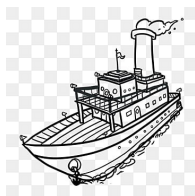


DURSLEY BIRDWATCHING AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY



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

Is the month up already? It only feels like last week that I was sat at my computer composing the August "From the Chair". We have had a couple of sessions of wonderful weather since my last message, so I hope you have all made the most of it, as sadly summer appears to have turned to autumn far too early. During the good weather it was good to see butterflies but I feel there are not as many around as in recent years. Also moth numbers caught in my moth trap have been down this summer, maybe Butterfly Conservation will come up with the reason in the next edition of their magazine "Butterfly".

At the AGM Rebecca Paisey took over the role of indoor programme secretary from Mike and has been busy compiling a list of meetings for the upcoming winter season, I am looking forward to it. A proposal to put on an exiting trip to wetland reserves in Poland was discussed at a recent committee meeting; see an article in this bulletin aimed at gauging interest. I hope to see you at the next meeting held at the Dursley Community Centre on the afternoon of Monday 30th September.

Ken

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Radipole Lake & Weymouth area

Leader: **Simon Ashley**

8th September 7:00 am - 6:00pm

September is a transitional month, marking the end of summer and the beginning of autumn migration. Timing our visit hopefully means we'll get to see a mix of summer visitors, resident birds, those arriving for winter and those migratory species passing through.

We've visited Radipole Lake on a number of occasions and it's always good value offering some of the best chances of seeing birds such as: Bearded Reedlings, Cetti's Warblers, Kingfishers, Marsh Harrier, Mediterranean Gull, and smorgasbord of wading birds. Following Radipole we'll have the option to visit either Lodmoor or a short drive to Portland Bill to check out birds in this area.

It's 2.5 hours drive to Radipole so to make the best of the day we'll need to leave relatively early - Aiming to arrive at the Swannery car park at 9:30am. All of the walking is flat on well made paths. Please bring a packed lunch.



Chipping Sodbury Common

Leader: Dot Jones

22nd September 10:30 am - 1:00pm

Just over the Gloucestershire border is Chipping Sodbury Common. A fabulous open, scrubby area with a few random hedgerows - is great place to pick up some migrants and lingering summer visitors. We'll be looking for Winchat, Redstarts and hoping for the odd vagrant. It regularly turns up Wryneck and even more elusive birds such as Woodchat and Steppe Grey Shrike. We may get lucky.

Meet at the Common (What three Words : <http://crackling.educated.revisits>)

INDOOR MEETING DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

30th September 1:45 - Andrew Bluett

St Kilda (if he manages to get there) or Marsh Warblers

28th October 1:45 - Roberta Goodhall

'Round the Horn - Birding at the bottom of the World'.

A special talk on the rare birds of Brazil.

25th November 7:30pm - Tom Mabett

Tom is the Operations Manager and Tour Leader from Naturetrek

'Europe's Best Birding' Tom will be talking about his favourite places from the Camargue to the uplands of Sweden. A great range of birds will be covered.

9th December 7:15 - Christmas Quiz, Buffet and Raffle

Oliver Paisey will be testing your knowledge with a wildlife quiz. We will have a bring and share buffet and a raffle.

27th January 2025 1:45 - Philip Mugridge

Philip and his wife Helen are a fantastic photographic team. This talk will explore the wildlife of the Orkney Islands

24th February 1:45 - Jackie Harris

Jackie will explain what makes each WWT site special, including the main headquarters at Slimbridge.

31st March 1:45 - Ken Newcombe

Ken is the Educational Engagement Coordinator of Gloucestershire Butterfly Conservation Group. Ken will be talking about Butterflies and Moths just as they start to appear locally. (Should be perfect timing.)

NB Please bring raffle prizes for the Christmas event to any meeting and give to a committee member.

If anyone is unable to drive to any evening meeting please request a lift share through What'sApp or email Rebecca (crazypaisey@hotmail.com).



