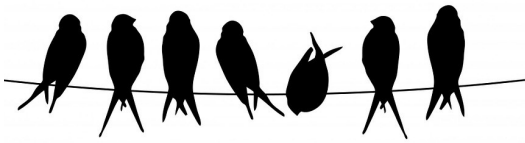


DURSLEY BIRDWATCHING AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY



FROM THE CHAIR - Welcome to the August edition of the society bulletin.

Once again I've been unable to take part in any DBWPS events held during July, mostly due to meetings clashing with other events in my calendar. However, all was not lost on the bird watching front, as a friend and I were invited to visit a friend who had up sticks and moved to Wareham on his retirement. He lives on a small development not far from the town and a short walk from his house takes you onto a heath. After tea and a chat we made our way to the heath - it's a good spot for Silver-studded Blue butterflies and other heath-land dwellers. We soon found a sizable colony of the butterflies and spent some time trying to photograph them. The hot weather on the day made them very lively but we did succeed in the end.



After lunch we visited Arne RSPB reserve which was surprisingly quiet regarding birds but we did see a magnificent Sika Deer Stag. In the evening we went out onto the heath and had good views of at least three Nightjars. Next morning we were up bright and early as we were being treated to a visit to see the Poole Harbour Ospreys at the nest site viewpoint. We arrived and after a talk about the Poole Harbour Osprey Project, we made the short walk to the viewpoint. Although a long way off, we could clearly see the female at the nest and at least two of the four chicks raising their heads above the sides of the nest. We only had a limited time at the viewpoint as another group would be arriving. The male briefly visited the nest but was soon away to catch another fish. Our leader left to greet and give her talk to the next party and we were allowed to stay until she appeared with the group. We left well before the next party came up to the viewpoint, and had a good walk around the walled garden there - apparently it had been restored from a derelict state. It was a good visit and we have learned since that all four Osprey chicks have successfully fledged.

Ken



OUTDOOR MEETING REPORTS

Frampton in Summer Sunday 14th July 2024

Report from: Anne Nuttall

A warm, sunny morning saw 9 birders meet in the usual Frampton car park for a morning walk led by Nick around the pools and woodland. A congregation of Jackdaws, with a few Rooks, made a nearby tree look top-heavy. Carrion Crows and a pair of formation-flying ravens later in the walk made up our sightings of corvids, but no Magpies were evident during the morning. The sailing lake was as calm as the proverbial millpond, with a couple of distant Mute Swans on the far side, and a large family of Pied Wagtails on and around the jetties. Black-headed Gulls were flying over, then a few Common Terns made an appearance flying high overhead. Luckily, we were to see some more closely when we returned, hovering and twisting and diving for food. Such elegant birds. A few swallows, martins and swifts were also around. Continuing along to Court Lake there were Greylag and Barnacle Geese in the field, joined by 3 Oystercatchers which had bred on the island - it always surprises me to see them away from the water! Some duck species were rather distant, a Great-crested Grebe with a family was swimming amongst the weed, and a Kingfisher was heard. Then there was a shout of 'Hobby' and there it was gaining height, over our heads. It was joined by another one, and we were to see several more during the course of the morning. For several in the group it was the first sighting of the year - I had almost given up hope! Walking along the track beside the Perryway in the woodland, there were glimpses and calls of the usual woodland birds, such as Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit, Bluetit, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, and Goldfinch, but they were hard to spot among the foliage. A treat, and a year first for some of us, was a Spotted Flycatcher which was feeding its young in dense ivy, a good reason to stand and watch for 5 minutes. A small group of Linnets were seen later.

Gatekeeper

A few individual butterflies were about - I saw Red Admiral, Large White, Gatekeeper, and Speckled Wood, but all agreed that this year has been exceptionally devoid of butterflies in any number after the early Spring flurry. There were plenty of damsel flies and dragonflies



over the water - so why were the hobbies flying so high?

Wild flowers in the woodland and on the verges had my attention whilst I was not looking at birds - Scarlet Pimpernel, Selfheal, Chicory, Centaury, Cinquefoil, Comfrey, Enchanter's Nightshade, Foxglove, Greater Willowherb, Meadowsweet, Meadow Cranesbill, Mayweed, Yarrow and Agrimony to name but some. I love the names.



Enchanter's Nightshade



And just like birds and butterflies, flowers have their own preferences for habitat so some are less frequently encountered than others. On the track back towards the sailing lake, Nick told us that he understands plans are afoot to establish a reedbed there to act as a filter bed, similar to those at Slimbridge, to help retain water that currently floods the village at times. It will be interesting to see how that develops. Thanks to Nick and those who came along, and to record-keeper Dot for the bird list. It was an enjoyable way to spend a summer morning.

