



giving
nature
a home

Newsletter
of the
Central Ayrshire
Local Group

38th year
Summer 2014



Loch Leven trip in November 2013



New Year bird walk in Rozelle 01 January 2014



Viewpoint at North Yorkshire Moors Centre, Sutton Bank in May 2014 on our group outing.



Arriving at RSPB's Fairburn Ings Reserve in Yorkshire on a fine, warm and sunny morning in May 2014.



The Gannet

RSPB Bempston Cliffs Reserve, Local Group trip to North Yorkshire May 2014



For all local birding details - log on to: www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk

Leader's Lines

Hello there,

I do hope you have all had a very pleasant summer and are now looking forward to the new session, catching up with old friends, whom you may not have seen for a few months, and, hopefully, making some new ones at the meetings or outings.

As I take over the reins of the leadership of the group, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Ronnie for the excellent job he has made of the post for the last five years. Luckily, he has agreed to remain on the committee and, along with Jim and Tony (both also past leaders), I will have ample back-up, if required. You have a hard-working, efficient committee who work well together on your behalf but, we would be pleased to hear from anyone who would be willing to join us, as we could be doing with one or two additions to our numbers. Even if you wanted to try it out for one year and, if you decide it's not for you, then you would be free to resign with no hard feelings. You never know whether you might even enjoy the experience!

I also hope you will let me, or any committee member, know of any changes which you think might improve your enjoyment of the indoor meetings, the outings or our communications with the members. If you know of any members who would appreciate transport to the meetings or outings, please let any committee member know and we will do our best to assist.

I have tried to put together another set of interesting speakers on a variety of subjects for the evening meetings. It's getting more difficult to find speakers as quite a few of the "stalwarts" are no longer keen to travel on a dark winter night. If you have any suggestions for speakers, or alternative forms which the evenings could take, I would be very pleased to know of your suggestions.

Jim has another excellent choice of outings organised for you and I hope as many of you, as is possible, will take advantage of his knowledge on these trips. You are sure of a warm welcome and cheerful company. Tony has organised a weekend away on Islay (fully booked now - but you can register an interest in the case of cancellations) a 2 day coach trip to RSPB Leighton Moss and Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Brockholes Reserve and a break in the USA on offer this session - full details elsewhere. Gerda is trying to get a slot at the MacLaurin Galleries to hold another "Art on the Wing" exhibition for Autumn 2016. Hopefully this will be as successful as the previous events which were excellent.

I, and the rest of the committee, are there to serve YOU and are always willing to listen to any comments (good or bad) you may wish to make on any relevant matter so, please, talk to us about your ideas on how we could encourage new members or ways of raising more funds for the work of the RSPB in Scotland.

I wish you all Happy Birding, Anne

RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group & SOC Ayrshire's long weekend 24 - 27 May 2014 Birds, steam & real ale in North Yorkshire Trip Report by Tony Scott

Saturday 24 May. From Ayr to RSPB Saltholme Reserve and the Crown Hotel, Boroughbridge

The weather forecast for today was not good, but at least we set out in dry, sunny conditions. Most of the group met at Dodds coach depot in Ayr as usual - but we also had two of our group to collect at Middlesbrough Railway Station around 12.45. We left Ayr ahead of time at 07.25 and our route took us along the A70 to Douglas and the M74 to our first stop of the day at Annandale Water services. John Cairns was our driver once again and as usual his driving skills got us to all the places we wished to go safely and on time. As well as the usual Costa coffees and filled rolls etc., we were also treated to lovely views of sand martins, pied wagtails and a variety of ducks including mallard and some white farmhouse varieties! We pressed on to the M6 and Penrith, before joining the A66 to cross the Pennines and into the gloomy weather of the east of the UK at our next brief stop at Scotch Corner services. The place was jumping with cars, caravans and large groups of young women setting off on hen parties and even more vocal young men on stag parties - one group carrying a blow-up doll with them! High jinks at High Noon! It was a Bank Holiday after all.

