

warmth in the sun, and we soon started seeing swallows, sand martins, house martins and the first wheatears of the year. Chiffchaffs were singing, swans and gulls were nesting, but one of my highlights was to see and hear a skylark. It was a delight to some to have excellent views of greenshank, a group of avocets and many other birds such as redshank, Brent geese, shoveler and pochard.

A walk in the woods was full of the perfume of *Viola odorata*, small patches of coltsfoot, daffodils and snowdrops, and on the dunes the pussy willows were covered in pollen which was attracting bees. A barn owl hunting at night, a fantastic sunset and a short-eared owl gliding by the lounge before breakfast were memorable moments for all.

Our final day included a visit to Castor Hanglands, a National Nature Reserve. Here the wood anemones were in full flower and a nightingale was heard and seen by some. Finally we stopped in Stamford, a town which was declared a conservation area in 1967, where we had the opportunity to view some of the wonderful buildings. A very enjoyable trip.

For a fuller list of sightings, please see the website.

Worcestershire Bats

David Lee

In Worcestershire we are fortunate to have a rich variety of bat species. In fact it is possible that we may have 16 out of the 17 species known to breed in the UK. We are missing only the grey long-eared, which is confined to areas around the south coast.

In addition to the 'usual suspects', we have a healthy maternity colony of lesser horseshoe bats roosting in a house on the Malvern Hills. A maximum of 730 bats were counted out last summer – they hibernate each winter in the disused Colwall railway tunnel.

Rare barbastelle bats are found all year round, close by in bat boxes in Tinker's Hill Wood, under British Camp. We have seen serotines foraging over Big Meadow at the Knapp, and a few years ago a *Nathusius' pipistrelle* was found grounded in a barn near Wichenford. It was released after a period of 'TLC', along with a companion that had arrived in the UK in a load of palletes from the Netherlands and couldn't be returned home!

There have been some surprises over the last couple of years. One was the unexpected identification in 2011 of *Alcathoe's* bat from DNA analysis of a dropping collected during a pre-development survey near Worcester. This is a fairly new species to science, first identified in Greece in 2001, and only proven to be native to the UK as recently as 2010!

Another exciting development was the discovery, last January, of a greater horseshoe bat during the annual hibernation count in Colwall tunnel. It was actually seen hanging in the Herefordshire end, but after being disturbed was later seen flying down the tunnel in the direction of Malvern, so we are justified in claiming part ownership - our possible number 16! The nearest known maternity colonies of 'greater' are in the Forest of Dean, although there have been some reports of bat detector recordings in the vicinity of Eastnor Park.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Indoor meetings are held at 7.30pm on the first Thursday of the month. Starting in September, we will be in the Main Hall (upstairs) at the Lyttelton Rooms in Church Street, **but note alternative venue for Dec 5th.**

THURS 5th SEPT: 'The Wildlife Garden' by Howard Drury, horticultural broadcaster and writer.

THURS 3rd OCT: 'Mushrooms and Toadstools' by Roy Mantle, County Recorder for Shropshire, member of the British Mycological Society.

THURS 7th NOV: 'The Biking Birder 2010 – the Natural History of Britain seen from the Saddle' by Gary Prescott, only person to have visited every RSPB reserve; holder of the Green Year List record for Britain and Europe.

THURS 5th DEC - at Christ Church, Avenue Road 'The Natural History of Christmas' by Dr. Michael Leach, wildlife author and photographer.

THURS 2nd JAN: 'Amphibians of Worcestershire and Beyond' by Alan Shepherd.

Outdoor Meetings

If you are joining us for the first time – welcome! If you need a lift or more information, please phone: Margaret Jue on 01684 893808 regarding walks (when donations to the WWT will be appreciated) and Brian Bradford on 01684 565994 regarding coach trips. Always wear suitable clothing and footwear.

WED 14th AUG: Coach trip to Shropshire WT Flagship Reserve, Wem Moss. Cost £12. Morning guided walk and afternoon free exploration of a second nearby reserve. Bring packed lunch (or a pub lunch is available locally to the Wem Moss site.) Meet at Malvern Splash at 8.30am. Booking is essential with Brian.

SUN 18th AUG: Meet 8pm at the Knapp for a bat walk with David Lee. Grid ref. SO 751522. Booking is essential. Contact Margaret on 01684 893808 before 16th August. No dogs please, and children must be accompanied by an adult. Bring bat detectors if available. Donations welcome.

