



## Newsletter December 2007

2007 has provided us with another interesting year and we hope you have enjoyed the Society's full programme of events. May we take this opportunity to wish you all a Very Happy Christmas.

### Bird Recorder



Sadly Andrew Brown has decided to relinquish his responsibilities as Recorder for the Society so temporarily will members please send their bird records to Alwyn Jackson by email at [alwynandcarole@my-emails.com](mailto:alwynandcarole@my-emails.com)

OR by post at "Mandola", Mill Street, Elsing, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 3EJ

OR by telephone at 01362-637752

Thank you.

On behalf of members I would like to thank Andrew for all his valiant efforts.

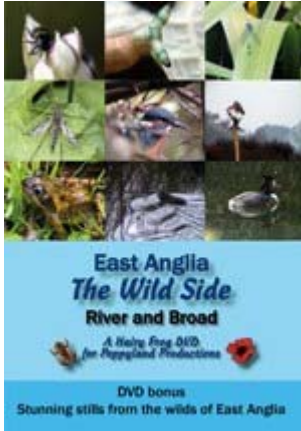
If any member is interested in becoming Recorder for the Society would they please contact Alwyn or Ray Gribble (01603-872709) to discuss what the task involves

## Recent meetings

On **Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> October** there was a full house for Allan Hale's presentation on his visit to "Trinidad and Tobago". Derek Harvey sent us his impressions of the evening.

"When we saw Allan's fantastic technicolour Carib shirt (sunglasses required) little did we realise that even this would be outshone by the sheer brilliance of the amazing tropical birds in real life. The incredible range of pure, stunning colour. Allan's computer/projector did not miss a single pixel, or should I say feather. And to top it all, Allan gave us the name of every bird. Many I had never seen or heard of before."

Thanks for the report Derek and thank you Allan for another sparkling evening.



At our indoor meeting on **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November** we welcomed back TV wildlife photographer Mike Linley who presented extracts from his latest films available in DVD format of East Anglian wildlife.

We were treated to some breathtaking close up shots of a variety of birds and other animals that Mike had spent several years compiling. It was interesting to hear how he had gone about capturing some of the more secretive species like for instance Long Tailed Tits building their nest in the depths of a bramble bush. An evening of magical moments, thank you Mike.

On **Sunday 18th November** the cold and breezy weather conditions did not deter ten hardy members attending our outdoor meeting. They visited Salthouse beach first and had excellent views of Lapland Buntings and Snow Buntings feeding on the marsh a few feet away. The next stop was Walsey Hills and the East Bank of Cley Reserve to obtain stunning views of a Pomarine Skua feeding on the carcass of a Pike which have been a victim of the recent stormy weather. At this point it was decided to stop off at the new NWT Cley Visitor's Centre to warm up and get some much needed sustenance. Refreshed the party visited hides on the reserve and again had excellent prolonged views of a Water Rail immediately in front of the hide. Having survived up to this point most the party retreated to their warm firesides at home but a hardy few decided to go to what is left of the Coastguard beach car park at Cley and walk along the storm battered shingle ridge to North Hide. On the way they enjoyed watching of a flock of 40+ Snow Buntings nearby and after searching through the birds on North Scrape the valiant few decided to call it a day. An excellent day's birding and many thanks to Ray Gribble for leading the day.

### **Little Auk rescued in Reepham.**



One morning following the recent stormy weather along the north Norfolk coast a friend, who owns a plant growing business at Reepham, was walking between two of his polytunnels when he flushed an exhausted Little Auk. He managed to catch the bird and took it into care. Having kept it in a box in a heated polytunnel and fed it on strips of mackerel for three days he took the bird to

Salthouse beach and released it. To his delight the bird flew directly out to sea apparently having recovered from its ordeal.

I only know of three other records of Little Auk in the Wensum valley. There was a single bird at Stibbard in February 1983 having been caught up in a “wreck” along the north Norfolk coast and on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 1990 a bird was observed at Thorpland near Fakenham. (Sources: The Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report 1983 & 1990). The other bird I am aware of was one picked up at Bylaugh near Swanton Morley after a heavy snowstorm. I was unable to obtain a date for this bird but was told about it 4 years ago by a resident of Bylaugh who is a member of the BTO.

