



**43rd year**  
Autumn 2019



Marsh harrier over the reedbeds at RSPB Minsmere reserve. John Rogers.

## Leader's Lines

For all local birding details - log on to: [www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk](http://www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk)

Hello friends,

Another season is about to start, and I do hope to see as many of you as possible at the indoor talks or on the outings. The full programme is listed at the end of this publication, with the first indoor talk taking place on Monday 16th September 2019 in Newton-Wallacetown Church Hall B at 19.30 hrs. The first outing is to Loch Ryan on the following Saturday 21st September. This will be led by **Jim Thomson** as usual.

Our meetings were all very successful last session with only one speaker being unable to come, but fortunately, **Angus Hogg** very kindly stepped in to cover. I hope you will enjoy the speakers lined up for this year too. It was quite difficult to find people to cover assorted topics. If you happen to hear a good talk elsewhere which you think the members might like to hear, please let me know. The local outings were all very well attended, with fewer participants on the longer day trips. All were enjoyed by those who went. **We had our usual three walks in Rozelle Park, firstly in the new year and then the dawn chorus walks in May, plus one in Belleisle Park.** All were very pleasant and with good sightings too!

**The November weekend trip to the east coast, organised by Tony,** was very enjoyable with some people enjoying a full itinerary of birding in Fife and Aberdeen, whilst a few others spent the Saturday at the new V& A galleries in Dundee instead.

Once again, I had to step in and take over the organisation of booking the reserves and the day to day running of **the holiday to Norfolk in June, from Tony.** The full report follows my introduction, with **Ian** looking after the payments for hotels which Tony had already booked. The first day going south, was somewhat fraught, but thereafter everything ran smoothly, and we all had a great time. There are so many good reserves in the area that we managed to visit two on most days, seeing a wide variety of birds, including the specialities of the area - stone curlew, bittern and many marsh harriers. Not to forget the amazing sightings of the nightjars on two consecutive evenings.

---

**Thanks to Derek Murdoch**, our driver from **Dodds of Troon**, who took us to both Grampian in November and Norfolk this June.

**Tony (and Ron Currie of AFS)** kindly arranged for Ayr Film Society to have a special showing of "The Messenger" in the town hall, which raised £548.00 for RSPB. We are most grateful for this opportunity.

The group has had stalls at **Gemmell's Garden Centre** for the Big Garden Birdwatch, where we handed out lots of leaflets to the customers. We were at the **Holy Fair/Armed Forces Day** at the Low Green in Ayr in June. We had quite a profitable day and I thank **Anne (Thomson), Ian and Morven** for helping me out. Last Saturday **Jean, Morven and I** were at Belleisle for their **Summer Wildwood** event. It was not held on the main lawn this year, but was rather scattered around the conservatory/playground area. The attendance could have been better, but we flew the flag for the RSPB anyway. We are always looking for events where we can take a stall (as long as the cost is not too prohibitive) so, if you have a local fete in your church or village, please let me know so that I can make enquiries. It does not look like we will be able to go to the Ayr Flower Show as we didn't get allocated a free "charity" stall this year and haven't been able to book a paid stand either.

As you probably know the **PS Waverley** is having to have new boilers fitted and has not sailed to Ailsa Craig or anywhere else this summer. It will be interesting to see how long it takes to raise the £2.3 million needed to complete the work and get her back out on the water. Perhaps she will then be able to undertake more of the advertised sailings thereafter, instead of cancelling at very short notice. I, for one, really enjoy the trips to Ailsa Craig, and have really missed them for the past three years.

I am very lucky to have a really good committee, who do so much to help out with the organisation of events and I would like to thank them for all their work on behalf of the group. Apart from those already mentioned **I would like to thank Ian for all his work** to keep our finances in good order; and to **Gerda for the articles** she sends to the Ayrshire Post to keep our name in the public eye, **and to Anne (T)** for doing the minutes of our committee meetings, as well as all the others who help in many ways, such as **Monica** with the teas and coffees and **William** selling raffle tickets at each meeting.

**I would also like to thank you, the members**, for joining us at meetings and outings and for supporting the raffle and refreshments at the evening meetings. Thank you too, for helping to raise funds to support the RSPB in their work in Scotland. We were able to send them £900.00 last session. This is all thanks to your efforts. Please keep it up!! If you need help with transport to any meeting or outing, please let me know.



*Anne M. Dick, Group Leader*

---

# The birds and landscapes of Norfolk

An RSPB Central Ayrshire and SOC Ayrshire group holiday from Monday 10 June to Wednesday 19 June 2019

Report by Anne Dick and Tony Scott

Photos: John Rogers, Tony & Gerda Scott

Day 1 Monday 10 June 2019

## Ayr to the North Yorkshire Moors Centre and overnight at the Best Western Willerby Manor Hotel, Willerby near Hull

Most of our group met for an 07.30 hrs departure from Dodds Coach Depot in Ayr. Derek Murdoch was our friendly and helpful driver once again, and the participants included Anne Dick; Ian and Monica Clark; Jim Thomson (Bird leader); Hugh Conner; Sue and John Rogers; Margaret and Jim Sutherland; Susan Wheeler; Bob Yates; Jean and Geoff Sheppard; Dorothea McCracken, and Molly Woolgar, who was travelling by rail from Edinburgh to Penrith, where our group would collect her. I was there to see everyone off and wish them a great holiday from Gerda and from me. Unfortunately we were not able to participate again due to medical treatment, but we hope to join everyone in some future trip. Both Gerda and I would like to thank Anne, Ian and Jim for taking over the responsibilities of payment to hotels and Dodds, and to book our group into all the reserves and other attractions. Also to Jim for his work as bird leader. We are pleased to have been able to work out the itinerary and to book the hotel accommodation and coach hire. At least Gerda and I could play some part in the holiday. Each day, Anne sent us a report on what was seen and how everything was progressing, so we did feel we were still able to participate in a way. I have included Annes' daily diary for each of the ten days and here is her first contribution....

