirmed the identification of the Sandwich Tern as different from others, is fascinating. This DNA, otherwise known as mtDNA, barely, if at all, changes over time as it comes from the mother directly to the offspring. As a result, the line of breeding of a bird or animal can be traced back dozens and dozens of generations and thousands of years. In this case it confirmed that The Sandwich Tern was a totally different type of tern with a different background to all the other UK terns. So now you know.

Courtesy of Bird Wise.

Is it a bird or is it a "tick", or what does birdwatching mean to you? By Trevor Hatton

Why does one go birdwatching? I go because I enjoy seeing interesting, beautiful and vibrant creatures, listening to their songs and watching their behaviour. It seems to me however that more and more people only see birds as a tick on some arbitrary list.

I was talking to someone recently who told me he'd really love to see a Golden Oriole. I could understand that - it's a beautiful, if elusive bird with an enchanting call. "That's no problem" I said and proceeded to tell him of areas near Calais where they can be found fairly easily.



"That's no good" he replied, they wouldn't be on my "British list". I wondered, did he want to see a Golden Oriole or a "tick" on a list. If he only wants to see birds in Britain he's going to deprive himself of seeing some wonderful sights. **Resplendent Quetzal**, Malabar Trogon, many species of Rollers and Bee-eaters, etc, etc, one could go on and on.

In the '90s my then partner and I used to go to France a lot (cheap day trips, 5.30 am boat out, 9.30 pm boat back, £10 a car and 2 people), no wasting time shopping, just wall-to-wall natural history; birds, plants, insects, mammals etc. One day we started with Crested Lark at Calais then went on with a few Golden Orioles, Bluethroats, Redstarts, Wood Warblers, both Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Honey Buzzards (displaying), Lesser-spotted Woodpecker,

Bee-eaters etc, etc and finished the day watching Grasshopper Warblers and Scarlet Rosefinches at Cap Blanc Nez. A few days later she is enthusiastically relating this to a birdwatcher who appeared totally disinterested. When she'd finished he dismissed the whole experience with "What a pity you can't count them as they weren't in Kent". What she said to him made me blush (well almost). My comments were equally unprintable.

At Minsmere a couple of years ago I ventured up the path towards Dunwich Heath and chanced upon a male Dartford Warbler displaying and singing his little avian heart out. Lovely! Magic! Returning to the reserve I told an acquaintance I met thinking she would be interested. "Oh, it's OK, thanks", she said "I don't need that, I've got that on my year list". I muttered something as politely as I was able and rapidly departed to enjoy watching birds.



I think I first became aware of the listing obsession some years ago at Oare Marshes. A female Red-necked Phalarope turned up one evening. I went there at dawn the next day and sat watching it in the warm light of the rising sun, a delightful sight as it daintily spun round and round gently picking food from the surface. I was entranced, watching it for over 2 hours. Wonderful! Someone else turned up, took a quick look and said to me "Did you need Red-necked Phalarope for Kent?" I honestly couldn't understand what he meant. After pondering the question for a moment I replied that I needed air, water, food, shelter, clothing, (leave it at that). With hindsight I realise that he meant did I "need" it for my (non-existent) Kent list.

I could go on ad-infinitum but I had better stop now as I need an early night as I intend going to Oare Marshes early tomorrow to see what I can add to my "Kent year list"! (Actually I only go to Oare to kill time while waiting for the nearby Shipwrights Arms to open, as I "need" a pint or two!)

One last comment. Why do some people refer to Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea (*Lathyrus Latifolius*) as Broad-leaved Everlasting SWEET Pea? It isn't fragrant and Sweet Pea is *Lathyrus odoratus*, a different species.

Time for a gin and tonic, all this writing (among many other things) makes me thirsty!

Hugh Warwick on hedgehogs

First - this is not my photograph. I have made efforts to track down the person who took it - but not got a response yet. What I do know is that the photograph accompanied a request for help finding wildlife friendly plants that would work in this landscape.