Alwyn Jackson

**Its been heard on the grapevine that Allan Hale has a new talk to add to his already impressive list – “How to decorate a kitchen in twelve easy stages”**

### **Albatross at nine o'clock!**

Carole and I spent 15 days touring the Southern, Western and Northern Cape of South Africa this year during the first two weeks of September with our tour guide Patrick Caldwell of Avian Leisure. The purpose of the trip was to see the wild flowers of the region and also take in some of the bird species along the way. The first three days were spent in the Cape area visiting various birding and botanical sites. On the fourth day we joined a pelagic trip from James Town. This was something I was looking forward to as I had wanted to see an Albatross in the southern oceans for some time. Carole decided to join me although she admitted she was rather apprehensive about going out to sea in a relatively small boat especially after seeing the size of the rollers offshore. There had been strong winds and very rough sea conditions the day before but the skipper assured us that it would be safe to set sail.

At 5.30am we woke up to discover the wind had dropped and the weather was set fair. We had a quick bite of breakfast and a dose of excellent Boots sea sickness tablets before leaving at 6.30am. We met up with our fellow travellers on the quay

at Simon's Town and as Carole recalls in her notes they "were keen birders – all men except one". What else did she expect! Our guide for the trip introduced himself and the two "spotters" whose job it would be to alert us to birds and their whereabouts. We were given a safety briefing and a lifejacket demonstration before departing promptly at 7am.



The first hour was a pleasant cruise alongside Cape Point and we were able to admire some of the spectacular coastal landscape we had visited during the previous three days.

When we reached Cape Point the sea became "very bumpy" as Carole noted with tremendous troughs and crests. Our boat made steady headway through all this and all we had to do was hang on to the hand rail as instructed. We were thankful that we had taken those sea sickness tablets earlier but one or two of our fellow

travellers hadn't and they began to suffer. However Carole came to the rescue and one grateful Irishman swallowed a tablet and within twenty minutes was feeling much better!

Quite soon after passing the Point the birds began to come in, slowly at first but numbers mounted steadily.



We saw our first ever **White-chinned Petrel** as it passed overhead. During the trip we were to see many more. A little time passed and the sea became slightly calmer as we steamed further offshore. It wasn't long before we heard one of the spotters shout, "Shy Albatross coming towards us at nine o'clock!" There it was heading our way the first Albatross we had ever seen! What a moment to savour and one never to be

forgotten. The bird passed very close and was far from shy. These birds are masters of their environment, the southern oceans and it is truly amazing that they spend a vast amount of their lives roaming around what to us can appear to be such a hostile place.

What we didn't fully comprehend was that this was just the start because after four hours cruising the skipper found what he was looking for, a large fishing boat. The birds are attracted to these craft because of the easy pickings they offer as the offal and dead fish are thrown overboard. It was breathtaking to see the sheer

number of birds following this one boat and we soon added a good number of new species to our list – Northern Royal Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel, Northern Giant Petrel, Pintado Petrel, Great Winged Petrel, Soft Plumaged Petrel, Wilson’s Storm Petrel and Sub antarctic Skua. Phew!

We followed the boat for some miles before turning for home. As Carole noted with some relief “sea smoother than outward journey”. We arrived back in Simon’s Town just before 3 o’clock and were able to grab a bite of lunch and a coffee at a café nearby. What a truly remarkable day it had been.

Alwyn and Carole Jackson

## **Save the Albatross.**



**10,000 albatrosses are killed every year on longline fishing hooks – that’s one every five minutes!**

**This is putting them in real danger of extinction.**



Just imagine the scene. One minute you’re an albatross gliding across the ocean majestically. You spot a fishing boat surrounded by other birds, and you know from experience that it offers an easy meal (might be discarded fish, waste or bait) You swoop in to pick up a particularly tasty piece of squid. As you swallow the bait down, there is a sudden, terrible pain.

The hook embedded in the bait catches and rips your throat. Helplessly, you find yourself dragged down into dark cold waters.

You choke and drown and are dragged deep down below the surface. You're unnoticed until your bedraggled corpse is hauled up and discarded.



Birdlife and the RSPB are working with fishermen to show them methods to prevent this massacre.

To support their work make a donation online at

**[www.savethealbatross.net](http://www.savethealbatross.net)**

or send a cheque payable to: RSPB to *Save the Albatross, The RSPB, UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.*

Thank you on behalf of the albatrosses.

## **Mapping some birds**

November 1<sup>st</sup> saw the start of the major effort that comprises the BTO 2007-2011 Bird Atlas. Last year was the first time I'd ever been involved in any survey work, when I took part in the plover survey. I was given a 2x2 km square that I had to walk round on certain weekends and spot any lapwings, golden or grey plovers. I didn't see any, but it was a very pleasant walk, and I rather enjoyed all the other birds I saw!