Group bird list: Great-crested Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Barnacle Goose, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Buzzard, Hobby, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Tern, Wood Pigeon, Swift, Kingfisher, Swallow, House Martin, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Reed Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Bluetit, Great Tit, Treecreeper, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Raven, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Bullfinch.

[Lower Woods Nature Reserve](#) Sunday 21st July **Report from:** Susanne Zamze

Seven of us met at Lower Woods, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserve for a stroll around the woods in the search of butterflies and birds, as well as to look at the diverse flora growing in the glades and rides in a very mixed woodland. Earlier in the year following an incredibly soggy Winter and Spring the paths had been turned into a quagmire, and the wood certainly lived up to it's original name of 'Wetmoor' . However the excess mud in Spring was compensated for by a fantastic display of bluebells! Fortunately conditions underfoot had vastly improved by now. The weather was warm and still, but there was not much sun to encourage the butterflies to fly. I'm sure anyone with a passing interest in nature will have noticed the dire lack of butterflies this Summer, so it was perhaps not surprising that we also saw very few at Lower Woods.

We did pick up Silver Washed Fritillary, one of the 'target species' for which the woods are well known, but not the other rarer White Admiral butterfly. Birds were very quiet as expected for the time of year and hard to locate in the denser foliage. There had been reports of 2 families of Spotted Flycatchers present which we tried hard to find and managed to hear calling but not to see.



© Anne Nuttall

Silver Washed Fritillary

Always a lovely mixed woodland to walk around with numerous paths and open rides, some routes way-marked, it was a very pleasant morning's walk with lots of wild flowers to look at as well.

Flowers seen: St. John's Wort, Ragwort, Greater Willowherb, Lesser Willowherb, Meadow Vetchling, Yellow Vetchling, Red Bartsia, Agrimony, Hemp Agrimony, Betony, Greater Knapweed, Creeping Cinquefoil, Hogweed, Hedge Parsley, Birds Foot Trefoil, Ragged Robin, Skullcap, Self Heal, Creeping Thistle, Marsh Thistle, Spear Thistle, Mellilot

Birds Over Inglestone common: House Martins over the houses near the cattle grid at the start of the common (Hawkesbury side). Buzzard, Red Kite, Swallow.

Birds Heard: Marsh Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk (or possibly young Goshawk), Nuthatch.

Birds seen: Blue Tit, Great Tit, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Bullfinch, Treecreeper (2), Coal Tit, Robin, Wren, Woodpigeon, Crow, Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Butterflies: Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Silver Washed Fritillary.



FROM OUR MEMBERS

Nurture Nature Notes for August 2024 - Otis Tarda

With the summer holidays upon us, thoughts inevitably turn to visits to the seaside, and the delights of fish and chips and ice creams on the promenade. And gulls - watching to snatch a chip or two from our hands, a feat they manage so expertly that they swoop in, get the booty and fly off without touching the person who'd been looking forward to lunch. To understand why they are now such a problem, we must look at the reasons for their urbanisation. In Scotland - Gull Central for our islands, a BTO study informs that there are numerous reasons for gull invasions, consisting mainly of Lesser Black Backed Gulls, Herring Gulls and Black Headed Gulls - such as loss of nesting sites, dwindling fish supplies, and warming seas. Urban rooftops provide safe nesting sites, with no predators. Although they have been recorded as nesting in urban sites since the early 20th century, it was the Clean Air Act of 1956 preventing landfill operators from burning rubbish, which provided gulls with their golden opportunity, which they seized. It is estimated that there are 1,000 pairs in Bath and 3,000 in Cardiff.

With Wimbledon and Euro soccer now completed as I write this consider slowing down your lives for a few days in the summer sunshine by taking time after work and at weekends sitting in your garden in different places and at different times. As well as lessening stress and forgetting work problems for a while you will be surprised at what the wildlife is up to. Most birds will have finished breeding and will be skulking away in the undergrowth moulting - garden birds losing their tails and shedding feathers ready to meet all comers in the early autumn to claim territories - chasing away intruders, even those from their own broods: choosing vantage points from which to sing around their territories to announce that 'this garden is mine.' Also, you will be fascinated to watch the hovering species of wasps, bees and flies and others gyrating around favourite flowers and foliage - in fact, you may well be mesmerised. Overall garden birds have had a pretty rough year for survival and revival and many species are not keeping up with their annual numbers.