Proposed Poland Bird Watching Trip in May 2025

The main aim is to explore the Biebrza Valley river basin which is the largest national park in Poland. It contains vast peat bogs, forest, aquatic and marsh ecosystems. There are 292 bird species, 195 of which are breeding including the aquatic warbler, the only passerine classed as globally threatened. 4 species of eagle are found here. It contains 80+ endangered plant species, 7 reptile, 12 amphibian and 200 butterfly species. Elk, Beaver and Wolf live in the park. There are 500Km of trails through the park. Just to the south is the Narew National Park.

Here is the likely programme.

First night B&B at a hotel in Modlin next to the Wisla (Vistula) river only a few minutes from the airport. There should be opportunities to explore meadows near to the river east of the hotel. Next day, travel to Goniadz in the centre of the Biebrza Valley marshes. On the way, we may visit meadows in the Bug river valley between Wyszki and Brok where the river meanders through the countryside. The whole valley supports over 100 species of birds. We rent a house or houses in Goniadz for 5 nights. We intend to book local guides for 3 days. The southern basin is about 30 km long and up to 10 km wide, a swampy area which is largely uncultivated, and is a part of the Biebrza National Park. Thousands of birds stop during spring and autumn passage. The northern part is more differentiated than in the southern part, but not so wild. The landscape is enriched by sandy mounds and patches of forest spread amongst the wet meadows and marshes.

It may be that we would drive south one day to visit the Narew valley. In the Narwianski National Park, the Narew river flows through wet and periodically flooded meadows. Its numerous branches and old river-beds create a real labyrinth. We return from Goniadz to stay a final night at the same hotel in Modlin before flying back to London Stansted.

A selection of bird species which could be seen on this trip including: Little Bittern, Bittern, Black Stork, White Stork, Honey Buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Spotted Eagle, three species of Harrier, Black Grouse, Spotted Crake, Little Crake, Corncrake, Water Rail, Crane, Ruff, Great Snipe, Woodcock, White Winged Tern, Eagle Owl, Short-eared Owl, all nine Woodpecker species possible, Bluethroat, Aquatic, Barred, Grasshopper, Great Reed, River and Savi's Warblers, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Kingfisher, Bearded and Penduline Tits.

Our hope is to keep the cost as low as possible with cheap flights and self-catering accommodation wherever possible. Our estimate is that the total cost would be between £1000 and £1500. The variability there is the ever changing cost of flights and how the number of people travelling divides into hire cars, accommodation and guide fees. The flights would be from London Stansted to Warsaw Modlin with Ryanair, taking an under seat bag and a 20kg hold bag. Rental car(s) would be picked up from the airport. We will need some people to agree to be a driver or a reserve driver (who would only drive if the driver is incapacitated).

We would need people to commit to coming ideally by the end of **Sept 2024**. The flights would need to be booked then and would not be refundable in the event of cancellation. These costs are probably in the range £150 to £225. The dates we are thinking of are probably from a Saturday to a Saturday in mid to late May. Let me know which dates you are not available in May if you are interested in joining us.

Contact David Wood via email davidw634@gmail.com or via the WhatsApp group if interested or needing more information.

The website for Biebrza National Park is <https://bbpn.gov.pl/biebrza-national-park>.

The website for the Polish National Parks including Biebrzanski and Narew is <https://zpppn.pl/en/lang>.

Birding Places gives some more information about the birds to be found in Biebrza National Park:

<https://www.birdingplaces.eu/en/birdingplaces/poland/biebrzanski-national-park>

The Polish OTOP birding site gives some walking trails to see birds:

<https://otop.org.pl/our-projects/we-protect/reserves-and-nature-trails/biebrza/?lang=en>