So this year when the Bird Atlas was announced I thought I could take part again. I decided to do the same area, Stratton Strawless, as I felt comfortable there. The Bird Atlas winter survey involves taking a two hour walk in the period before Christmas and again after Christmas, with a second phase, the breeding survey, again a two hour walk in about April and again in about June. And all you have to do is count all the birds you see, noting them down as you go, and send them in!



November 1<sup>st</sup> dawned so fair and gorgeous that I decided to bite the bullet and get out there for my first visit. Having walked round my route before, I knew roughly how long it would take me (and had cut a few 'extensions' off as I knew there wouldn't be time for those), and also that it took me through about a fifth of the wood, most of the hedgerow, past the only set of ponds, past, through or giving a good view of most of the fields and through the main village, so it hit all the habitats in the square.

"*New Forest.*" Online Photograph. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 9 Dec. 2007  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/art-1467>

I parked in the woods as usual, put my boots on, checked my watch to know my starting time, and looked up to see a treecreeper obligingly shinning up the tree next to me, and various tits flitting about a little higher up! I was very pleased at this, as I had usually seen treecreeper last year, and it gave me confidence for the rest of the trip.

So I set off on this lovely sunny autumn morning, found almost nothing on the ponds, a host of gulls behind a plough on one field, robins in the hedgerow every hundred yards or so (it seemed), saw a sparrowhawk in the woods largely because his shadow fell across the trees I was looking up at, surprised a green woodpecker because he was anting in the field next to the path, saw some LBJs (little brown jobs) who eventually posed for long enough on the telegraph wires for me to decide they were yellowhammers, and eventually gave up counting individual wood pigeon when I got to the flock in the fields at the top, where I managed to estimate 330 of them!

The jackdaws and rooks in their colony were also a bit of a counting challenge, but the rules of the survey allow you to spend time on that and not take it out of your overall allowance. A kestrel was also very kind as he hovered in the distant fields giving me an easy identification, and blackbirds and redwings were having such a good time on the berries and sloes round the hedge on the way back to the village that I could count them one by one as they flew off scolding me for interrupting their feast. People's birdfeeders were a very good source of finches, and the pied wagtails were kind enough to sit on the roofs and announce their presence to me.

The most difficult thing was working out just how many long tailed tits were flying along the lane just in front of me as I went back to the car, and I arrived just about on time, having given myself ten minutes 'extra' for these difficult counting jobs. When I got home I filled in the results form online with what I'd seen, although there is also a paper form I could complete.

So, you can see how difficult this mapping is (not!).

There's an awful lot more areas to be done, so if you'd like a nice walk in the countryside noting down the birds you see, contact Chris Hudson, our regional organiser, and he'll sort you out! Information on the Bird Atlas is available on the BTO website [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org), and Chris is at phone number 01603 868805 and e-mail address [chris697@btinternet.com](mailto:chris697@btinternet.com).

Jacky Pett



## **Bird Count - Sunday January 6th.**

**The idea of a Bird Count is to find as many different bird species as possible in our recording area between 8am and 4.30pm. It is a team event and great fun. A good way of recovering from those post-Christmas blues.**

You can start anywhere in the valley at or after 8am but you must finish by 4.30pm. The finishing point is the bar in the Parson Woodforde Public House, Weston Longville.

Teams can consist of 2 to 4 members and we prefer that there is a cross-section of bird watching experience within the team.

### **A reminder of the rules**

- You can start anywhere within the WVBS area
- All species counted must be seen or heard
- In teams of two all must see or hear each species counted
- In teams of three, 2 must see or hear each species counted
- In teams of four, 3 must see or hear each species counted
- The finish time is 4.30pm in the Parson Woodforde Public House, Weston Longville.
- Feral pigeons are accepted, hybrid waterfowl are not.
- Birds within the grounds of Pensthorpe are not accepted

Teams will be supplied with a checklist to tick off species seen but it would be useful to add the location for our record purposes.

**This is a fun event so please come along and enjoy yourselves.**

If you wish to take part or are short of team members please contact Alwyn Jackson (01362-637752) or Ray Gribble (01603-872709).