*"Well, that's the first day over. It was bit eventful to say the least! The A66 was chock-a-block with all the traffic leaving the Appleby Horse Fair. Lots of horse-boxes, trailers, caravans AND gypsy wagons drawn by horses actually on the road at a snail's pace amongst the heavy traffic. We were and hour and a half late reaching Scotch Corner, so didn't even bother stopping. We arrived at North Yorkshire Moors visitor centre when we should have been leaving, but Derek had to have a 47 minute break minimum, so we just had to stay the full time there. It was a bit drizzly but we all had a late lunch and a visit to the bird hide. We would not have arrived at Bempton Cliffs until after the centre had closed at 17.00 hrs, so we just decided to forget that and head for the hotel instead - arriving at 17.45. Moved dinner forward to 19.00 hrs as everyone was needing an early night. Dinner was very tasty and the rooms are large and comfortable. No complaints there, except there is no lift. The bird list was not very large due to the rain and missing the seabirds (at Bempton). Hopefully that will change in the next few days."*

Dinner was at 19.00 hrs, and on the menu tonight, quite an array of mouth-watering dishes. Here is a selection from the menu: chicken liver paté with walnut and rocket salad and red onion marmalade; cream of carrot and coriander soup (plus two other choices). Mains included slow-braised beef in red wine with pommes pureé and roasted vegetables; poached chicken breast with colcannon and creamy white wine sauce - plus two other options. Desserts included raspberry and white chocolate cheesecake with fruit coulis (plus three other choices).



Day 2 Tuesday 11 June 2019

## Willerby Manor Hotel to RSPB Blacktoft Sands reserve, Lincoln and our hotel at South Wooton - the Best Western Knight's Hill Hotel & Spa

Breakfast at 07.30 and depart at 09.00 hrs for our main birding spot of the day at **RSPB Blacktoft Sands**, due to be here from 10.30 to 13.45 hrs. The reserve consists of mudflats and salt marsh in the east, and the majority of the area to the west is tidal reedbed (the largest in England), within which six brackish lagoons have been excavated. Other habitats include areas of flooded grassland and willow scrub.

*"We collected sandwiches from the Sainsbury's next to the hotel as we left this morning, so didn't need to stop in Goole. We managed to stay dry all morning and have a good time at **Blacktoft Sands**. At least four marsh harriers were in the air at the same time. Cuckoo calling. There were some heavy showers and we had to shut the windows sometimes, but managed fine. The wader scrapes had dried out and the avocets had all left a few weeks ago. Only a few lapwings were left. Plenty of ducks, geese and swans. Can't say the same for **the afternoon in Lincoln**. Despite Derek doing his best to drop folks very near the cathedral, those who ventured out got soaked. No peregrines were seen - only feral pigeons! We got to the hotel in good time and got dinner moved forward to 19.00 hrs again as folks were cold and hungry. Dinner was good, varied and plentiful. Most of us headed for our rooms quickly after the bird list, which was up from 44 to 64 today, although some we saw yesterday but not today. Probably would have been more if it had not been so wet and windy. Luckily the weather forecast looks better for tomorrow morning at least, so should be ok for Titchwell. The afternoon might be wet again but not until later on. We can only hope!"*

**Jim's bird list** added a further 20 species today - including little grebe (4); cormorant (4); shag; little egret (2); great egret (2); greylag; Egyptian goose (2); shelduck (4); wigeon (2); shoveler; tufted duck; marsh harrier (4); pheasant; cuckoo; yellow wagtail; pied wagtail; Cetti's warbler (2); common whitethroat; reed warbler; and reed bunting. Miles driven today: 155.



Day 3 Wednesday 12 June 2019

## RSPB Titchwell reserve and Holkham NNR / The Lookout nature centre.



The plan was to breakfast from 07.30 and depart 08.15 for an 18 mile drive to **RSPB Titchwell** for 09.30 and staying, following lunch at the reserve café, until 13.00 hrs. Titchwell is one of the best birding sites on the Norfolk coast, with a habitat of fresh and brackish saltmarshes, tidal and freshwater reedbeds, sand dunes and a sandy beach. Around the visitor centre there is an area of scrub, willows and poplars. After our visit to Titchwell, **the next port of call was Holkham reserve** and the new nature centre - The Lookout. Arrival time was to be 13.20 and staying until 16.20. Because of rain, the visit to Well-next-the-Sea was abandoned in favour of an earlier return to the hotel and an early dinner.

*Anne's diary: " Another successful day's birding. This morning at Titchwell we had great sightings of bearded reedlings - even a male feeding fledglings. Babies everywhere including little and great-crested grebes, coots and moorhens, ducklings, goslings, cygnets and lots of little families of wrens, robins and tits. Yesterday's lost avocets were all here - some on eggs. Over 20 Mediterranean gulls were seen amongst the full set of gulls. Rarities included red-crested pochard and water vole. At Holkham, ranger Paul met the coach at the main road and walked down Lady Anne's Drive with us, explaining the management and likely birds. A spoonbill and several little egrets flew past across the drive as we walked down. We headed off through the woods to the first hide, seeing many more of both in the marshes. A family of blackcaps was seen amongst other small birds. A flock of black-tailed godwits were flushed by one of the many marsh harriers. Down on the beach there were breeding little terns and ringed plovers. An idiot pushing a bike between the sea and the restricted area put up a small flock of sanderling. Unfortunately the rain came on rather heavily and we had to head back to The Lookout. Little ringed plovers with chicks were on the pond just outside and a pied wagtail had a nest on the rafters. We 'phoned Derek to come back a bit earlier than planned and headed back to the hotel. We had to skip the visit to Wells as it would have been useless in the rain. We enjoyed an early dinner again, then the bird list before bed, The count for Titchwell alone was 24, with several more added at Holkham. The food was good tonight and plenty of it! Several skipped dessert as they were too full to cope. Service could be a bit quicker but the staff are so helpful and very pleasant. Our breakfast will be served tomorrow in the Captain's Room, where we have dinner, as it was a bit chaotic squeezing past other people in the bar this morning. The rain should have passed over before the morning with just a chance of isolated showers tomorrow."*