And it is possible to turn this blank space into something that will bring in birds, butterflies, bees, bats - all blessed with the letter 'b' and, of course, wings.

The reason I started this petition was to stop this sort of development being built in this manner. It would cost possibly 50p more per house to include hedgehog highways (that was a figure given to me by

a developer) - and if the new owners really did not want the corridor (due to small tortoises or a miniature dachshund for example) - then blocking it with a flower pot is easy.

This example is a done deal - but all over the country developers have started revving up their engines to create more houses. Now - there is a massive conversation to be had about the need for and distribution of these houses - as well as the iniquity of empty properties in places like London bought purely as investments ... but not here.

This push to build needs to be met with a citizens' planning department - i.e. - us - checking what is being planned and built near where we live - and then asking the developers the question - could there not be more care taken for wildlife ...

Already we know that some developers are less interested in nature than others. Persimmon seem very uninterested in wildlife. But there is hope as shown by Bovis who have committed to working with hedgehogs in mind. Who have you been in touch with? Try and use the Hedgehog Highway Facebook Group for communication as this site is a little clunky!!

As ever - please keep sharing the petition - there has been a rather pleasing flurry of late!

Now - an unapologetic advert - over lockdown I was able to finish my latest book and it is due out on 10th September - the title of the book ... well, it is almost embarrassing ... it is called The Hedgehog Book! It is richly illustrated - and contains a lot of the latest information we have about our favourite creature - how we can help it - as well as some fun and games around the way it has appeared in art and literature!

Do butterflies taste with their feet?

RSPB England's Beth Markey, explores one of the more unusual side of nature...

If you could choose to taste with any part of your body, your feet would probably be last on your list, right? We can't imagine that clammy socks and floor tiles have anything on a mouth-watering chilli con carne.

But for some animals, tasting with body parts other than a tongue gives them a distinct evolutionary advantage. Butterflies are one such example. As you might have guessed from the title, their taste receptors are located in their feet. And if that's not enough to digest, get this ...butterflies also smell with their feet too...

Eating and tasting are not one and the same...

Firstly, it's important to make it clear that butterflies don't eat with their feet. They simply taste with their feet. To a human, whose ability to eat and taste comes from one orifice, this can seem somewhat mystifying. But it serves a very useful purpose.

Instead of consuming their meals through a big, tooth-lined mouthpiece, like us, butterflies use a straw-like tube, known as a 'proboscis'.

See that long object that looks a bit like a spider leg coming out of the butterfly's mouth? That's a proboscis and it's used to suck up nectar – a butterfly's main source of food. You see, aside from being a glamorous



addition to the landscape, butterflies are important pollinators too, carrying pollen from plant to plant in their mission to quench their hunger.

Unfortunately, a butterfly's proboscis doesn't house taste buds. It's tiny and, when out of use, it stays safely curled up under the butterfly's chin. This poses a challenge as it's important for them to be able to distinguish between a butterfly delicacy and, say, sap or cuckoo spit. So instead, it uses taste receptors, located on its feet to determine whether a substance is edible or not.

The sciencey bit

Given the seeming absurdity of the idea that any animal can taste with anything other than its mouth, it wasn't until the late 19th Century that researchers began to give weight to the idea. In fact, it was originally assumed that butterflies tasted through their antennas or 'palpi' – sensory appendages on their faces. These days we know that our ancestors weren't entirely off base as palps do play a significant role in helping butterflies detect food.

In actual fact, butterflies' taste through 'chemoreceptors' in their feet. As soon as they land on a plant, they can detect whether it is sense sweet, bitter, sour and salty. Interestingly enough, if a butterfly lands on you, it's normally a sign that they have sensed the sweat on your skin (and not that you're Disney royalty – sorry...).

Yet, butterflies use taste for more than choosing a snack. Their taste receptors play a big part in choosing a mate and finding a host plant for their eggs.