We reached Middlesbrough in the rain and our two ladies, Molly and Sue, were waiting for us at the railway station. With our company complete, we moved on to the relatively new and flagship reserve at Saltholme. What a pity the weather was so wet and chilly - but we were lucky enough to have some walks as the rain abated for a while. One of the many superb features of the reserve is the café with its wonderful viewing area. We could enjoy our freshly cooked lunch whilst looking out to a huge lake with rafts for nesting terns. Most of these were common terns, but also a few sandwich terns. We were told that there are around 350 pairs of nesting common terns and the groups did appear to be thriving. Through the rain we could also see great crested grebes, cormorants and even a little egret, although this is far less unusual than it used to be. Another great feature was the sand martin wall where there was lots of activity. Other species seen on the reserve included six grey heron, over 40 mute swans, both greylag and Canada geese, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, shoveler, garganey, pochard and tufted ducks. Raptors seen today included common buzzard, kestrel and peregrine. Later we managed a walk to one of the wildlife watchpoints where we had good views of moorhens with chicks, pied avocet, oystercatcher, ringed plover and lapwing. We also had close-up views of a pair of reed buntings. Had the weather been warm and sunny, we could have taken advantage of the many walks and hides in this amazing reserve set in the heart of industrial Teesside. Most of us managed to get to the other side of the lake and Paddy's pool hide and some got even farther away at Saltholme pools hide, where good views of yellow wagtails were enjoyed.

We left the reserve in a downpour, but by the time we got as far as our Best Western Crown Hotel in Boroughbridge, the rain had stopped and the sun even tried to push through the clouds occasionally. If the weather was cool, the welcome at the hotel was most certainly warm. From the very start we were all impressed with the friendly and attentive service provided by all members of staff, and also the quality of the food and its presentation. The rooms were spacious and comfortable and the general atmosphere was not just good but excellent. Around 18.45 we slowly drifted along to the lounge bar for a pre-dinner drink. The real ale drinkers amongst us were not disappointed with the choice of three ales on tap and the first we just had to try was the local Black Sheep ale from the Masham brewery. Dinner was called punctually at 19.30 hrs and we had a choice of three starters, three mains and three desserts each of the three evenings. Tonight we enjoyed the Wensleydale cheese and apricot panna-cotta with pear and walnut salad. The salmon, cream cheese and chives en-croute with Hollandaise sauce was a most substantial and tasty dish, whereas the Wok-fried duck breast with Hoi-sin noodles was somewhat lighter and equally delicious. A fair number of our group chose the Yorkshire strawberry (Eton) mess with chocolate sauce to finish. Coffee, tea and after-dinner mints followed each evening. By now we were all truly contented guests and ready for a good nights sleep.



Reed bunting at Saltholme



Common tern



Saltholme café

Sunday 25 May 2014. Sutton Bank, RSPB Bempton Cliffs Reserve and Wykeham raptor viewpoint

After a most sumptuous breakfast at the Crown Hotel, we left Boroughbridge at 09.15 for the short drive via Thirsk to climb the steep Sutton Bank to the North York Moors National Park Centre where we spent a most pleasant 90 minutes or more. A walk through mixed woodland was really delightful and we were accompanied by such pleasant birdsong. Tree pipits and blackcaps were heard and yellowhammers, siskins and bullfinches added colour to the lush green surroundings. We walked as far as the viewpoint which was signposted as 'The Finest View in England'. Quite a claim. It was indeed a most pleasant prospect of 'England's Green and Pleasant Land' but I think Blake had maybe other views in other parts of the North of England in mind when he wrote 'Jerusalem'. I can think of quite a few even more stunning views in the Peak District, for example. However, we all enjoyed the lovely panorama with a circling buzzard adding that little extra dimension to the scene. We also had time to look at the displays and the shop in the visitor centre, and even time for a coffee or more in the café.

From here, driving through the pretty town of Helmsley and the market town of Pickering, we were on our way south-east to RSPB's Bempton Cliffs Reserve. We ran through the occasional shower, but were greeted with a completely blue sky when we got to Bempton. The reserve was very busy - it was a Bank Holiday Sunday of course, but luckily we had reserved our coach space so no worries in that respect. Amazingly for such a busy day, the advertised 'high class food caravan' was nowhere to be seen. Luckily, some of us had bought filled rolls at Sutton Bank but others had to make do with the tea, coffee, crisps and biscuits on offer at the RSPB kiosk. Moving out to the viewing points along the magnificent cliffs, we enjoyed the close proximity to England's largest (and only?) mainland gannetry. Great to be able to eyeball some of these albatross-like giants of the ocean as they swept up from their roosting ledges. Truly amazing. The calls of the many kittiwakes blended with the grunting of the gannets, but we had to look down into the cavernous depths to see the whirring wings of puffins as they sped over the water to their nesting places. Common guillemots were packed tight into their colonies which they shared in part with the handsome razorbills. Shags and cormorants and a variety of gulls made up the numbers, and even a few fulmars were noted towards to tops of the stacks. Colourful wild flowers were also a delight which helped to complete the glorious panoramas along this breathtaking Yorkshire coastline.