Dinner was a splendid affair tonight with , as every night, a choice of four starters, four mains and four desserts. A selection of the dishes included honey roast parsnip soup with crème fraîche, or slices of smoked duck with fresh figs, walnut rocket salad and a honey and mustard dressing. Mains included roast topside of beef with Yorkshire pudding and red Bordelaise sauce; or baked salmon with a herb crumb and bearnaise sauce. Desserts included fresh strawberry pavlova; or chocolate profiteroles with fresh cream. Every night there was the Chef's cheeseboard on offer too.

**Jim's birdlist** added the following highlights today: Spoonbill; pochard; red-crested pochard (4); hobby; grey partridge; avocet; little ringed plover; sanderling (12); black-tailed godwit (100); redshank (10); turnstone (10); Med gull; common (mew) gull; little tern; bearded reedling (6); long-tailed tit; jay, greenfinch; bullfinch. Total species to date: 92. Miles today: 60.



Day 4 Thursday 13 June 2019

## NWT's Cley Marshes reserve & a boat trip to NT Blakeney Point

Originally we were hoping to have the boat trip in the morning, but that was based on last year's tide tables. This year low tides were earlier at this time, so the first trips out to **Blakeney** were at 14.00 hrs. First of all, the group headed to **Norfolk Wildlife Trusts's flagship reserve at Cley Marshes**. This is one of the best known birding spots in the UK, with over 360 species having been recorded in the 10 km square. There are five hides and a new visitor centre, complete with café and bookshop. Boat trips out to Blakeney Point are very popular, with three companies offering trips to see the birdlife and the seals. Our group went with Bean's Boats, as we did on past occasions. There is a large ternery with numbers reaching 3,500 pairs of Sandwich terns and around 150 pairs of common terns breeding. Roseate terns have spent summers here and there is a nationally important number of little terns (c.215 pairs) which breed in the area.

*Anne: "Spent the morning at Cley dodging VERY heavy rain. One avocet chick (our first) was seen and a shelduck with a minimum of 26 ducklings was quite a sight. There was a large flock of mainly black-tailed godwits and redshank, but also a few knots. Both little and common ringed plovers on another scrape. The new centre is very smart with viewing windows and an outdoor platform with seating. A small gallery has pictures for sale too. The café produced some good soup at lunchtime - needed on such a cold, wet day. Several red kites were seen on the road to and from Cley from the coach. No-one had heard of them being released in the area so maybe they have spread here from other releases. In the afternoon we went on a*

but of both species. Several common, Sandwich and little terns were seen from the boat, and a flock of knots were flying around. Large groups of assorted gulls were also out at the point. It was too windy to land at the old lifeboat station, so we were back at Morston Quay by 15.15 hrs. The trip was rather rocky to say the least - not that I mind. Molly passed on taking the trip (and Derek) but 14 of us braved the waves. Some went for coffee from the National Trust kiosk when we got off, but as the rain was getting heavier again we returned to the hotel for 16.30 for a wee rest or a visit the Farmer's Arms (the real ale pub in the hotel grounds) for a pint or two for a few of the men. No chance of nightjars tonight due to wind and rain, but we will try later in the week if conditions improve. The bird count was up from 92 yesterday and now stands at 100 (102 if you count ostrich and turkey!).



NWT Cley Reserve

Shelduck and ducklings at Cley



Morston Quay



Blakeney Point



**Jim's birdlist** - some new species for today: Red kite (6); red knot (100); greater black-backed gull; common tern; avocet chicks; goldcrest pair with young; marsh tit; yellowhammer.

Dinner was at 19.30 tonight and some highlights included: spring pea and mint soup with chive crème fraîche; smoked chicken and herb terrine with charred tomato chutney and crusty bread. Mains included: roast Norfolk turkey, sausage and bacon roulade, stuffing and rich pan gravy; and: Braised venison with root vegetables in red wine and creamed potato puree. Desserts included : fresh strawberry pavlova with Chantilly cream, plus: hot apple pie with Creme Anglaise. Vegetarian starters and mains were also available, as every evening. Coffee and tea was also served each evening following dinner.

Miles today: 107.

