

I started the weekly BTO garden survey in 2001, and have now built up a large data base. The data on long-tailed tits are very interesting. From 2001 to spring 2003 they were only recorded in my garden as single birds calling in to see what food was available. When, on the advice of a friend, I installed a wire mesh feeder containing whole digestive biscuits, numbers improved significantly. Hanging the feeder at an angle appears to be the best way, as it gives other birds a chance to feed. In the autumn of 2003 a flock of 10 birds gradually built up, and since then they have been regular winter feeders with the maximum numbers in the first two months of the year. The largest flock counted (with difficulty!) was 14 in 2006 and 2011, and the smallest only 3 in 2007. Numbers fluctuate from year to year as a result of either poor breeding or very bad weather as happened last year. From February onwards the flock starts to diminish until often there is just one local pair left who will continue to make good use of the available food. They will visit until the eggs hatch, which becomes apparent when, for about a week, the female arrives with bent tail feathers. This is because she has been sitting for long periods in the superbly domed nest they make from moss, lichen and spiders' web, and her long tail feathers have been curved around inside the nest. It seems that these birds remember that food is available here every autumn, because a few have been ringed and are returning to a known restaurant.

### **Vultures in Crete**

Brian Dawkins

My brother moved to Crete about 3 years ago and lives near Agios Nikolaos on the north coast.

Crete is a very rugged, mountainous island, and he likes driving his four-wheel drive truck up into the mountains to look at the wildlife. While I was over there last October, he suggested we went up into a canyon in an area where Griffon Vultures breed. They are one of the larger vultures of Europe, Asia and Africa, and are bigger than most eagles. They have a pale brown neck with a dull white ruff, contrasting with their sandy-coloured body and wings. Their wings are very broad with long 'fingers' with a wingspan up to 2.65 metres (8.5 feet). Like other vultures, they are scavengers, feeding mainly on carrion. Their numbers are known to fluctuate in response to changes in the climate, but the species is not a threatened one. They have been reintroduced into parts of Europe with reports of increasing numbers in Spain.

We stopped in the canyon and looked up a sheer rock face to the summit of a mountain, which must have been about 800 – 1000 feet above us, where six vultures were wheeling and soaring around, silhouetted against the bright blue sky – they can soar to 10,000 feet. There were ledges on the rock face where a couple of birds were perched, and my brother has seen nest sites and young birds in small caves towards the top of the rock face by climbing up the other side of the canyon and looking across.

While we were watching the birds perched on a ledge near the top of the mountain, the silhouette of a wild goat appeared above them on the summit! Goats are everywhere on the mountains and are amazing climbers.

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **Indoor Meetings**

Indoor meetings are held at 7.30 pm on the first Thursday in the month at the Chase High School Sixth Form Annexe, Geraldine Close, off Geraldine Road, Barnards Green, Malvern, WR14 3PF. Adults £2, children free, refreshments included. Non-Trust members welcome.

**THURS 6<sup>th</sup> SEPT:** 'The Magic of Moths' by Patrick Clement.

**THURS 4<sup>th</sup> OCT:** 'The Natural History of the Wyre Forest' by John Robinson.

**THURS 8<sup>th</sup> NOV:** 'The Management of Deer in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' by Peter Watson, from the Deer Initiative.

**THURS 6<sup>th</sup> DEC:** 'Mistletoe Miscellany' by Jonathon Briggs, Ecologist and Mistletoe Consultant.

### **Outdoor Meetings**

If you are joining us for the first time – welcome! If you need a lift or more information, please phone Pauline on 01905 352423 or Brian Bradford on 01684 565994. Always wear suitable clothing and footwear. Donations to the WWT appreciated.

**TUES 14<sup>th</sup> AUG:** A coach trip to Rhayader for a guided walk in the Elan Valley and a visit to the Gingrin Kite Centre. Meet at the splash car park at 8am. Cost £20 including entry to Gingrin. Return departure scheduled for 4.30pm. 10 places still available.

**SUN 2<sup>nd</sup> SEPT:** 'Water Power at the Knapp' – a cocktail of ice, floods and mills. Throw in a bit of geology and a river flowing the wrong way and the landscape of the Knapp and Papermill comes alive! A gentle walk and talk following Leigh Brook through the reserve and back again- only 1.5miles with gentle slopes, taking about 2 hours. Meet Jim Handley at 10am at the entrance to the Knapp and Papermill near Alfrick Pound (GR752522).

**FRI 21<sup>st</sup> SEPT:** Meet at the Splash Car Park at 1pm for an afternoon/evening coach trip to Woodchester Park. A guided walk in the evening to see Woodchester Mansion and the bat hibernaculum. Cost £22 including mansion tour.