SAT 12th OCT: Join Roy Mantle for a fungi walk in Shrawley Wood. Meet at 2pm at the Lenchford Hotel, postcode WR6 6TB, grid ref. SO 813642, 1 mile north of Holt Heath on B4196. Park in layby or in hotel carpark if eating lunch there. Booking essential, with charge of £3 per person to be paid in advance. Cheques payable to 'WWT Malvern Group'. Contact Margaret on 01684 893808.

Contributions

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

Committee Contact

Margaret Vernon (01684 565079)



NEWS & VIEWS

From Margaret Vernon

As I sit writing this at the end of May, with the rain lashing against the window panes, I just hope the summer has improved by the time you read this!

The big piece of news is that, because of building work, we have to move our indoor meetings out of Malvern Evangelical Church temporarily, but we have at last found an available venue in Malvern to suit us. We shall be meeting in the Main Hall at the Lyttelton Rooms from September 5th 2013, possibly until May 1st 2014. The facilities, although on the first floor (there is a lift), provide us with all our needs. There is ample car parking available nearby, and there are 2 identified parking places for disabled people in the Priory grounds.

We look forward to seeing many of you there on September 5th. (We plan to return to MEC in September 2014.)

The Somerset Levels, 19th Feb 2013

Roger Hales

After months of cold, grey days, the forecast for our trip to the Somerset levels was for day-long sunshine. We set off at 8.30 for the two hour drive to our first destination, Shapwick Heath, the site of an elevated Neolithic footway which runs for over 2km across the Somerset swamp and is the oldest known routeway in Britain.

The area is now famed for its mixed habitat of grassland, wet woodland, fen and scrub, attracting otters, many species of duck and water-loving plants. Here our best sighting was of a male goldeneye diving in one of the peat-blackened lakes. From here we also enjoyed the calls of an elusive Cetti's warbler.

Having walked back along the muddy, rich, black footpaths, we re-joined the coach, which took us onto our next venue whilst we tucked into our lunch boxes. Westhay Moor is a restored peat moor, now renowned for its reed beds which are home to thousands of ducks and waders.

The Levels, drained for agriculture for a thousand years, have only recently been allowed to return slowly to their natural status of flood plain and wildlife haven. This region of the Avalon Marsh is only 3m above sea level and was formed 10,000 years ago in the last glacial period. Ancient man dug peat, harvested willow, fished and took wildfowl from this rich resource. For centuries the area was far too wet to use in winter: they were summer lands, the derivation of the name 'Somerset'.

Glastonbury Tor is an impressive sight in the distance rising from the flatlands.

Nowadays it is still very wet underfoot and wellingtons are essential wear if a full exploration of the reserve's many paths and six hides are to be enjoyed. From these vantage points we spotted great white egret which now breed in the Levels, an elegant pair of marsh harriers, as well as snipe and many waterfowl.

Our final destination was Ham Wall nature reserve, transformed by the RSPB from old peat workings into reed beds, lakes and scrub. Here we saw bittern, reed bunting, both little and great egrets and many duck species. By good fortune (or was it inspired planning?) the week's 'mega' bird for the whole UK just happened to be present on this very reserve! A pied-billed grebe, a rare vagrant visitor from the USA similar to our little grebe, was spotted by one of our group whilst we all waited for the day's star attraction to appear.

As dusk fell and the temperature dropped rapidly, we were rewarded by the stunning spectacle of an enormous starling murmuration. Hundreds of thousands of birds from the surrounding countryside mass to their roosts in the reed beds. Most nature lovers will have seen this on television, but actually experiencing the sheer scale and ebb and flow of these vast flocks of birds, wintering here from all over Europe, can't be over-stated.

This brought a very special end to a day that had lived up to its promise, both in terms of sunshine and the pleasure of being close to nature.

Gibraltar Point, 13-16 April 2013

Tina Indge

Gibraltar Point, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve, is three miles from Skegness; the Wash Study Centre was our base for three nights.

The closure of the A43 meant that a diversion took us underneath the Harringworth viaduct which, with 82 arches, is the largest masonry structure in Britain – a truly striking sight! This was followed by a visit to Vine House Farm from where the Wildlife Trusts obtain their bird food. The owner, Nicolas Watts, gave us a very interesting and informative tour of the farm, where we saw bramblings, a marsh harrier and a barn owl to name but three. A brief stop at Boston cemetery, which includes a large conservation area, yielded green woodpecker, two sparrowhawks and carpets of daffodils and scillas.

At the Centre we were free to explore the wide range of habitats, but were always keen to return for the excellent meals provided by the staff. There was