Our final port of call today was off the main A170 at Wykeham - about five miles up a forestry road to the car park set amongst a dark, gloomy sitka spuce plantation. Only coal tits were seen as we walked through to more mixed woodland at the raptor viewpoint. The wide green valley before us was a delight, but not a single raptor was to be seen and certainly no honey buzzards, our target species. Still, we stayed long enough to soak up the view which stretched as far as the North Yorkshire Moors. Now it was back to Boroughbridge, our hotel and another excellent dinner. A fine end to a memorable day.



Yellowhammer at Sutton Bank



Walking at Sutton Bank



Tree sparrow at Bempton



Gannets at Bempton



Monday 26 May 2014. Two RSPB reserves - Fairburn Ings and Blacktoft Sands

A delightful sunny morning and we were on our way south from Boroughbridge at 08.45, heading for the RSPB reserve of Fairburn Ings. We arrived at 09.30 and spent a most enjoyable two-and-a-half-hours on the many paths and in the hides of this extensive one-time industrial site. Today it is totally transformed into a wildlife paradise where kingfisher, avocets, great-crested grebes, little grebes, grey herons, cormorants, sparrowhawk, common buzzard, cuckoo, water rail, sand martin, swallow, house martin, wren, dunnock, robin, song thrush, nuthatch, tree sparrow and more were seen. At lunchtime, we drove the short distance into Fairburn village where we had booked tables for our group at the Three Horseshoes Inn - a place we had visited and enjoyed on a previous trip. We were not to be disappointed, as the food was as good as we remembered it to be. Wonderfully light Yorkshire Puddings with beef gravy from a roast as a starter, and a Whitby crab salad to follow. The Timothy Taylor's Landlord ale was in good condition and appreciated by our real ale drinkers!

In the afternoon we drove down to Humberside, and the RSPB Blacktoft Sands Reserve near Goole. On arrival there was a large group of birders armed with 'scopes scanning the nearby fields. The warden told us they were looking for a black stork which had originally been seen just a few miles away and they were anticipating its imminent arrival here. Sadly, it didn't happen and the bird must have flown off in another direction! Blacktoft is a wonderful place to see marsh harriers and we had some truly spectacular sightings of these raptors flying low over the reedbeds. We had views of five harriers, and another brief but exciting encounter was with a great bittern which appeared from the reeds for just a few minutes. This was our highlight of the day. We also enjoyed seeing avocets with chicks and the noisy and huge black-headed gull colony could hardly be overlooked! Gadwall, shelduck, mute swans with cygnets, shoveler, tufted duck, pochard, reed and sedge warblers, reed buntings, blackcaps and more made this a visit to remember. The reserve has seven hides and most of us managed to visit six of them in the time available from 14.30 to 17.00 hrs. The afternoon was quite cloudy, but rain arrived much later - around 21.00 hrs - too late to spoil the day for us.

We returned to our hotel for 18.15 and enjoyed our last evening at this fine hostelry. Chilli king prawns with dressed rocket was one of the starters tonight, and a most popular main dish was the peppercorn-crusted venison steak with a brandy and mustard sauce - all served with new potatoes and a panache of fresh market vegetables. To finish - a summer pudding with strawberry ice cream did the trick for many of us. Despite the light rain, an evening walk was a necessity after such feasting - and a *digestif* was also on the cards at the nearby Black Bull Inn.



Jim & Morven at Fairburn Ings



Viewing ducks and grebes at Fairburn's 'Big Hole'



Fairburn flowers



Yorkshire puddings for lunch at the 'Three Horseshoes Inn'



Avocet & black-headed gull at Blacktoft



and a pair of shelducks

Tuesday 27 May 2014. Pickering, and the North Yorkshire Moors steam railway to Whitby