Day 5 Friday 14 June 2019

**The Brecklands, NWT Weeting Heath, Thetford and the BTO head office at The Nunneries with its own nature reserve, and RSPB Lakenheath Fen Reserve.**

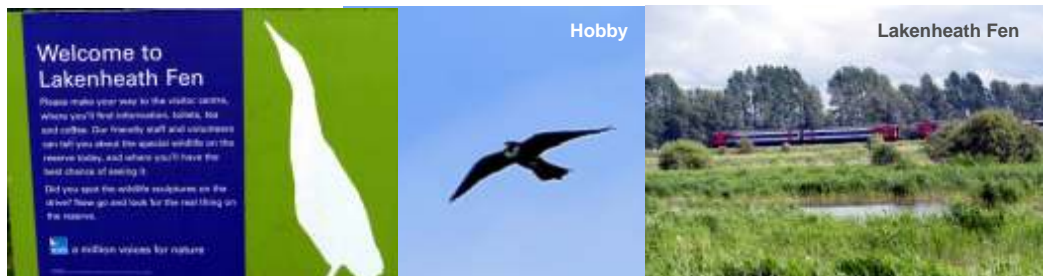


Today the group headed inland for **The Brecks**, a unique area of sandy heathland and conifer plantations around Thetford. It is famous for several scarce breeding species of birds and is best in spring and early summer. Our first stop was at **NWT's Weeting Heath Reserve** at 09.45. This is the place to see the rare stone curlew, and if lucky, woodlark. From here it was on to Thetford and the **BTO reserve** at their headquarters. The next and final destination of the day was **RSPB's Lakenheath Fen Reserve** (14.15 to 17.00 hrs). This 200 hectare wetland was created in the late 1990's and the area was to provide up to eight territories for great bitterns, which was successful. Common cranes also bred successfully from 2009 - the first time in the Fens for over 400 years! Anne: "I can hardly believe that half the holiday has passed already. There was a funny yellow ball in the sky this morning, making it like a tropical jungle in the woods. The grass was steaming. There were only a couple of light showers which came to nothing. What a change from the past few days. Stone curlews were clearly visible this morning at Weeting Heath, along with green woodpecker and a jay. Feeders were very busy with numerous nuthatches, stock doves and the usual tits and finches. We then went the BTO head office at The Nunneries in Thetford, where they have a small nature reserve with a couple of lakes, scrapes, woodland and meadows. Very nice little place with a good selection of birds, butterflies and dragonflies. We got great views of a family of goldcrests. Also saw a couple of Muntjac deer. I had arranged to go there as an alternative to lunch in Thetford and we got sandwiches from a Spar shop instead of visiting The Bell Inn as originally planned. We redoubled our tracks past Weeting Heath en route to RSPB Lakenheath Fen. Here, seven of us managed the full five mile walk around the reserve. Fabulous sightings of hobbies catching dragonflies above the water outside the hide. Very few people saw a bittern (not me) and no-one saw any cranes. We also saw two of the cuckoos who were calling incessantly. We added eight new species to the list today. Derek is on his rest day tomorrow (he has to have 36 hours off) so we could not go for nightjars tonight, despite being finished dinner an hour quicker than yesterday. Not sure I could have walked any further anyway. The weather is supposed to improve, so we should get out on Sunday or Monday nights".



At The Nunners





Back at the hotel for 18.00 hrs, the group enjoyed another excellent dinner with selections of outstanding cuisine including: ham hock and spring pea terrine with piccalilli and crusty bread; or grilled fresh mackerel with chive potato and herb salad, plus two other starters. Mains: grilled black bream with a leek, spring pea and green asparagus fricassée in a cream sauce, or: sautéed chicken breast with wild mushrooms and shallot herb and cream sauce, plus two other mains. Desserts included : summer berry pudding, fruit compôte and crème fraîche, or: warm treacle tart with Crème Anglaise, plus two other dishes.

**Jim's bird list.** Another eight new species today including: great bittern (4); sparrowhawk; hobby (at least three); water rail (2); stone curlew (7); swift (40); green woodpecker; woodlark and treecreeper, bringing the total up to 108  
Miles today: 98.

**Day 6 Saturday 15 June 2019**

## Pensthorpe Natural Park near Fakenham, and NWT Foxley Wood



**Pensthorpe Waterfowl and Natural Park** is just 20 miles from the hotel, so an arrival time of 09.30 was possible, staying until 15.00 hrs - there is so much to see. Habitat conservation at Pensthorpe is one of their most important areas of work - wetlands, hedgerows, woodland, water meadow, river banks, species-rich farmland, brecklands and heath, all vital for a species rich and diverse countryside. The value of the habitat at Pensthorpe is recognised internationally by the Eu's Special Area of Conservation designation, as well as nationally with four SSSI's. All of these designations encompass the River Wensum, a lowland chalk river of significant importance. Scrub clearance and coppicing is also a key part of managing the woodlands. There are projects underway aimed at protecting turtle doves, common cranes, corncrakes and red squirrels. Our next destination was **NWT's Foxley Wood Reserve**, just 11 miles from Pensthorpe.

This is Norfolk's largest remaining ancient woodland, where all the common woodland birds may be seen, although this visit may be hampered by the very wet weather of the past few days. The plan was to return to our hotel at South Wootton (40 miles from Foxley Wood) for around 18.00 hrs with dinner at 19.45.

*Anne: "Had a Harrod's coach today (by appointment to HM the Queen) with Stephen at the wheel. An interesting day at Pensthorpe. Other than the captive collection there were plenty of tracks through various habitats with several hides overlooking the four lakes, woodland and farmland. Some of the paths were closed due to flooding but they had done their best to make temporary bypasses. The wader scrape area was more of a lake with only ducks and black-headed gulls left - but their chicks were standing in water as the islands were very much smaller than they should have been. They also have a breeding programme for endangered waders, turtle doves and corncrakes, for the release of the chicks reared to suitable habitats. Red squirrels are also being bred for release. Just managed to miss a heavy shower on the way to Foxley Wood. The road was all big puddles but we just had a light drizzle on the bus window. It was a bit of a let down. All the bluebells had finished and hardly any birds. We walked a long way through longish wet grass tracks for a small group of tits flying over the track. There were also a couple of chiffchaffs singing. Maybe better in a drier year when vegetation might be under control. The dinner was very tasty as usual, all the meat served is 'melt in the mouth' - so tender. There must have been a special offer on broccoli as we have had it every night - good job I like it! There has been a request to visit more heathland, so a look in the guide book is next on the list. Must see if we can locate Dartford warbler somewhere.*

A short selection of the food on offer tonight: sautéed wild mushrooms on a charred brochette and shaved Parmesan and rocket salad; or maybe Parma ham with fresh figs and olive salad with a balsamic dressing. Mains included slow-roasted pork belly with buttered greens and cider thyme jus; or baked fish pie with creamy potato purée. Desserts included vanilla panna cotta with orange compôte; or iced orange parfait with pistachio sponge and mango gel with crushed meringue, or, as every night - the chef's cheeseboard.