Sitting silently outside today I caught a movement - something dark -about the size of a bumble bee, and as I watched it came again, climbing rapidly up the side of a planter, possibly attracted by the live mealworms we feed our garden birds - it was a pygmy shrew, and these smallest of British mammals need to eat three times their weight a day in order to survive, since as a prey species they use up a great deal of energy rushing about at great speed. A fritillary butterfly landed briefly beside me, a great thrill as the Big Butterfly Count runs for the remainder of July until 4th of August, and reportedly 80% of our butterflies are diminishing in number, although there are encouraging reports about Red Admirals and Holly Blues bucking the trend. More on this next month.



A birding mission in the Outer Hebrides, June 15th-25th 2024 - Chris Newton

My solo June visit to North and South Uist was a mission to find and photograph some of the rare birds the islands are known for, particularly the Merlin, my personal Holy Grail, as the only regularly occurring British raptor I had never properly seen or photographed.

I knew as soon as I arrived on South Uist that I wasn't going to have an easy time of it. An Atlantic wind you could lean on was blowing under a sky of lead, with heavy showers and daily temperatures barely reaching 13 degrees, with little prospect of change in the forecast.



I began the hunt at Loch Druidibeg ('Drudibeg'), one of the best-known birding spots on the islands. It's very easy to visit and explore by trickling along the lochside road to Loch Sgioport ('Skipport'), and I soon saw a Short-Eared Owl and a couple of Hen Harriers there, but no Merlin. I also had a dusk vigil there in the vain hope of hearing or even glimpsing a Long-Eared Owl, known to use that area. I did twice see a White-Tailed Eagle - there was a nest on one of the islands. I would recommend this area to those who are not up to too much climbing and scrambling, or who

are confined to the car by the weather. In fact I had several more sightings of eagles in the days that followed, two of them flying quite close. A birder showed me a superb photo he had taken of a White-Tailed Eagle which was grasping THREE Hen Harrier chicks in one of its claws.

The next hotspot on the list was Committee Road, four miles of single-track moorland road which crosses North Uist from the west coast to the east. I had spent a lot of time there in September 2023 on my first Uist mission, with limited success. This time an excellent wildlife tour with Martin Gillingham ([Day Tours Uist and Benbecula / Western Isles Wildlife \(western-isles-wildlife.co.uk\)](#)) revealed that a pair of Hen Harriers were nesting about 200m from the little car park halfway along Committee Road. While we were watching them, two Buzzards appeared, very distant and almost stationary high above the skyline. But they seemed very still for Buzzards...



Male Hen Harrier dropping prey (possibly Redshank chick) onto nest.

Martin's scope confirmed that they were in fact Golden Eagles, relatively numerous on the Uists, but rarely seen close.

The next day I returned solo, early in the morning, and was able to watch (from a discreet distance, of course) several food drops - not passes, presumably because there were chicks on the nest and the female was hunting too. So it proved when she appeared with food of her own. I watched the male for some time and found that, as is typical of Hen Harriers, he was patrolling the same vaguely circular route every half hour or so. And then I saw him do another food drop - 250m away on the opposite side of the road. Male Hen Harriers are known to service two nests when conditions are good, and so it was here.



The tour took us to the RSPB reserve at Balranald, where we had remarkable views of nesting Arctic Terns, Ringed Plovers and Eiders, and were treated to a thrilling flypast by an Arctic Skua. We saw White-Tailed Eagles and a Red-Throated Diver in another bay, and near Lochmaddy we had great views of a hunting Otter.

During the day we saw several Short-Eared Owls, one of which flew over the car bonnet. The moorland around the Orasay Hotel at the north end of South Uist appeared to have more than its share of SEOs, and I got my best sequence by setting up my

Short-Eared Owl - the moment when it saw the photographer!



tripod on a hillock right by the gateway and waiting in camo for one of them to fly towards me. They were most active in good light rather than at dusk or dawn, less so in the middle of the day, and often ditched in the heather, presumably to take a break from battling the wind.

On my previous visit I had seen a pair of Black-Throated Divers, my first ever, on Loch Moracha in North Uist, so I returned there at the earliest opportunity. There were none, but I checked out the neighbouring Loch Barpa before leaving, and to my delight, through my biggest binoculars I could see a group of five divers at the far end of the loch. They appeared to be coming slowly my way, so I hunched down in the heather with my 600mm plus 2x teleconverter and waited. They didn't come much closer than 200m in poor light, but that was just about enough for some acceptable shots of the group. To me they are perhaps the most stunningly beautiful bird of all.



A quartet of Black-Throated Divers



By day 7, despite endless kerb-crawling along Uist's many narrow moorland roads and tracks, I had failed to find a Merlin. Then a couple of harrier watchers told me they had twice seen one on a particular fence on the main A865, and described the spot. With no space anywhere to put the car I just kept driving slowly past it, to no avail. Our wildlife guide had told me the Merlins would be up on the high moors breeding, although Committee Road, Druidibeag, Langass and others are widely reported as Merlin breeding sites.

