

Northern regions to overwinter at the reserve.

There was something for everyone; some of us ventured out to the hides, where we saw a total of 60 wild bird species, including European cranes, geese such as white-fronted, barnacle, grey-lag and bean, and numerous ducks. Waders were in good numbers, my favourite being the wheeling flocks of lapwings. In the wildfowl collection, flamingos strutted and bathed in the sunshine, and the rare Hawaiian geese, the Nene, followed people around clearly hoping for food.

We came together at 4.00 pm for the floodlit feed of wild swans, ducks and geese. The Bewick's swans are the iconic winter visitors for the reserve, with 146 so far this year. We all enjoyed this spectacle and as the wildfowl descended on the food in the dusk, large groups of starlings flew over towards their roost.

Garth's Garden

By Garth Lowe

Our small rural garden which overlooks the Knapp and Papermill Reserve is surrounded by trees and provides plenty of winter activity, made all the more interesting by the discoveries I make while ringing birds. We take part in the BTO's online garden bird survey noting the maximum number of each species we see every week. So far we have recorded 44 different bird species in the garden.

The most recent interesting birds have been a tawny owl and a buzzard. The roosting owl was first noticed flying away when we dropped some garden waste over the fence, but later, after creeping up slowly to the old ivy-covered oak stump very close to the bungalow, I was able to enjoy a better view. The buzzard occasionally flies in and perches on a telegraph pole in the roadside hedge, its last visit proclaimed by burbling crows angry at its presence.

There is a male great spotted woodpecker which I first ringed in 2009, so it is at least eight years old, and one of the long-tailed tit flock is over three years old. Both have some way to go, as the oldest great spot in Britain was eleven and a long-tailed tit reached eight years. Although this pecker seems to be the only one visiting now, one cold winter I ringed five different males here! One would never know this without ringing. They are all caught in a manually operated trap baited with digestive biscuits.

As autumn drifted into winter we were pleased one morning to spot two bats using our eaves to roost. We have seen bats do this before but realise they are just using us temporarily before they go into hibernation elsewhere. They are not the only mammals, as we have woodland moles, bank voles and both the woodmice species, which often use one of the many nest boxes as a winter home. Brown rats appear but are not welcome and are always a problem when feeding birds.

Numbers of feeding birds appear to be down this winter even though some colder spells have occurred. A very wet June in 2016 could well be responsible for the low numbers of tits as that is the time the vulnerable juveniles are still being fed by parents. It is always a joy to see the marsh tits which have now joined the red data list, with studies now taking place to ascertain what the problems might be.

Bird ringing around the Malverns

By Peter Holmes

The Malvern area has a number of active bird ringers, contributing to the national bird ringing scheme run by the British Trust for Ornithology. Members of the Wychavon Ringing Group operate at a number of sites including the Malvern Sewage Works. Stuart Brown works in the Leigh Sinton area, where, among other things, he rings nationally significant numbers of redwings and meadow pipits. I ring at Castlemorton Common and Upton Sewage Works.

Perhaps the most significant ringing projects are the two Constant Effort Sites (CES), at Malvern Sewage Works and Castlemorton Common. In a CES site ringing is standardised, with 12 trapping visits, one in each 10 day period between May and August, putting the same nets in the same places for a set period of time. CES ringing is a central part of bird population monitoring, providing information on survival and productivity across a range of mostly passerine species, but it is less successful for larger species which generally don't fly so low, and escape from nets more easily.

I have run the Castlemorton Common CES since 1994, and a 20 year summary was produced in 'Birds and Butterflies Around the Malverns 2013'. That analysis showed that over the 20 years most species populations were remarkably stable. Blackcaps increased somewhat, and willow warblers declined slightly, but the latter nowhere near as marked as the national pattern. Bigger declines have been in some larger species present in the site but not trapped in mist nets. When I started there were several pairs of turtle doves and also cuckoos and little owls were much more numerous.

My other specific interest on Castlemorton Common is the movements of redpoll. Redpolls are very common on autumn passage, with frequent flocks passing over in good years. A smaller number spend the winter locally, often using garden feeders, before a somewhat smaller movement (or possibly movement in smaller groups) occurs in spring. In most years there are no summer records of redpoll.

I generally catch about 200-300 redpolls each year. The vast bulk are lesser redpolls but, if you accept the different species (which I and their genetics do not!), there are occasional common redpolls and some likely hybrids.