**Jim's birdlist:** New species seen today: Barnacle goose; great spotted woodpecker; and siskin. So the total now is 111. Miles today: 71



Harrod's coach



Crowned crane



Turtle dove



White headed duck



Pensthorpe



Day 7 Sunday 16 June 2019

## NWT Hickling Broad Reserve and RSPB Strumpshaw Fen Reserve and an evening excursion to Dersingham Bog for nightjars

**NWT's Hickling Broad** Reserve covers an area of 600 hectares and holds a wide variety of dragon and damselflies and butterflies, with swallowtail being especially prized. **RSPB's Strumpshaw Fen** Reserve comprises reedbeds, alder and willow carr, damp woodland, open water and grazing marshes. It is a good place to see great bittern, marsh harrier, water rail, kingfisher, bearded reedling and Cetti's warbler.

Anne: *"This morning to Hickling. A long, slow fly-past by a bittern not far up the trail was very enjoyable. We have come to the conclusion that most of the reserves are managed for mallard ducks, which are breeding in vast numbers. We had one shoveler with a brood of nine just outside the centre (for a slight variation). We are becoming rather blasé about marsh harriers - they are everywhere. A couple of common cranes flew past one of the hides from where we saw Chinese water deer munching along the edge of the reeds. Very tasty home-baked fruit scones for lunch with coffee. A lot of butterflies were out today as it is getting warmer. We didn't need a rain jacket again today, but a bit wary of not carrying it because as we were changing reserves the rain was torrential making driving very difficult for Derek. It was off by the time we reached Strumpshaw Fen, where we were met by a "Jobsworth" who would not consider allowing the coach to be parked anywhere. Fortunately Derek managed to find a place in the nearby village. Strumpshaw has a nice little centre with more pleasant staff and volunteers inside. Not the most productive of places and quite long walks between the viewing points, and only one hide. Good variety of birds on the feeders including marsh tit, jay and great spotted woodpecker. Missed another shower as we left. We finished dinner in time for seven of us to head out at 21.00 hrs to be at Dersingham Bog before it got dark. We passed a barn owl on the way and had several woodcocks roding around us before the highlight of up to three nightjars in the air very close to us. One even came and sat on a wee tree not five metres away. Many sightings and plenty more churring away all around us. A very well spent hour. We couldn't stay any longer as Derek had to have the coach parked up for the night at 22.45. We might have another go tomorrow night if we have the time. Maybe those who missed out will come too. We should all be fit after this holiday as we are walking over five miles each day and then we had a huge flight of steps to negotiate down to the viewing area tonight, which obviously had to be climbed up on the way back. I didn't really recognise the place as it has been developed a lot with the steps and a board walk too."*





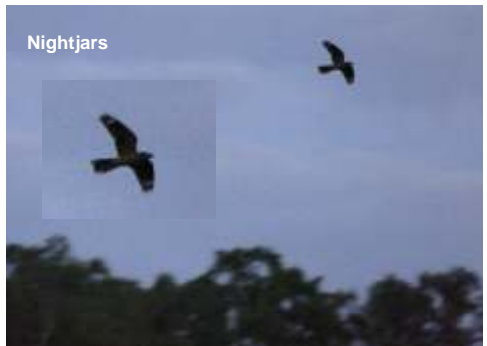
Hickling Broad



Marsh tit



Dersingham Bog



Nightjars

**Jim's list:** Common crane; woodcock; barn owl; nightjar(5); grey wagtail; Savi's warbler; and spotted flycatcher. So the total now is: 118. Miles today: 154

Day 8 Monday 17 June 2019

## RSPB's Minsmere Reserve and return to Dersingham Bog

A long run down to **RSPB Minsmere** today, driving via Swaffham and Dereham (with a stop at Thickthorn Services on the A47), then to Wenshaston and Westleton, **arriving at Minsmere for 10.30**. 100 or more species breed annually here. The scrape holds 20 breeding species, many present in large numbers. Common terns nest on the islands alongside black-headed gulls and a few pairs of Mediterranean gulls. Sandwich terns visit and over 100 pairs of avocet breed each year. Great bittern breed here too, and marsh harriers are hard to miss as they fly low over the reedbeds. Hobby also breed and up to 12 may be seen. Bearded reedlings are common and little egrets are present in large numbers. Water rails breed, as do reed, sedge, Savi's and Cetti's warblers. Kingfishers are present throughout the year and little terns nest on the beach. The woodland holds green and great spotted woodpeckers, up to 60 pairs of nightingales, common redstart, tree pipit, stonechat, yellow hammer, woodlark and Dartford warbler. Sand martins nest in a purpose-built bank near the visitor centre, shop and café. Here until 15.30.