That afternoon I drove down to a tiny landing called Peter's Port on the east side, and wandered on to a headland to see what was about. A group of Lesser Black-backed Gulls were making a terrible racket overhead. Suddenly a much smaller bird shot out of nowhere and flew at one of the gulls like a bullet. I saw it silhouetted and knew it was a falcon, but suspected Kestrel, as so often my previous Scottish 'Merlins' had turned out to be Kestrels. But then it flew down in front of the cliff opposite and I saw its colour - dark grey-blue. I had found my Merlin. Unfortunately he disappeared as fast as he had arrived, and I spent most of my last day in that spot without seeing him again.

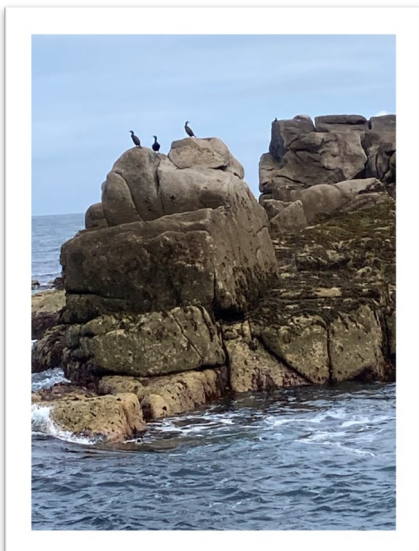
I had made a couple of visits to a place on the machair grassland near Griminish on the west coast where the Red-Necked Phalarope nests, but in the savage westerlies no birds were showing at all. However, I got up early on the day of the ferry home to find that summer had arrived at last, and calculated that I just had time for another visit. There was only one little wader showing, and it was indeed a Red-Necked Phalarope - I'm not sure of the gender, but it looks bright enough to be a female.



Red-Necked Phalarope

Scilly Isles - July 2024

Christine Davis



On our boat trip from St Mary's around the Western Isles, we were told that approximately 30 Puffins were still around, but apparently only 10 nesting pairs. The rest were non-breeders. We also saw Razorbills, Shags and 1 Gannet. According to our guide Cormorants are rare here.

On an evening trip to find Shearwaters with ornithologist William Wagstaff, we were fortunate to see 300 plus Shearwaters and a Porpoise.

A most enjoyable holiday.



EDITOR'S 'BIT'

With no further events planned for August (as I write) we will look forward to reading the reports from the residential weekend some members are undertaking. I hope that you all enjoy the rest of the summer (if we get one), and will look forward to meeting up once our winter programme starts in September.

Thank you to Chris Newton, Anne Nuttall, Christine Davis, Susanne Zamze, Otis Tarda and of course, Ken Cservenka for your contributions this month. Without them, there would be no Bulletin. Please send any articles or photographs for the next bulletin by 15th of the month to me by email at caroline.sandrey@gmail.com or by post to the address below.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS

Please enter your sightings at www.universalquestions.com/nature or <https://theglosterbirder.co.uk> And do let us know of anything rare or unusual you see.

SOCIETY NEWS

Dursley Pet Shop

Remember, if you show your membership card in the Dursley Pet Shop you will be entitled to a 10% discount on a wide range of gardening items sold in the shop such as seeds and bulbs etc., as well as the usual discount received on bird related items.

Dursley Birdwatching and Preservation Society - Officers & Committee 2024-2025

Chairman	Ken Cservenka	19 Overhill Road, Stratton, Cirencester GA7 2LG	01285 656480
Vice Chair	Roy Jellings	roy.jellings@aol.co.uk	01453 810176
Treasurer	David Wood	Garden Cottage, Commercial Rd, Chalford Hill, Stroud. GL5 3QZ	07870 553249
Secretary	Simon Ashley	2 Victoria Villas, Spillmans Patch, Stroud GL5 3LU simonashley65@gmail.com	07825 668389
Outdoor programme			
IT & Communications			
Indoor Programme	Rebecca Paisey	crazypaisey@hotmail.com	01453 811408
Membership Secretary	Caroline Sandrey	15 Spey Close, Thornbury, Bristol, BS35 2NR caroline.sandrey@gmail.com	07972 125959
Bulletin Editor			
Bulletin Distribution			
Librarian	Position Vacant		
General Committee	Dot Jones, Peter Steele, Alan Keith, Amanda Sulton Black		



Secretary: simonashley65@gmail.com



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