**THURS 11<sup>th</sup> OCT:** Bodenham Arboretum. Probable 10.00am departure from the Splash car park. Will include a guided tour, but other details to be finalised later.

**WEDS 7<sup>th</sup> NOV:** Meet Derek Bradley at Alfrick Village Hall (SO 748531) at 10 am for 2 – 3 hour walk (approx) 3 miles, a few stiles and steepish banks – expect mud! For more details contact Derek on 01886 884372.

**WEDS 26<sup>th</sup> DEC:** - Boxing Day walk led by Brian Iles. Details later.

**Don't forget to check our website for other meetings.**

### **Contributions**

Please send ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to Brian Dawkins (01684 573562) email [db.dawkins@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:db.dawkins@hotmail.co.uk)

### **Committee Contact**

Margaret Vernon (01684 565079)



## NEWS AND VIEWS

Whilst we are all enjoying the summer, which is quite spasmodic this year, don't forget to take advantage of the wide range of outdoor events which we have organised. (details overleaf). Our outdoor trips and walks have grown in number during the last few years with Pauline (Ranson) at the helm, and over the last year Brian Bradford has given his support. Pauline is to step down from this role in the autumn and we shall split the job in two, with Brian taking responsibility for coach trips, and Margaret Jupe for local walks and visits.

Very many thanks to Pauline for all her work on the committee over the years. She will continue to be involved in the group in other ways – thankfully! Welcome to Margaret Jupe as she picks up the reins.

A big thank-you too to all those people who helped at the Knapp and Papermill Open Day, not just on our own stand, but also with the refreshments and the bric-a-brac stall. And also to all the members who signed up for the Collection Day at Morrison's – it was very pleasing to have all the slots filled well ahead of the day.

### Malvern Group e-mail list

We keep a secure list of e-mail addresses of Malvern Group members and friends that we use to circulate details of our meetings, events, requests for help and anything else that we think may be of interest to our members. No one will see anyone else's e-mail address and we try not to inundate you with e-mails! If you would like to add your name and e-mail address to this list please e-mail [malverngroup@live.co.uk](mailto:malverngroup@live.co.uk).

### Wildlife rambling/study outings

In addition to our normal outdoor meetings, at two- or three-weekly intervals from May some of us have been visiting local areas of wildlife interest to 'see what's there' – flowers, birds, butterflies, bees, beetles, other insects, spiders, snails, reptiles, etc. etc., in the hope of improving our identification skills, sharing our knowledge and even doing a bit of recording. These outings are very informal, often cover a small area (no long walks), and anyone with any level of knowledge from 'expert' to 'beginner' is very welcome. We set a meeting place and time, which will be advertised at indoor meetings and circulated to those on the Malvern Group e-mailing list. If you would like to join us, no need to book, just turn up equipped with binoculars, field guides if you have any and refreshments if you wish, leave

### Wildlife Trust

when you like. For more details, phone Carol (tel. 01886 884372) or e-mail the Malvern Group ([malverngroup@live.co.uk](mailto:malverngroup@live.co.uk)).

### RSPB Trip

The local RSPB group have vacancies on a trip to Caerlaverock in the Montrose basin on 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012, watching wintering geese etc. Cost £270. Anyone interested please contact Lyndon Knott on 01905 455222.

### The Many Headed Slime Mould

Andrew Cartlidge

Having moved from London to Malvern last year, I was expecting a different range of plants and birds etc. What I did not expect was something I had never found before – slime moulds.

In November, in a field near to Ragged Stone Hill, I came across some thirty specimens of the "many-headed slime mould" (*Muciturbo crustacean*). They superficially resembled clumps of fungus stalks, being about an inch high and half an inch across, and yellowish white with a slightly grainy texture. These would have been spore producing bodies as, for most of the year, slime moulds live in the soil or leaf litter, slowly moving around hunting for food. Fortunately they don't move too fast and only eat fungi and bacteria.

They are an odd group of organisms having some of the characteristics of both plants and animals. They have not been well studied, as probably botanists don't regard them as plants or zoologists as animals. An odd thing about them is that they start off as normal single-celled organisms but at some point instead of normal cell division, the cell nucleus divides but the rest of the cell does not, it just gets bigger and bigger so they end up as a bag of cytoplasm containing lots of nuclei. The cell also does not have a cell wall, just a cell membrane, which means that the whole organism can squeeze itself through very small gaps. Indeed there have been reports of slime moulds squeezing themselves out of trunks of newly felled trees.

When I returned to the field recently there was no sign of them – perhaps they will be back next autumn.

### Long-Tailed Tits

Garth Lowe