A most relaxed breakfast today - our last at the Crown Hotel. We even had time for a walk around Boroughbridge this morning, where some of our group purchased freshly made rolls for lunch on the steam train. Today we left at 09.45 after John had stowed away all our luggage on the coach. We were heading home to Ayrshire, but first we had an appointment with steam! Gerda and I collected the group reservation and tickets at Pickering railway Station while many of our group had an hour to wander around the old market town of Pickering, before our departure at 12 noon. The weather was mixed today, but a little brighter here in Pickering and indeed, for most of the journey by rail across the North Yorkshire moors. We departed 15 minutes late, as our planned steam loco had developed a fault and a substitute had to be found. This was in the form of 'Black Five' ex-LMS 44806, which hauled us all the way through the lush vales to Levisham and Newton Dale Halt before climbing up through the moors to Goathland (in "Heartbeat" country) and the descent to Grosmont where the main railway workshops and museum are to be found. A diesel loco was attached to the head of the train and another steam loco - 61034 "Chiru", at the rear. After a sprightly run through the Esk Valley we arrived in Whitby at 14.05 hrs - a good 30 minutes late. Still, it had been a most relaxing and scenic journey and time to enjoy our packed lunches or to buy a drink or a snack from the onboard trolley service.

Our time in Whitby was somewhat shorter than planned, but this busy seaside resort and port with its ancient abbey in an imposing position high above the town is always a pleasant destination. Many people come here for its famous fish and chips and seafood, others because of its associations with Bram Stoker's 'Dracula' and its now well-known annual Goth Festival! We decided on something much more genteel and headed for Elizabeth Botham's traditional tearoom, before meeting the others at 15.30 - the allotted time for John to collect us with the coach. We then headed along the coast to Sandsend before climbing high along the A171 above the famous harbour villages of Runswick Bay and Staithes. From Loftus it was direct to Middlesbrough Railway Station where Molly caught her train for Edinburgh. For the rest us, it was heading west to Scotch Corner and on to Appleby-in-Westmoreland where dinner was arranged at the picturesque coaching inn - the Royal Oak. Appleby was bathed in evening sunlight as we arrived in anticipation of another meal to round off our long-weekend. Appropriately, Whitby scampi was on the menu, along with old favourites such as beer-battered haddock with chips and mushy peas! The real ale drinkers were happy with a couple of pints of Hartshead bitter - a great session beer at just 3.8% vol. Now at 20.00 hrs, it was on to the M6, M74 and a final stop at Abington services before arriving in Ayr for 23.30 after a most enjoyable time of 'Birds, Steam and Real Ale in North Yorkshire'. Thanks to all who took part for making this joint RSPB and SOC Ayrshire trip into something very special. Here's to the next time!



The Crown Hotel, Boroughbridge



A drink in the lounge



Steam beer!



A 'Black Five' arrives in Pickering



Morven and Heather in our reserved compartment

Tierisches München Animal Munich

Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität München (Fakultät für Biologie, Verhaltensökologie)

Report by Natàlia Pérez-Ruiz

Over the past year 2013, I was struggling and trying so hard to find a job related to my field of study, such as an ornithology-based job. Luckily, after sending many applications to several organisations, I got my chance. Early this past February I was so glad to know that I had to fill one of the positions as “Avian Field Assistant” in a huge project across the city of Munich. The project was called “Animal Munich”.

The project began last October, with the fitting of around 200 nestboxes throughout the Munich metropolitan area. These nestboxes will be monitored over a period of three consecutive years, primarily during the breeding season. Thus, the main aims of the research are to assess which adaptation mechanisms great tits (*Parus major*) develop to succeed with their offspring in a busy city and to determine the factors which cause these adjustments. With this purpose in mind, environmental traits (i.e. light, noise and temperature) are recorded in every nestbox using data loggers. In addition, behavioural tests are performed in those which are occupied by great tits.

From the total of 200 nestboxes, 100 of them are placed on trees throughout the entire city, and are checked regularly by team members. This team is comprised of a post-doc, master and bachelor students as well as two field assistants.



Above: Female incubating Below: Chicks on their first day of life Above: A clutch of eggs Below: Chicks about to fledge



Regarding the other half of the nests, known as the so-called “Citizen Scientists” nestboxes, are sponsored for free by inhabitants of the city. Hence, the same citizens can monitor these nestboxes located in their own gardens or apartments. They are equipped with an internet camera making it possible to track the breeding behaviour individually and in detail, from the computer or smartphone, without disturbing the birds. A great opportunity to obtain direct insight into science and experience the fascination of nature too.