OUTDOOR MEETING REPORTS

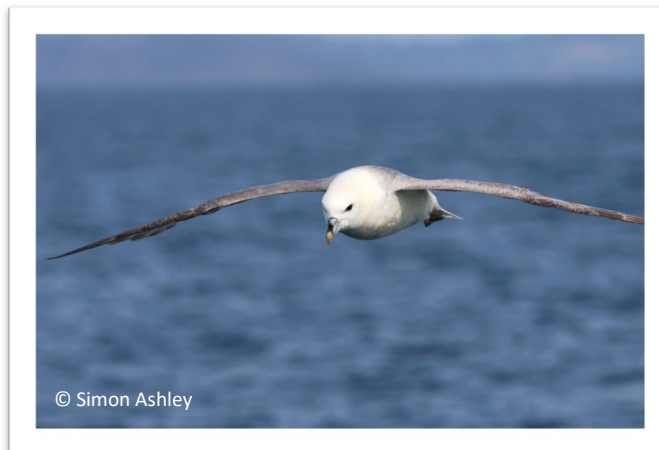
Devon Residential 2nd - 5th August

Report from: **Simon Ashley**

Friday

Our trip began with a visit to the Somerset levels, we met at Ham Wall RSPB's signature reserve. Birding at this time of year isn't always easy most species have just about completed raising their young and are all exhausted and not particularly active. Undaunted we explored the reserve and I managed to see quite a few of the key species, we had good views of several Marsh Harriers and a fabulous flight view of a Bittern as it crossed the reed bed. After lunch we tried our luck at West Hay hoping to find Cattle Egrets or a Glossy Ibis. Then we headed South to Brixham - we arrived mid-afternoon and had time to visit Berry Head. Being by the sea is always nice and a gave us a good opportunity to observe birds we rarely see in Gloucestershire. From a clifftop vantage point, we were able to watch Sandwich Terns, Fulmar, Gannets and Shags.

One of the perks of a residential trip is the opportunity to socialise a bit and our accommodation was nicely placed for a short walk to take advantage of some of the excellent restaurants in town. fresh fish was the obvious choice - and all the food went down well.



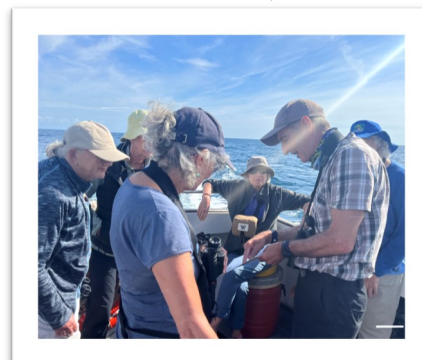
Fulmar

Saturday

One of our key target birds was Cirl Bunting, currently on the UK Red list for conservation status, which means it's a species of high conservation concern. Once widespread in southern England and Wales, it's experienced a significant decline and became the UK's rarest farmland bird. At its lowest point in 1989, there were only 118 pairs left in the country. The RSPB's extensive conservation efforts to save the Cirl Bunting have focused on working with farmers to create suitable habitats and provide food sources for the birds. The recovery program has been successful, with the population increasing significantly and at the latest count there were some 1,100 territories. We spent the morning at Slapton Ley a well-known stronghold for them, but only one member of the party got a view of a male so, we headed to Prawle Point another well known spot. Driving Devon's narrow lanes can be a bit challenging, and the car park was right at the end of one of a particularly skinny one! We did eventually make it there. It's a great birding area and we were treated to Yellowhammers, Linnets and Stonechats. The day was warm and sunny and was just about the best I've had for butterflies I've had all year. Small Copper, Wall and Common Blues were particularly noteworthy. We heard the Cirl Buntings several times - but had to wait until near the end of our walk before we got to see one. When one finally flew into view and perched atop of some gorse.

Sunday

This was the day we were all most looking forward to - A full day's Pelagic with the Kelly's Hero boat - Captained by David Saunders and with expert guide Mike Langham. The weather was perfect clear skies, and little wind meant we were in for some calm conditions. Mike is a first-rate bird guide and helped us pick out all of the birds throughout the day, he was also a fount of



knowledge on the local geology and history. David is a brilliant captain and took us to all of the hotspots and kept us plied with tea coffee and biscuits all day. The birding was excellent. Armed with loaves of bread, boxes of cornflakes and two frozen 'chum' blocks which we scattered liberally into our wake we almost always had birds for company. We got to know the Balearic Shearwaters very well. Brown and white, in a state of moult and pot-bellied we could separate them from Manx Shearwaters. We also found Storm Petrel and one of my absolute favourite birds a Pomarine Skua. We also had plenty of close quarter action with lots of pods of common dolphin swimming close to the boat, and great views of harbour porpoise. It was a real treat of a day and one I think we should repeat in future years.