Anne: " We spent the day at Minsmere on our usual five plus miles trek all around the scapes in the morning. We added a few more new sightings with spotted redshank, stonechat and Jim got Dartford warbler which we were told were breeding in the dunes. Some people saw otters and an adder was seen on the track to the bittern hide, but none were seen by anyone in the adder viewing area. Many bitterns were flying about and we had very close views of a lovely male marsh harrier. Lots of assorted dragonflies but don't ask me what they were. Another very successful day and really warm with NO rain. Even the sweater came off in the afternoon but not brave enough to leave the rain jacket out of the back pack - just in case. We didn't bother with the visit to Walberswick and its harbour, as we wanted to get back for a repeat performance of last night's sightings. We were a group of 12 out tonight, and so were the midges! (In larger numbers). The woodcocks were flying above the trees before we even got down the steps and the nightjars performed very well all around and above us. One favoured the same little tree as last night. There were another dozen people out tonight in two groups and singles, but I think we were in the best place for close sightings. We didn't even need to use binoculars as we were so close."

The final dinner of our stay at the excellent 'Knight's Hill Hotel and Spa' included a prawn and crayfish cocktail with a Marie Rose sauce, brown bread and butter; or : Poached pear, fig and blue cheese salad with a honey mustard dressing - plus two other options. Mains included poached salmon, spring greens and Bearnaise sauce; or Sauteéd chicken with shallots and wild mushrooms and a herb cream, plus two other choices. Dessert included warm sticky toffee pudding with butterscotch sauce and vanilla ice cream with three more items on offer.

**Jim's bird list** had a few new items today. Spotted redshank (3); kittiwake; stonechat (3); Dartford warbler; and garden warbler. New total: 123. Miles today: 198.



Day 9 Tuesday 18 June 2019

## From Kings Lynn to Rutland Water Reserves at Egleton and Lyndon, and to the Best Western Mount Pleasant Hotel near Doncaster

Sadly, it is time for our group to leave the comfortable 'Knight's Hill Hotel' and head north on our way home to Ayr. First of all though we have one more night at the luxurious 'Mount Pleasant Hotel' near Doncaster. A good way to finish the holiday at this rather special place. On the way, we can spend a few hours at the **Rutland Water reserves**. This is the largest reservoir to be constructed in the UK and one of the most important wildfowl sanctuaries (A RAMSAR site). There are purpose-built islands, shingle beaches and lagoons, with areas of scrub and stands of deciduous woodland, as well as ancient meadows and reedbeds. In 1996, young osprey chicks were introduced and have now bred successfully at Rutland Water. They can be seen from early April until mid-September.

*Anne: "We spent today between the two centres at Rutland Water. We went first to Egleton (Anglican Water centre) in the morning and managed to get round most of the hides. We saw two ospreys from the centre and another from the sandpiper hide. This was sitting on a nest which had been used two years ago but not since. They were hoping that it might be used again, but not this year. Not many additional birds today but still nice to look round different places. We moved to the main centre at Lyndon for the afternoon. At least there was a nice viewing area for the CCTV images being beamed live from the nest which still has its four chicks. Good for those who are not able to walk far. It was then just a 20 minute walk to the new two-storey hide with the TV screens being moved from the current 'wader scrape' hide eventually. Photography hides (for tree sparrow and woodpecker) looked out on feeders being used by grey squirrels and rats. There were a few birds but not what the hide names suggested. A spotted flycatcher was a good sighting from here. From Rutland we drove straight to the hotel, as no-one wanted to stop for a break. Unfortunately the coach was unable to park at the reception area and it was a long walk from the coach to the check-in area. Once again, the rooms were large and variable in style. We had a private dining room once again and were offered the £34.95 table d'hôte menu".*

Arrival was planned for 18.00 hrs and dinner at 19.30. A choice of four starters, mains and desserts was on offer, finishing with coffee and mints. Starters included a Pressing of duck legs, free range chicken, smoked duck breast, avocado, mango, spring onion and hoisin dressing. Mains highlighted a chicken supreme with buttered Savoy cabbage, leek and Wensleydale cheese, and thyme fondant and a port wine reduction. There were three other dishes including a vegetarian option (beetroot and feta arancini with garden herb cream, baby spinach, broad beans and coriander shoots). Of the four desserts on offer, damson cheesecake with apple calvados sorbet and mint apple syrup sounded tempting.

**Jim's list:** New species included osprey (five plus four young birds) and tawny owl, bringing the total species seen today up to 125. Miles driven: 143





Rutland Water



Best Western Mount Pleasant Hotel



Mount Pleasant gardens (2011)



Day 10 Wednesday 19 June 2019

## From Doncaster to RSPB Old Hall Reserve and home to Ayr and beyond

We planned to leave Mount Pleasant at 09.15 and head through Boulton-Upon-Dearne to the RSPB's Old Hall Reserve in the Dearne Valley for around 10.00 hrs. The Dearne Valley cuts through one of the most industrialised areas in England, but a series of interesting wetlands survive, hosting large numbers of birds, and the two sites are now RSPB reserves, one of them at Old Moor. Resident birds include great-crested grebes, little grebes, common snipe, redshank, lapwing, black-headed gull, kingfisher, barn and little owl, stonechat, tree sparrow, oystercatcher, ringed and little ringed plovers, cuckoo, yellow wagtail, sedge and reed warblers. There are five hides and a visitor centre and café where we can enjoy lunch today.