After mating, a butterfly will hop from leaf to leaf, tasting each one to ensure that it is the right place to lay her eggs. The second her caterpillars hatch, they are ready to eat voraciously in order to reach the next stage in their life journey – the chrysalis.

It's not just butterflies either. Just when you thought insects couldn't get any weirder, it turns out that there are lots of creatures who use their senses in very different ways to us. Take crickets and locusts. In order to test the quality of dirt before settling on a location for their offspring, they use taste receptors in their ovipositor (a tubular organ that deposits eggs).

And kicking it up a notch in strangeness, there are some species of moth, like the looper moth, that hear with their bellies. This is used to detect the echolocation of bats hunting them. But the contender by far has to go to yellow-swallowtail butterflies, who not only taste with their feet but can also see with their genitals...

You heard it from us – Nature. Is. Weird.

Wildlife tourism: unpacking a conservation conundrum – an excerpt from Martin Harper's latest blog. You can read the full version here :

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/martinharper/posts/wildlife-tourism-unpacking-a-conservation-conundrum>

What should we do?

The wicked problem this talk has been trying to resolve is how do we sustain the economics of wildlife tourism which potentially provides a lifeline for the survival of a species or protected area, while not causing serious associated environmental harm.

The challenge of course is for governments, tour operators and individuals to take action to maximise the benefits while mitigating the costs.

The good news is there already a range of tour operators contributing directly to conservation. For example, Heritage Expeditions is BirdLife International Species Champion for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and it provides transport and logistics for researchers and personnel on nature reserves, makes financial contributions as a company and encourages clients to support conservation work.

And there are also a range of standards out there such as the Travel Operators for Tigers India Wildlife Association (TOFTigers Initiative) which is the trading arm of a UK-based charity, the Nature Stewardship Alliance which aims to encourage sustainable tourism with a particular focus on Tiger conservation.

Their “Pug Mark” certification standard is recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This was established in October 2008, as an initiative led by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The GSTC developed a set of sustainable tourism standards and performance indicators. that have different performance indicators for hotels, for tour operators, for destinations and governments, for certification bodies and for travellers.

All of these standards though are clearly voluntary. There is no global regulation for standards at wildlife attractions, and wildlife tourism is rarely specifically regulated at national levels.

We all hope that the world grips the Covid-19 pandemic and that people will be free, if they wish, to travel again perhaps to see some of the great wildlife wonders of the world. When this happens, we hope that this travel gives back to conservation more than it costs the environment.

The RSPB is going to look hard at the findings of our review to help guide our future engagement with wildlife tour companies.

I would welcome any thoughts from you to help us guide the next stages in our exploration of this issue.

Martin Harper – Global Conservation Director for the RSPB

UK ports free-for-all could spell doom for grey seals - The Guardian

The looming cranes of the Humber’s four ports are surrounded by wildlife, from bitterns and marsh harriers to grey seals, lounging on the mudflats and hunting for fish in the estuary waters. Despite the steady flow of cargo ships in and out of the ports, wildlife has thrived – testament to the success of decades of environment policies, according to green groups.

Yet those groups are now increasingly alarmed that the government’s plans to turn ports like those in the Humber into free ports will have a “disastrous” effect on the seals and other wildlife across the UK.

Ministers are considering excluding free ports from rules protecting birds and wildlife habitats – protections which George Eustice, the environment secretary, has previously attacked as being “spirit-crushing” and pledged to scrap.

Andrew Dodd, head of casework for the RSPB, said: “Removing those protections would be disastrous for the wildlife in those areas and a massive backward step in the way the UK looks

after its most important wildlife places. It would undo a lot of the positive work that the ports sector has done with major environmental organisations over the last 20 years.”

The free ports policy promotes deregulation and poses a serious and unnecessary threat to environmental protections

Hatti Owens, lawyer

Birds and habitats regulations derive from two EU directives which Eustice said during the referendum campaign “would go” in the event of Brexit. They are among rules that Boris Johnson has derided as “newt-counting delays” which hold up his Project Speed ambitions to “build, build, build”. The regulations enabled the creation of hundreds of special areas of conservation and special protection areas, which green groups say have delivered essential protections for Britain’s green spaces and wildlife such as the Humber estuary with its population of grey seals.