*Photo left:
Nest box in a ground floor flat*

*Photo right:
The box has a camera on the lid*

Specifically, concerning my field assistant functions, I was responsible for collecting breeding and behavioural data on great tits, including nestbox checks for incubation status, hatching eggs or record the number of fledglings, as well as carrying out aggression and flight initiation distance tests and register female nest defence behaviour scores. Additionally, my main duty was the bird handling (ringing and measuring) of adults and chicks on day fourteen.

The field work was physically demanding, involving cycling with a ladder outdoors in the city in all weather conditions, reaching an average distance of 30km per day. I must honestly say that the first week was hard for me to catch up with other colleagues’ achievements, but after one month of daily cycling, it didn’t feel like a big deal in the end! After the bike rounds, my journey concluded in the university laboratory, where I entered and managed the data collected.



*Photo left:
Female in defence position*

*Photo right:
Cycling around with a ladder to check nestboxes*

Eventually, with all this massive amount of data, the master and bachelor students are going to arrange their theses on different hypotheses, all of them under consideration of this project. Once they finish with the statistical analysis and come up with some results, we will be able to start drawing interesting conclusions which would probably lead to other significant study cases.

Last but not least, my impressions about working with this amazing project in this (for me) foreign country have been propitious. The job fulfilled my expectations and has given me far more experience on the subject, a fact which makes me confident and optimistic that hopefully will lead me to other work positions in the near future. Maybe I might return for a second year?

Notes from my summer wildlife diary

Eleanora Forrester, Knockshinnoch Bungalow



29 June 2014

My jungle is well developed to accommodate the woodpeckers with just a clearing for access to the feeding station to provide tempting food for them and the garden birds.

House martins are allowed to drape their nests around the exterior of the cottage although this means my sleep time is shortened due to their crack of dawn start. From my wee patio, my visitors enjoy the fascination of the house martins sweeping in and out of the nests. But the cheeky baby robins have now decided to make use of the table there to view their garden world.

Ivy overruns the wall to ensure safe housing for the wee ones, the wrens and sparrows.

The other day, I left my back door open so I would hear the veggie van's toot when it arrived on the farm road. Then I got on with the chores. Suddenly, I was aware the sound of swallows seemed strangely close. As they are usually away over the farm, I thought I'd go and look. The opportunists were right inside my back door flying around investigating the ceiling at the entrance and also the utility area. I peered at them through my glass door at the kitchen, thinking the sight of my face would chase them away, but no! Opening the door, I expected that they would then be frightened away, but quite the opposite - they flew over me to utilise my kitchen! I had to flap my arms about, jump up and down and shout "Out, out" before I had any success to make the swallows retreat!

I really mustn't allow nature (as much as I would like) to totally rule the roost here!

Eleanora, Knockshinnoch Retreat.

03 July 2014

Recently, my brother-in-law, Ronald, and his wife came over to see me and, naturally, at dinner, the topic of conversation was about birds. I was expressing my apprehension that I suffer each year waiting to see if I'll have my spotted flycatcher again with the numbers decreasing at such a rate. Just at that moment, my eyes caught the lovely flickering movement of one. "It's there," I said.

I fetched the bins but politely handed them to my brother-in-law as he was seated nearer the window, indicating to him which tree the spotted fly was perched in. "Nope, chaffinch," he said. "No. there's a greenfinch."

I felt a bit upset thinking this had all been a figment of my imagination caused by the dinner wine. Then he turned around to face me, grinning from ear to ear. "Yes, it is a spotted flycatcher!" What a tease!

Eleanora, now enjoying masses of views of spotted fly.



Seagull Utopia

by Ian Thomson



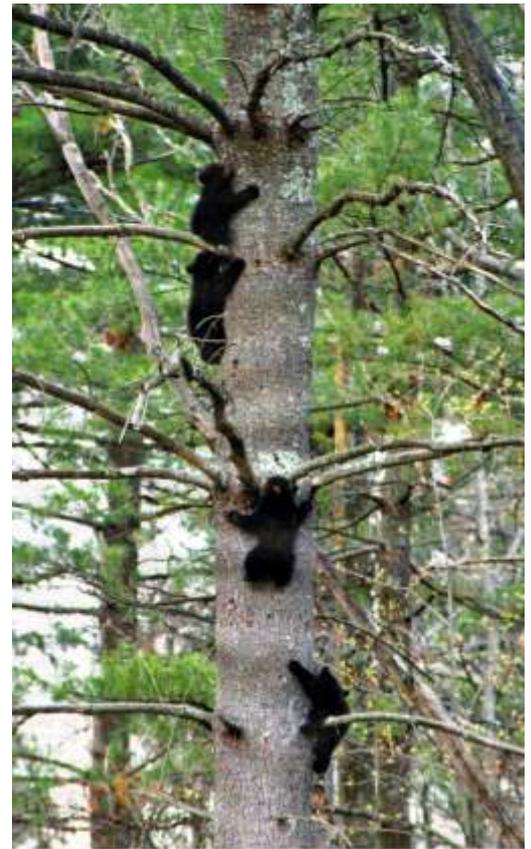
The economic situation in the European nations
Is the reason why our savings disappear.
For the banks gave all our money
To their pals, who think it's funny,
To get free loans for champagne and high-strength beer.