Anne: “ Well here we are heading north to Bonnie Scotland. Molly was travelling home by train from Doncaster, so we said our goodbyes before she left. She texted later to say she was safely home. We had the visit to Old Moor today on the way back. A smaller reserve so not too much walking today. We easily covered the hides to the reedbeds, but no bitterns or marsh harriers. A quick visit to the facilities and then back out to the scrapes. Black-headed gulls were very noisy as usual. A selection of ducks and geese but still a shortage of waders. They have not come down to the area yet. The feeders in the visitor centre gardens were much favoured by bullfinches and tree sparrows (and grey squirrels). We were back in time for a bite of lunch before leaving. We didn't stop at the motorway services as Derek suggested a farm shop/café just at the start of the A66 instead. He has been using it for some time. It was a lovely 'farmer's market' kind of large shop with lots of fresh produce and home baking in the café. Meals were also available but we didn't need that. Camels, llamas and donkeys were available to talk to. We made good time and arrived at the 'Solway Gate restaurant' (Dumfries) at 17.45 in nice time for dinner. We were back in Coylton to drop Jim off, but just too late to get down the main road. The road repairers were putting out the cones as Derek was unloading Jim's luggage. The road is closed from 21.00 to 06.00 hrs each night this week, so we had to make a detour past Martnaham Loch towards Dalrymple and down the A713 past Ayr Hospital to the A77 and back to Dodds coach depot for 21.20 hrs. I think everyone enjoyed the holiday.”

**Jim's bird list.** One new species today - a peregrine falcon. The holiday trip list closed at 126 species. Miles driven today: 288.





## 'Beast from the east' took heavy toll on smaller birds, survey suggests

**Patrick Barkham**

*This article appeared in The Guardian on Friday 05 April 2019*



Almost 1.2 million house sparrows were spotted in British gardens during this winter's Big Garden Birdwatch but smaller garden birds appear to have suffered from the previous winter's cold weather. Long-tailed tits decreased by more than 27% and wrens by 17% in 2019 after a bumper year in 2018, according to the RSPB survey. Populations of both species are thought to have been affected by last year's "beast from the east": small birds are more susceptible to extreme chilly spells.

The most-sighted species among 7.5m birds counted by nearly 500,000 people over the last week in January was the house sparrow, followed by the starling, blue tit, blackbird and woodpigeon. Numbers of the latter have increased by more than 1,000% since the survey began in 1979. The once-abundant house sparrow and starling, however, have suffered long-term declines, with the sparrow's numbers falling by 56% since the birdwatch began.

In the last decade, however, the sparrow's numbers have increased by 10% in the survey, "giving us hope that at least a partial recovery may be happening", said Dr. Daniel Hayhow, an RSPB conservation scientist. The long-tailed tit dropped out of the top ten, replaced by the magpie. Like the collared dove in 11th place, sightings of magpies have more than doubled since the birdwatch began. In a separate RSPB survey undertaken by 60,000 children in school grounds, the blackbird was the most numerous species seen, with an average of eight per school. It was seen in 89% of all schools that took part.

Martin Harper, the RSPB's director of conservation, said: "Our garden birds should be a part of our everyday life. For many people they provide our connection to the natural world and bring enormous joy. "To have hundreds of thousands of people spend an hour watching the wildlife in their garden doesn't only help us build up a picture of how garden birds are doing, but people who take part feel better." The Big Garden Birdwatch has helped alert the RSPB to significant declines in garden birds such as the song thrush. The species was once a regular in the top ten but by 2009 its numbers had halved. In 2019 it was 20th in the rankings and was seen in just one in ten gardens.

To highlight the loss of 40m wild birds from Britain over five decades, the RSPB is releasing (ED: has now released) a track of birdsong, Let Nature Sing, which includes some of the most recognisable birdsong now disappearing from most people's daily lives, including cuckoo, curlew, nightingale and turtle dove. The latter two birds have declined by more than 90% in recent decades. Sam Lee, a singer and folksong collector who helped edit the single, said: "Birdsong has been one of the biggest influences of English song, poetry and literature. The loss of it should concern us all, because it is a signal that all is not well in the world. " We should see birdsong as a barometer for the health of this planet, and hence of ourselves."

## Bird behaviour affected by noise pollution that masks song messages

**Fiona Harvey**

*Environment correspondent*

***This article appeared in The Guardian on Thursday 20 June 2019***



Birds are even more disrupted by their noisy neighbours than had been thought, new research has found, with human activities possibly preventing birds from reproducing, and even hindering normal social behaviours such as keeping the peace. When European robins were subjected to artificial noise their behaviour changed, a study by Queen's University Belfast found.

Background noise appears to mask the communication of crucial information between birds. Aggressive communication is common, and birds respond to it, but when noise interferes the birds involved can mistake the signals.

Gareth Arnott, senior lecturer and researcher from the Institute for Global Food Security at the university, said: "We found that bird song structure can communicate aggressive intent, enabling birds to assess their opponent. But human-made noise can disrupt this crucial information passed between them by masking the complexity of their songs used for acquiring resources such as territory and space for nesting."

The result is that birds can end up in situations all too familiar to humans. The birds receive incomplete information on their opponent's intent, and do not appropriately adjust their response," said Arnott. "Where song is disguised by background noise, in some cases the male ends up fighting more vigorously than it should but in other times it gives in too easily."

This is the first time it has been shown that aggressive communication is being disrupted by noise. The purposes of birdsong are two-fold, according to Arnott: to attract a mate and defend the territory. Birds already face an array of threats, from pesticides and intensive farming to shooting and poisoning. Noise has often been overlooked, the paper in *Biology Letters* found. A spokesman for RSPB said: "Everyone is becoming increasingly concerned that nature is in crisis in the UK, with one in ten of our wildlife species at threat of extinction, and many of our bird populations are already facing serious crisis as a result of habitat loss, climate change and other human activities. This report is a good reminder that the way we live and our lifestyle has an impact on our natural world, and that we need to protect it if we want to let nature sing."

The research does not have clear implications for human health, although excessive noise may damage children's ability to learn and causes stress among adults. For birds, the extra burden of noise pollution adds to the extraordinary population decline seen in recent decades as the result of changing agricultural practices, the use of pesticides and the reduction in habitat for once common birds.