## **Birds to look out for in the next month –Dec/Jan**

### 1. Winter Thrushes

- Redwing, Fieldfare – note flock sizes

### 2. Finches + Larks

- Brambling – some already coming to garden feeding stations
- Siskin – a few flocks are already in the valley
- Redpoll – look for them on alders and in Siskin flocks. Separate Lesser from Common if possible
- Linnet - note flock size
- Skylark - note flock size

### 3. Ducks and Geese

- Goosander, Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Pintail
- Pink-footed Geese

### 4. Waders

- Golden Plover, Lapwing – note flock sizes
- Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Snipe

### 5. Rails

- Water Rail – usually more vociferous at dusk
- Coot - note flock size

### 6. Gulls

- Record flock sizes and species

### 7. Mainly on coast

- Waxwings – only the odd 1 to date.
- Brent Geese,
- Common and Velvet Scoter, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser
- Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin, Ruff, Curlew
- Divers
- Grebes

### 8. Raptors

- Peregrine, Merlin, Rough-legged Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard

## **Forthcoming Events**

Please see the new 2008 programme for Indoor and Outdoor meetings listed at the end of this months newsletter.

**A date for your new 2008 diaries – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May**



**Wild About the Wensum at Pensthorpe, near Fakenham.**

**A great day out not to be missed. See you there!**

**Articles/letters etc for January newsletter to reach Sue Gibney by**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2008**

**by email at [admin@wvbs.co.uk](mailto:admin@wvbs.co.uk)**

**Or hard copy Sue Gibney 37 Norwich Road Lenwade NR9 5SH**

## WVBS Provisional Outdoor Programme 2008

- JAN Sun 6<sup>th</sup>**            **Winter Bird Count** – Organiser Ray Gribble
- JAN Sun 27<sup>th</sup>**        **Strumpshaw Fen, Buckenham Marshes and the largest Corvid Roost in Europe** – Leader Glen Collier
- FEB Sat 23<sup>rd</sup>**        **West Norfolk finishing at Roydon Common Raptor Roost** – Leader Ray Gribble
- MAR Sat 29<sup>th</sup>**        **Lynford Arboretum** – Leader TBA
- APR Sun 27<sup>th</sup>**        **Foxley Wood** - Leader Alwyn Jackson
- MAY Sun 4<sup>th</sup>**         **Dawn Chorus + Bacon Butties at Sparham Pools**  
Leader Ray Gribble
- MAY Sat 17<sup>th</sup>**        **Wild About the Wensum at Pensthorpe**
- JUNE Sat/Sun 7/ 8<sup>th</sup>** **Bempton Cliffs +Upland Birds**  
Leader TBA
- JUNE Thurs 19<sup>th</sup>**    **Nightjar Evening with a meal at Marsham Arms**  
Leader Josh Leeder
- JULY Sat 5<sup>th</sup>**         **Moths at Charles Sayer followed by visit to Tern Raft Lake**  
Leader Ray Gribble
- JULY Fri/Sat/Sun 18 to 20<sup>th</sup>** **Ringling Demo-**  
Leaders Ray Gribble & Allan Hale
- JULY 27<sup>th</sup>**            **Minsmere RSPB** - Leader Bill Shepherd
- AUG Fri/Sat/Sun 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>** **Bird Fair – Rutland Water**
- AUG Sun 24<sup>th</sup>**        **Breydon Water / Berney Levels-** Leader Josh Leeder
- SEPT Sat/Sun 6/7<sup>th</sup>** **Wild About Norfolk – Notcutts Norwich**
- SEPT Sun 28<sup>th</sup>**        **Seawatching at Holme Dunes** - Leader Bill Shepherd
- OCT Sun 26<sup>th</sup>**        **N Norfolk Coast** - Leeder Josh Leeder
- NOV Sun 23<sup>rd</sup>**        **Rockingham Forest for Red Kites** - Leader TBA

## **WVBS Provisional Indoor Programme 2008**

- JAN 17<sup>th</sup>      Dr Gavin Siriwardena BTO “Winter Feeding of Farmland Birds”**
- FEB 21<sup>st</sup>      Barrie Sullivan “An Artist Looks at Wildlife”**
- MAR 20<sup>th</sup>      Julia Burton “Coffee, Crocs & Quetzals”**
- APR 17<sup>th</sup>      AGM Dr Mike Edgecombe “Chinese Himilayan region”**
- MAY 15<sup>th</sup>      Dawn Balmer “BTO Atlas 2007 – 2011”**
- JUNE 19<sup>th</sup>      Nightjar Evening**
- JULY 17<sup>th</sup>      Members’ Summer Social BBQ**
- AUG 21<sup>st</sup>      Mike Smart RSPB “Protecting Coastal Birds”**
- SEPT 18<sup>th</sup>      Prof Fred Cooke “Seawatching”**
- OCT 16<sup>th</sup>      Tim Loseby “A Bird Photographer’s Garden”**
- NOV 20<sup>th</sup>      David Osborne FRPS “Falklands”**
- DEC 11<sup>th</sup>      Xmas Social**