More relaxed planning regulations are a key attraction for advocates of free ports, a proposal Rishi Sunak made before he became chancellor. Earlier this month he announced the creation of 10 free port zones which would allow tariff-free import and export.

So far, 21 seaport and airport operators have shown an interest in becoming free ports, and many of them are represented by members of Port Zones UK, an umbrella group led by the British Ports Association.

BPA chairman, Richard Ballantyne, sits on a government advisory panel on free ports whose members also include Nusrat Ghani, the maritime minister, two rightwing thinktanks and a Conservative mayor, but has no environmental representatives.

Environmental deregulation was a key proposal made in a Port Zones UK document submitted to the panel last year, before the government opened a formal consultation on what rules should govern free ports.

“Port Zones UK would like to ... review the impact of the birds and habitats regulations,” the document said, adding the group’s other aim was to “ensure that environmental conservation area designations are excluded from seaport limits and boundaries to ensure that permitted development rights are not overridden by these designations.”

The RSPB is concerned that deregulation might enable a return to practices in the 1970s and



80s. Lappel Bank, a mudflat on the Medway river that was home to 1,700 birds from threatened species including the **ringed plover**, was concreted over to allow Medway Port Authority to create a cargo park for car exports.

Green campaigners believe that the Dibden Bay site of special scientific interest might be developed if Southampton becomes a free port.

Richard Benwell, chief executive of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said: “An outdated approach of deregulation and concrete would only pave the road to greater economic and environmental risk.” The environment needs more investment, he said. “That means more newt-counting, bird-counting, bug-counting and habitat-mapping, not less. New data-driven approaches must work alongside strong planning laws. They cannot replace them.”

ClientEarth UK environment lawyer Hatti Owens said: “As it stands, the free ports policy promotes deregulation and poses a serious and unnecessary threat to environmental protections.”

She said the free ports advisory panel had urged that “streamlining” planning regulations should be a priority, “shorthand for a bonfire of environmental protections and completely at odds with the government’s commitments to a green economic recovery. George Eustice recently committed to the UK being a ‘global leader’ in protecting the environment for future generations. If the government is to keep this promise, environmental standards must not be sacrificed for a quick buck.”

Mark Simmonds, BPA’s head of policy, said he understood “the vigilance and even suspicion of environmental groups but we are not looking to rip up environmental regulation”.

He said the BPA’s proposals had developed since the Port Zones UK document was published. “The birds and habitats regs were not explicitly mentioned in our response to the free ports consultation last week.

“Our industry has a good record on the environment, from providing and maintaining flood defences and preventing coastal erosion to the management of protected sites within harbour boundaries.

“What we would like to see in the free ports package is terrestrial planning rules that match those enjoyed by others, such as airports.”

He said there were “eight or nine” different types of marine protection, and in 2018 only one proposal out of 118 was approved under the birds and habitats regulations.

Successful second release of white-tailed eagles takes place in landmark English reintroduction project.

The return of white-tailed eagles to England has reached its next key milestone with the successful release of a further 7 birds on the Isle of Wight. The five-year reintroduction programme now in its second year is led by Forestry England and the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation, and aims to restore this lost species after an absence of 240 years.

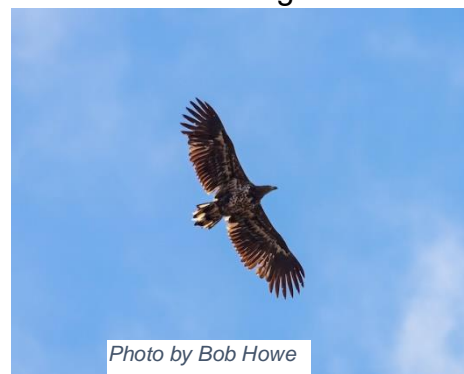
Over five years, up to 60 white-tailed eagles will be released with the aim of establishing an initial population of 6- 8 breeding pairs on the Isle of Wight and along the mainland coast. The first six birds were released last year. It will take several years for the young birds to become established and breeding is not expected to start until at least 2024.