In the experiment, the team used playback of robin song to stimulate responses from birds who were territory holders, using simple or complex songs in either the presence or absence of noise. The researchers found that song complexity was used as a signal of aggressive intent. But this process was disrupted by the presence of added noise.

Arnott said: "The study is evidence of human-made noise pollution impacts animal habitats and directly influences their ability to communicate properly, which may have implications for survival and population numbers for birds."

## Committee

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

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

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

Jim Thomson, **Outdoor Leader**  
Tel: 01292 571 899

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

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

Ronnie Coombes  
Tel: 07597 303023

Morven Cumming  
Tel: 01292 286 465

Jean Anthony  
Tel: 01563 851 325

*Please note: talks subject to alteration*

## Indoor Meetings 2019

Monday 16 September  
**GARNOCK CONNECTIONS PARTNERSHIP**  
A talk by **SIMON McGRORY** on the work of the partnership.  
Membership registration precedes the talk.

Monday 21 October  
**SEA EAGLES IN THE EAST OF SCOTLAND**  
An illustrated talk by **OWEN SELLY**

Monday 18 November  
**BIRD WALKABOUT IN OZ**  
An illustrated talk by **KENNETH SMITH**

Monday 16 December  
**THE FIRTH OF CLYDE**  
An illustrated talk by **REBECCA CRAWFORD**

## Indoor Meetings 2020

Monday 20 January **BARONS HAUGH RESERVE**  
An illustrated talk by **DAVID ANDERSON**

Monday 17 February **BIRD CRIME - THE WORK OF THE  
RSPB INVESTIGATIONS TEAM** A talk by **IAN THOMSON**

Monday 16 March **DANUBE DELTA, ROMANIA**  
An illustrated talk by **LIZ LEYDEN**

Monday 20 April  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** followed by **AYRSHIRE  
ROUND-UP** - the year's highlights told by **JIM THOMSON**



Martin Mere

## WINTER BIRDING WEEKEND IN LANCASHIRE

Friday 15 - Sunday 17 November 2019  
visiting Leighton Moss, the Ribble  
Estuary and Martin Mere by **COACH**  
from **AYR Leader: Jim Thomson**

A joint SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group WEEKEND TRIP. **Leaving Dodds coach depot, East Road, AYR at 08.10hrs on 15 November.** We will be driving to RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS Reserve for the afternoon. **We will stay overnight on a Dinner, Bed and Breakfast basis at a 3\* hotel on the Fylde Coast.** Next day we will visit THE RIBBLE ESTUARY RESERVES.

On day three we will visit the WWT MARTIN MERE RESERVE. **Returning to AYR for around 21.00 hrs and stopping enroute for dinner in Dumfries.** Registration will be from September onwards or register earlier by e-mailing Tony Scott on : [dascott4@outlook.com](mailto:dascott4@outlook.com) or telephone 01292 281 085. **The cost should be in the region of £240.00 per person.** This trip will operate with numbers of 15 to 20 people. **A full information leaflet will be available at the first and subsequent meetings of RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group and SOC Ayrshire. Please book as early as possible in order to obtain the best prices.**

# Central Ayrshire Local Group Meetings, Outings & Holidays Season 2019-2020

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.

## Field Trips 2019

Saturday 21 September  
**STRANRAER, LOCH RYAN & WIG BAY**

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Ballantrae (toilets). On to Stranraer and Loch Ryan. All day trip - please bring packed lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Saturday 19 October  
**WWT CAERLAVEROCK RESERVE**

Meet at 11.00 at the reserve car park. All day trip - please bring packed lunch. (Café also available on site) Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Friday/Saturday/Sunday 15/16/17 November **by COACH from AYR RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS; THE LEYLAND ESTUARY, RESERVES AND CENTRE; & WWT MARTIN MERE RESERVE.**

Meet 08.00 hrs at Dodd's coach depot, East Road, Ayr. Weekend trip with DBB at a 3\* hotel in St. Annes. Return to AYR Sunday around 21.00hrs. Cost includes coach, dinner, B&B - around £240.00 pp (dependent on numbers). Hoping to book the Best Western Glendower Hotel.

Saturday 14 December  
**MAIDENS HARBOUR, CULZEAN AND THE COAST**

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Maidens harbour car park. (Toilets available). Move on along the coast to Culzean or south towards Girvan. Please bring a packed lunch - or restaurant facilities available in Culzean Country Park. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

## 2020

Saturday 25 January  
**GREENAN SHORE AND DOONFOOT.**

Meet at 10.00 hrs Greenan Castle car park. Trip lasts until 12.00 hrs.

Saturday 22 February  
**IRVINE HARBOUR & BEACH PARK**

Meet at 10.00 hrs at the old Harbourmasters office, Irvine. Please bring a packed lunch - or plenty of places for lunch close by. Finish c15.30 hrs

Saturday 21 March  
**AUCHINCUIVE ESTATE**

Meet 10.00 hrs at Oswald Hall car park. Walk and birdwatch. Café on site. Finish around 15.00 hrs.

Friday 24 April  
**DUMFRIES HOUSE ESTATE**

Meet at the visitor centre at 10.00 hrs. Cafe and toilets on site. Finish around 16.00 hrs. NB: Trip is on FRIDAY to avoid weekend crowds.



Greenan shore

## 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 in 2020. New Year walk in Rozelle at 09.00 hrs/Saturday 04 Jan. Dawn chorus walks: Rozelle 06.30 & 08.00 hrs/Sat. 03 May. In Belleisle: 08.00 hrs Sun.05 May

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 listed on the previous page, also if you require further information about any activity.