A good number of these redpolls have been trapped by other ringers, and I have trapped many ringed individuals, building up a good picture of where they are coming from and going to. The winter records include a couple locally, but most are from counties in the south-east of England, with a few from Belgium as far as the Luxembourg border. In spring they are back in the Midlands and also central and north Wales. Breeding season records are wide ranging from northern England and Scotland as far as the Highlands.

Contributions

Please send any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to the editor alison.uren@gmail.com or phone 01684 567819

Malvern Group Newsletter

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Worcestershire

40th Anniversary Celebration

By Alison Uren



Front row: Carol Bradley, Jane Ratcliffe, Lyn Saunders, Joy Bunyan, Pauline Ranson, Alison Uren
Back row: Margaret Vernon, Margaret Jupe, Neil Edwards, Christine Seymour, Ray Bishop, Brian Bradford, Phil Bunyan, Brian Dawkins, Dave Cook, Brian Iles

The WWT Malvern Group has just celebrated its 40th Anniversary! What an achievement it is to keep a voluntary group going for that long, and what a testament to the enthusiasm and dedication of the members, especially those who come on the committee and organise Indoor and Outdoor Meetings. Above is a photo of 16 past and present committee members, including Ray Bishop who was on the very first committee 40 years ago, and has only missed one meeting since! Many thanks also to the willing helpers who sit on the admissions desk and serve refreshments.

We also celebrated with a walk in January at the Knapp and Papermill Reserve, led by Brian Iles. The Reserve has recently been expanded by the acquisition of new land and it was interesting to see the new boundaries. It is worth a visit at any time of year, especially in June when thousands of orchids are flowering in the Big Meadow.

Indoor Meetings 2017

Indoor Meetings are held at 7.30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms in Church Street, Great Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50 with refreshments included. Children are free and non-members of the Trust are very welcome.

April 6th: Our Changing Wildlife
Chris Ward, wildlife lecturer and photographer

May 4th: Wildlife and Management – Looking Ahead
Duncan Bridges, Director of Malvern Hills Conservators

Outdoor Meetings 2017

Full details and the booking form for all walks and trips can be found on the website. For more information, phone Margaret Vernon on 01684 565079. Booking is essential for the day trips.

Walk: May 31st 10.00 a.m. A morning guided walk with Simon Roberts to hear about, and hopefully see, the breeding pied flycatchers on the Malvern Hills. Meet at Hollybush car park SO 758368.

Walk: July 23rd 11.00 a.m. to 14.00 p.m. A walk with Mel Mason to see butterflies on the Malvern Hills. Bring a packed lunch and water. A sunhat and walking boots are recommended. Meet at North Hill car park SO 771468.

Trip: June 20th. Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire. A wealth of wildlife including nightjar and roding woodcock. Depart from Splash at 9.15, cost £13, limit 16.

Trip: July 13th. Brean Down and Sand Point, Somerset. Rare plants and butterflies, and a guided walk with a NT volunteer. Depart from Splash at 8.00, cost £18, limit 16.

Trip: August 9th and 10th. Imber Village, Salisbury Plain. Chalk grasslands with birds, butterflies, mammals and exceptional flora. There has already been considerable interest in this trip so we shall run it on two consecutive days. Depart from Splash 7.30, cost £15.

Trip: May 26th to 30th 2018. Orchids of Kent.

A 5 day/4 night trip in May 2018 staying at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory on a self-catering basis. We shall have a local guide for one day to see up to 20 species of orchid. In addition we shall have one day at Sandwich Bay and another visiting Kent Wildlife Trust reserves. Cost will be in the region of £150 plus £25pp for the guide. Contact Margaret Vernon if interested 01684 565079 **before the end of April 2017, as the accommodation has to be booked.**

Slimbridge Wetland Centre

By Christine Seymour

On a bright, mild day in December, eighteen of us plus a driver from Community Action visited Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetland Reserve. After a short introductory tour, arranged especially for us, we all dispersed to follow our own interests.

The Centre was founded by Peter Scott with the twin aims of conservation and education. It has excellent facilities: a restaurant, art gallery, film theatre and shop, as well as the wildfowl collection. Around the periphery are many hides overlooking the Severn wetland areas with a mass of wild birds, particularly wildfowl that have migrated from