This social deprivation leads to food banks, near starvation
But our feathered friends seem happy with their lot.
For although we're nearly skint,
Those seabirds seem to have a mint,
Put deposits on new cars they haven't bought.

Each new spring seems like the last,
Trying not to "Damn and Blast!!"
Wiping seagull doo from doors and wings of motor.
Taking comfort from the cry
"Thank God sheep and cows can't fly!"
As we head inside for yet more soapy water.

You would think the human race could put seagulls in their place
But the public love them, there's no "ifs" or "buts".
Using dubious charisma
To ensure they leave no prisoners,
Their poo bomber raids drive us completely nuts!

Yet a small, pale chink of light gives some hope in darkest night
There's a cure for this invasion, with no fuss.
Gulls could vote in Referendum,
They'd vote "No" so we could send 'em
Down south, across the border in a bus!



Tree-climbing black bear cubs in Florence, Western Massachusetts

Four black bear cubs climb a tree Saturday in a back yard on Westhampton Road in Florence, Massachusetts.

After spending some time in the tree, the cubs came down and sauntered off with their mother, who was waiting below after trying to get some water out of the family pool.

Black bears can be encountered in many of the woodlands and even gardens in the more leafy parts of Northampton, Florence and many areas on the fringe of towns in this area known as Pioneer Valley.

Article from the New Hampshire Gazette sent in by **Heidi Scott**.





The young eagle owls at their nesting place below the wall, at a time when the mother was capable of feeding them. After gliding down into the depths of the Stadtgraben, they are having to make more attempts at flying from this low level. Not as easy as it would have been from the tops of the wall or the cliff.

Eagle owl family in new drama

- *One young bird falls from the nesting spot
- *Young eagle owl mother saved
- *Young birds make their first flight

Inge Kern reports from Überlingen / Bodensee

from the "Südkurier"



Last summer Inge sent us a report about an eagle owl family which had set up home within the historic ramparts of Überlingen's town wall. A young bird had crashed into a street festival whilst attempting a first flight and was rescued by the Mayoress of the town. Later that year, the eagle owl mother was killed and the young birds were moved out into the country for safety. This year, another pair moved into the same breeding spot on the historic town wall and once again, problems arose when the young mother of day-old chicks fell into a cess pit in a deep cavity at the foot of the stone tower.

The good news is that the young female is once again back at the nesting place after being extracted from the turgid liquid in the pit by farmer Werner Obser. Werner and his wife managed to wash away all the gunge that covered her feathers before calling on the services of veterinary surgeons Gottlieb and Michaela Scherrer. This was not without problems as the valiant bird put up quite a struggle. However, after receiving a calming injection, our eagle owl allowed the vets to get on with their work of treating the wounds received during the fall. Later the young female was taken to the animal rehabilitation centre run by Eberhard and Margrit Wirth in Nußbachtal. During the time this young female was recuperating, the problem of how to feed the young birds arose. The eagle owl father had disappeared a few days earlier, leaving the mother as the sole provider of nourishment. Now there was no-one to undertake this task, so a solution had to be found.

Forester Rolf Geiger came to the rescue and abseiled down from the cliff top to the nesting spot on the wall where the offsprings were almost starving. He managed to drop some food close to the birds, but this attempt at feeding did not go well initially. As Rolf dangled from the ropes above, the baby owls, involuntarily took off out of fear into their very first attempt to glide through the air! They both ended at the bottom of the cliff and walls in what is known as the Stadtgraben. Viewers commented at how well the young birds had managed this first 'flight'. Now the food was at the top of the cliff and the young birds at the bottom. It was decided to bring the mother out of recuperation to see if she was able to provide food for her youngsters. This was not easy, as she was still hindered with her own injuries, but before long she could start to hunt again and - in time to save her chicks. Eagle owl families have bred here four times now and - despite problems - have managed to raise ten young birds during this time. A single bird was raised in 2010; two in 2011; four in 2012 and three last year. The mother bird was found poisoned in October 2013, so the fact that another female has stepped in during 2014 was a marvel, and considering what has happened so far this year, it would appear that the family are thriving once again.