Each bird is fitted with a satellite tracker to enable the team to monitor and track their progress. Evidence from similar reintroductions suggests that the rate of survival to breeding age is around 40%, and four of the six birds released last year have survived and are doing well.

As they mature the released white-tailed eagles have, as expected, begun to explore widely. Their journeys have taken them across much of England as they explore and learn about the landscape for the first time. Between these explorations, the birds have regularly been seen fishing for Grey Mullet in the estuaries of the Solent and observed in the skies over the Isle of Wight.

Bird enthusiasts and members of the public across the country have supported the project by reporting sightings of the eagles and sharing these via @seaeagleengland on social media and via our online sightings form.

Roy Dennis, Founder of the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation said: “We are delighted that we have been able to release this next group of birds this year as planned. We have seen from other reintroduction programmes that returning lost species offers real benefits for the health of our environment, and to people and local economies. This is particularly important at these difficult times as people rediscover nature and its benefits.”



“It has been very exciting to follow the exploratory flights of the birds we released last year and to see how they are learning to live successfully in the English landscape. We have been particularly encouraged that the birds have been catching Grey Mullet in the estuaries of the Isle of Wight because we believe this will become an important food source as the population develops, and is one of the key reasons we considered the Isle of Wight and the South Coast suitable for a reintroduction.”

“A project like this relies upon the involvement and support of many, many people. I would like to thank everyone who has helped us again this year including the local organisations and individuals on our steering group. We look forward to the day when these amazing birds become a regular feature in the skies above us.”

Steve Egerton-Read, White-Tailed Eagle Project Officer, Forestry England, said: “We are now a year on from the release of the first white-tailed eagles and it’s very encouraging to see them doing well. We have been following their movements closely using the satellite monitoring, field visits and reports from members of the public.”

“It will be fascinating to see how the young birds released this summer explore and how they interact with the slightly older birds released in 2019. Thank you to everyone who continues to support us by reporting observations and photos of the birds as they travel around the country, we are always keen to hear about your amazing sightings.”

The reintroduction of Britain’s largest bird of prey is being conducted under licence from Natural England, the Government’s wildlife licensing authority. All of the young birds involved in the project are collected under a Scottish Natural Heritage licence from the wild in Scotland and brought to the Isle of Wight.

Courtesy of Roy Dennis.

Roy has just released his new book entitled Cottongrass Summer. For a signed copy, please visit roydennis@aol.com £9.99 plus £2.00 p&p

Did you know?

Swallows seem to choose their mates based on their long tails. A study published in 1992 found that male swallows with long, symmetrical tail feathers mated earlier than those with short, asymmetric tails.



© Steve Young

A friend of mine, Steve Young, took this amazing photograph at Dan's Dock in Oare Marshes a few weeks ago. It shows two grass snakes vying for the same frog. Steve has had this photo published in various local and national newspapers, along with a mention from Chris Packham on his weekly Facebook programme. Chris said that the snake would never eat a frog bottom way round because of its legs pointing out. Do you think he was he right – did the snake eat it like this, or turn it around? Let me know what you think at newsletter@rspbgravesend.org.uk

Many of our reserves are beginning to reopen, albeit on a limited basis. For more information, please look here <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/news/stories/coronavirus/reserve-reboot/>

Following guidance from the RSPB, we will be holding our 2020 AGM online via Zoom (which allows up to 100 attendees) on the 8th October at 7.30 pm. A test meeting will be held on the 10th September, to allow members to try out connecting via Zoom if they haven't used it before. Full details will be available on our website and Facebook soon.

On behalf of all of the committee, please stay safe and well.

Steve Cullum – Newsletter Editor.