Pomarine Skua

Monday

A day to travel home - we had an early morning nose around the harbour and added Turnstones and Rock Pipit to our list. We then headed North calling in a Goldcliffe reserve on the Severn Estuary - we'd hoped to see a Baird's Sandpiper - but it hadn't been seen all day. We did add lots of waders to our tally - and it's always great to watch those.

Species list:

Graylag Goose, Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Common Shelduck, Gadwall, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Ring-necked Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon), Wood-Pigeon, Collared-Dove, Swift, Water Rail, Eurasian Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Green Sandpiper, Redshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Pomarine Jaeger, Razorbill, Common Murre, Black-legged Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, European Storm-Petrel, Northern Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant, Shag, Bittern, Little Egret, Great Egret, Gray Heron, Western Marsh Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Sedge Warbler, Common Reed Warbler, Swallow, House-Martin, Chiffchaff, Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Wren, Blackbird, Stonechat, House Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail, White Wagtail, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Cirl Bunting, Yellowhammer

Fleur - Brixham resident



Immature Gannett



FROM OUR MEMBERS

Nurture Nature Notes for September 2024 - Otis Tarda

We tend to ignore somewhat the corvids, however, each has its contribution. Jackdaws have increased in numbers since the 1960s, which is rather surprising considering that many of their nesting sites are no longer available, viz, chimney stacks now either cowed or wired over due in part to domestic heating and grate fires by other fuel sources. In the 1960s a householder in a local village could not understand why his kitchen Turtle iron stove wouldn't draw so the local chimney sweep was called in. He discovered that there was a fifteen foot mass of sticks blocking the flue. Jackdaws, when choosing a chimney for their nest site drop twigs and sticks down the flue until a few lodge across it, which establishes a firm base for their nest, they continue to drop sticks down until they reach the desired height for their nest. Such nests often caught fire when the kindling and coal in the grate were ignited! Jackdaws are accomplished thieves, as they plunder other birds' nests for the eggs and nestlings, and also raid garden bird feeders, which are frequently damaged by them and other corvids. They are highly social, gathering in noisy flocks and performing aerial acrobatics. They mate for life, choosing their mate in their first year but don't breed until the following year. The pair will perch side by side preening each other. The name originates from their call 'daw' and the 'jack' part means a rogue, or knave, think packs of playing cards.

I hope some readers took up the suggestion in a previous Nurture Nature article and have located spots around their gardens to watch what nature is up to at different times of the day, as we do. At the end of July when looking at chimney stacks for bird activity we witnessed an amusing episode on a stack of a female jackdaw trying to get the attention of a male. She was giving him the 'Come-on' with wing fluttering and other body type seduction but to no avail. He walked around the chimney pot to try and avoid her, she followed. After about five minutes of this he flew up to the tallest stack topped by a stainless steel cowl. She tried to follow but couldn't get a footing on the slippery metal and gave up.

Just digressing a moment, perhaps you have seen the romantic habits of wood pigeons, whose squabs (young) may hatch as late as October. Following this jackdaw seduction stand-off, was the activity of a pair of wood pigeons on poles supporting an OBC (Overhead Bungee Cable) for conducting the local electricity supply. Local pigeons are becoming something of a problem now in gardens due to loss of woodland habitat and arable foraging. However, there was a rather charming lovey-dovey carry-on which involved a lot of cooing and much necking. So see what acts of nature you've observed, and write in. You'll be surprised what you'll see and hear. But for now, due to lack of space the other corvids will have to be left until later NN items.