We wish them well now and in the coming years!



Birds feature prominently in Shakespeare's plays and poetry. But one of the bard's birds has become a major nuisance in the USA

From a BBC correspondent in Washington DC.

Choughs, wrens, cormorants, owls, nightingales, larks and some 60 other species all have their place in the playwright's canon. Such references have inspired bird lovers for centuries. So much so that in 1890, a German immigrant named Eugene Schieffelin decided it would be a great idea to introduce as many of Shakespeare's birds as possible to North America.

One cold winter's day he released 60 starlings into New York's Central Park in the hope they would start breeding. Unfortunately, they did.

The US is now home to an estimated 200 million European starlings. Thickset and pugnacious, starlings are bruisers of the avian world. And they are now such a nuisance they are one of the few bird species unprotected by law. "Starlings are lean and mean. In the industry they're often called feathered bullets," says Michael Begier, National Coordinator for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Airports Wildlife Hazards Program.

"They're a particular problem at airports because they flock in very large numbers, and compared to other birds their bodies are very dense. They are about 27% more dense than a herring gull which is a much larger bird." When a flock of starlings strikes an airplane the effects can be devastating. In 1960 they caused the most deadly bird strike in US aviation history. The birds flew into the engines of a plane as it took off from Boston's Logan Airport, and it crashed into the harbour, killing 62 people on board.

The Bard and his birds

"When the wind is southerly, I can tell a hawk from a handsaw." *Hamlet in Hamlet, Act 2 Scene 2.*

"Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day. / It was the nightingale, and not the lark, / That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear. / Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree. / Believe me, love, it was the nightingale." *Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, Scene 5.*

"I myself could make / A chough of as deep chat." *Antonio in The Tempest, Act 2, Scene 1.*

"Hark! Peace! It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman, / Which gives the stern'st good-night." *Lady Macbeth, Macbeth Act 2, Scene 2.*

Ironically, starlings are only mentioned once by Shakespeare - in Henry IV, Part 1. Hotspur is in rebellion against the king and is thinking of ways to torment him. In Act 1 Scene 3 he fantasizes about teaching a starling to say "Mortimer" - one of the king's enemies. "Nay, I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak nothing but Mortimer, and give it to him to keep his anger still in motion," Shakespeare wrote.

"As with everything, Shakespeare's imagination seems to know no boundaries," says Drew Lichtenberg, literary associate for the Shakespeare Theater Company. "He uses birds to express the depth of romantic feeling in Romeo and Juliet. He uses them to express the screech of night owls in the Scottish play (Macbeth) and King Lear. He uses them for every dramatic purpose."

Field Trips 2014

Saturday 20 September

ISLE OF CUMBRAE

Meet at Largs seafront car park (toilets) 10.30 hrs. Then the ferry over to Cumbrae for a walk around Tomont End and down the west side of the island to Millport. Bus back to the ferry pier. All day trip. Please bring picnic lunch.

Saturday 18 October

WWT CAERLAVEROCK RESERVE

Meet at 11.00 hrs at the reserve car park. Whole day birding trip until c.15.30. Shop & café on site, so we can lunch here or bring our own.

Saturday 01 to Tues 04 November **by COACH**
WILD GOOSE CHASE ON ISLAY

Three nights at the Bridgend Hotel on Islay. Visiting the best birding spots from one end of the island to the other. Coach, ferry and three nights half board £450. The tour is fully booked.

Saturday 22 November

DUMFRIES HOUSE ESTATE

Meet at the visitor centre car park at 10.15. for a walk around the newly landscaped grounds. Lunches are available on site or bring your own. Finish c. 15.00 hrs.

Saturday 13 December

LOCH RYAN, STRANRAER & WIG BAY

Meet at Ballantrae car park (toilets) at 10.30 hrs. Whole day trip, please bring a picnic lunch. A garden centre with café and toilets is a short drive from Wig Bay.