We have recently been told of Jackdaws trying to nest under solar panels on local houses so specialists were called in to put wire netting around the panels. No sooner had they gone than the jackdaws pulled out the pegs holding the netting down! The men were called back, and said they had put pigeon strength pegs in, so replaced them with jackdaw strength ones.



Due to Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960s, much of our countryside looked as if it had been nuked due to the devastating effects of this rapidly spreading disease, which was carried in on imported timber and spread. In Wiltshire elms were once so plentiful that they were known as Wiltshire weeds. The Government and woodland charities started a project in the 70s "Plant a Tree in '73". Let us take up this mantle again in our decade with 'Plant More in '24'.

As a follow up about gulls in the August issue, there was a very good BBC Radio 4 programme a month ago on gulls - mainly around the British Isles but also worldwide. It's well worth a listen on BBC Sounds.

Otis Tarda

Has anyone else noticed the increasing numbers of pigeons besting under solar panels? They are certainly nesting under my neighbour's solar panels, and I guess also under mine. Perhaps I should invest in some netting! CMS

The return of the Goshawk to Gloucestershire

Chris Newton

The Goshawk is one of Britain's bird of prey success stories - from effective extinction a few decades ago to a population now thought to be in excess of 1000 pairs. Group members will surely have noticed the increase in reported sightings around the county in recent years. Aside from the usual reports from the Forest of Dean, a national stronghold, the birds are showing up all over the place - particularly, in late summer and autumn, the less wary juveniles with their distinctive brown-streaked plumage. After several trips to the nationally famous New Fancy View to try to see goshawks in the early spring when they display over their territories (scope essential!) I heard that a suspected Goshawk nest had been spotted in a wood in the Vale, and went down to have a look. The nest in question was clearly disused, but there were others, and not far away I found pigeon feathers below one of them. I didn't approach the nest (not having a 'licence to disturb' protected birds), but that wouldn't have helped anyway, as it was visible only from some distance away. I was using a ride which is daily frequented by riders and dog walkers.

I didn't have to wait long before a single Persil-white chick bobbed up. I took a photo and sent it to my contacts at Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group (G.R.M.G - Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group (glosraptors.co.uk), who told me the chick would be 23-26 days old. That discovery fired an interest in Goshawks which has burned ever since. I checked on that nest, always with binoculars from the ride, periodically over the next 3-4 weeks and in that time saw the single chick turn into a spectacular full-grown juvenile approx 6 weeks old.



Fledged Goshawk - approx 6 weeks old

I spent most of my time sitting in a hide well away from the nest, and this gave me some thrilling encounters with mum and dad. On





© Chris Newton

one occasion I heard what sounded like some sort of domestic row - the birds were screaming at each other from the nest area. Then the male shot into view, flying down the ride past me and landing in a dead oak tree. Hot on his heels came the much larger female, still screeching. She hurtled past within 10m of my hide and landed on the branch almost on top of the male, driving him away, before flying back to the nest.

Female Goshawks do not want the males anywhere near the nest during incubation or when the chicks are small, which is why he delivers food some distance away, in a handover usually involving a plucking post or a disused nest. Perhaps this one had tried to

land on the nest, just trying to be helpful. Incidentally the male's eyes were noticeably yellower than the female's, indicating a younger and less experienced bird.

The following spring I was able on several occasions to watch the pair displaying from outside the wood, but it took some detective work to find which nest they were using (by then I had found 15 altogether, in varying states of repair, one in use by a Buzzard family). Goshawks, like badgers, are always building or renovating their homes, and usually seem to move house from year to year. The standard advice is to search for fresh greenery decorating a nest, or look for prey remnants under the tree. Some of the nests were so high up and with so many branches below them that neither approach helped. But one evening from my hide I heard a single soft contact call from deep inside the wood. From the direction, I knew which nest the bird must be on. The next morning I set the hide up on another ride which gave the only possible view through the trees to that nest, 80m away and very high up in a big larch. I sat and watched, until the scope revealed something new amid the tangle of twigs - the burning orange coal of a mature Goshawk's eye. Once again she turned out to have a single chick, which later fledged successfully.