2015

Saturday 24 January

BIRDING THE GLASGOW AREA WITH JIM COYLE

Meet 10.30 hrs at Rouken Glen car park (toilets). Jim will meet us here and guide us around his favourite spots. Please bring a packed lunch. Finish c. 15.00 hrs.

Saturday 21 February

GREENAN SHORE AND DOONFOOT. Meet at 10.00hrs Greenan Castle car park. Trip lasts until 12.00 hrs.

Saturday 21 March

RSPB LOCHWINNOCH RESERVE & MUIRSHIEL

Meet 10.30 at Lochwinnoch reserve. At 12.30 on for a picnic lunch (please bring) and a birding walk at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. Finish around 16.00 hrs.

Saturday 25 April

CASTLE KENNEDY GARDENS, STRANRAER

Meet 10.30 at Ballantrae seafront (toilets). On to Castle Kennedy for the whole day - birding the lochside, woods and gardens. Café and toilets on site. Entry charge. Finish around 16.00hrs.

Saturday 16 May

THREAVE ESTATE & KEN-DEE MARSHES

Meet at New Galloway High Street (toilets) at 10.30. On to Ken-Dee reserve for around 11.00 and then at c.13.30 on to Threave Estate until around 16.00 hrs. Full day trip - please bring a picnic lunch.

Saturday 20 - Sunday 21 June

RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS WEEKEND **BY COACH**

Coach travel from Ayr. At Leighton Moss from 12 noon until 17.00 hrs. Overnight at the Best Western Leyland Hotel. Sunday visit to Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Brockholes Reserve. Cost of coach and half board around £160.

Central Ayrshire Local Group Meetings, Outings & Holidays Season 2014-2015

The Gannet

is the official newsletter of Central Ayrshire Local Group of RSPB Scotland. Registered charity no. SC037654

All indoor meetings take place on Monday evenings at 19.30 hrs - in Hall B of the Newton-Wallacetown Church, 60 Main Street, AYR. Parking available on Main Street or Garden St.

The meetings are open to everyone interested in birds and wildlife. Please come along and join us. If you enjoy our meetings and field trips - local membership costs only £6 single or £10 double. There are eight indoor meetings and nine field trips.

We will be repeating our annual bird walks in Rozelle & Belleisle Parks during the Spring of 2015. Please look out for details to be advised at a later date.

All field trips are held jointly with the Ayrshire branch of the SOC (Scottish Ornithologists' Club). The meetings are open to everyone interested in birds and wildlife. Please come along and join us on any of these outings.

We generally car share and if anyone requires a lift or is willing to share their car, please telephone any of the committee mentioned below, also if you require further information about any activity.

Anne Dick, **Group Leader**
Tel: 01292 541 981

Kenneth Smith, **Deputy Group Leader.** Tel: 01292 442 901

Ian Clark, **Treasurer**
Tel: 01292 441 940

Anne Thomson, **Secretary**
Tel: 01292 260 816

Jim Thomson, **Outdoor Leader** Tel: 01292 570 351

Gerda Scott, **Publicity**
Tel: 01292 281 085

Tony Scott, **Newsletter and tours organiser**
Tel: 01292 281 085

Committee members:

Ronnie Coombes
Tel: 01292 265 891

Peter Halbert
Tel: 07824 888 271

Indoor Meetings 2014

Monday 15 September

THE STORY OF DUMFRIES HOUSE ESTATE AND ITS REGENERATION

An illustrated talk by **CHARLOTTE ROSTEK**
Membership registration precedes the talk.

Monday 20 October

CUCKOO MIGRATION

An illustrated talk by **BEN DARVIL**

Monday 17 November

FIONA ROSS with an illustrated talk on the BIODIVERSITY OF SOUTH AYRSHIRE

Monday 15 December

KENNETH SMITH with an illustrated talk entitled AN ICELANDIC SAGA

2015

Monday 19 January

RAPTOR MIGRATION IN SOUTH-WEST SPAIN

An illustrated talk by **ANGUS HOGG**

Monday 16 February

RSPB's NATURAL SECRETS

A talk by **PETER HOLDEN** of RSPB

Monday 16 March

PAULA BAKER gives us an insight into RSPB's LOCH LOMOND RESERVES

Monday 21 April

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by AYRSHIRE ROUND-UP - the year's highlights told and illustrated by **JIM THOMSON**

Please note: Talks subject to alteration



Enjoy the spectacular wildlife of Leighton Moss on our June weekend in 2015. Look out for details available shortly.

Handbills/ booking forms and full details in November