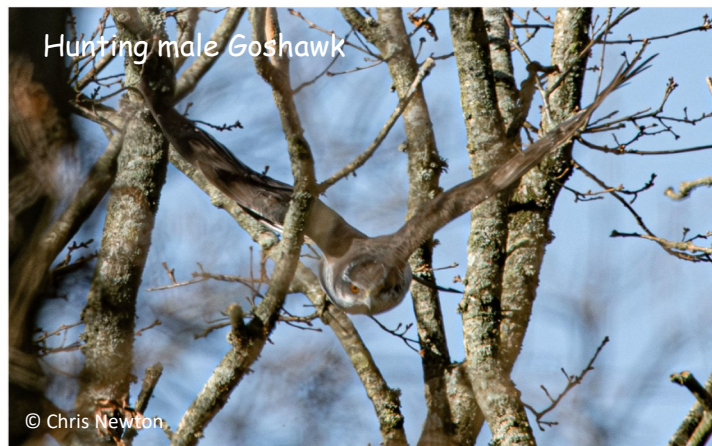
In year 3 the nest was even harder to find, but this time the pair (I can only presume, of course, that they were the same birds) raised two young. Meanwhile in another wood, I had found a Goshawk nest in, unusually, an oak tree, with four well-grown chicks. There was just time for the GRMG to send a ringing team before the birds grew too big, and I had the fascinating experience of watching the climber bring the chicks down one by one in cloth bags for the ringer to weigh, measure and ring them. That pair have bred again successfully in 2024, in a Douglas fir, producing at least three fledged juveniles.

I have now spent several hundred hours watching for Goshawks in the woods of the county, and enjoyed some thrilling sightings. I have watched a male slink from tree to tree like a cloaked assassin, watching for prey below him. On one occasion I arrived to find a pair in the process of violent, noisy copulation in an oak tree, one of the very few times when the birds have not dematerialised upon my arrival. Most sightings are much more distant and fleeting, but in most of the mature woods I have searched I have found evidence of Goshawks. It would seem that any sizeable and well-established wood in Gloucestershire which has mature conifers, and especially larches, and does not see too many human visitors, may house one or more pairs of Goshawks.

Brief encounters with Goshawks are not too difficult to achieve, but actually watching them is a different matter. Goshawks have an almost supernatural ability to know when a human is nearby, and an equally supernatural ability to vanish. The very few successes I have had so far have involved a well-disguised hide and a great deal of patient waiting. So far I have only once been



able to watch, and photograph, a perching hawk without its knowledge. This was a hunting winter male which flew into a high oak some 100m from my hide. I was able to get distant shots of it perched, and then a couple more shots when it took off, fortunately in my direction. Both shots have had to be heavily cropped.



To locate Goshawks, you need to look for nests in winter when the branches are bare. They are usually in substantial conifers and are always built high up the tree and against the trunk. You may hear the goshawk alarm call, a machine-gun

whee-whee-whee, a bit like an angry car alarm - it will be you they are shouting at, so don't hang around, certainly in the breeding season.

If you find evidence that Goshawks are present, then on a fine late morning in March or April, position yourself where you have a good view over the wood, and sit and wait. Appearances are unpredictable, but they are most likely on a still, sunny morning with the air warming, particularly after a period of poor weather. Quite often the Buzzard acts as the Goshawk's herald, appearing first in the sky. I have found that the Goshawks typically put on a display for a minute or so, separately or together, flying around at speed, soaring and diving, then disappear for half an hour or more. They may do this several times over a period of 2-3 hours - or only once. The male will continue to display - or perhaps just have fun in the sun - in May and even into early June when the female is on the nest.



High-flying male taken from 150m away and heavily cropped. 01.06.2024



EDITOR'S 'BIT'

No room for much except to give you advance notice of an exciting trip planned for January. Places will be limited and if the trip is oversubscribed the committee may draw lots for tickets.

GUIDED BIRDWATCHING CRUISE - from Exmouth Marina (EX8 1FE)

Saturday 11th January

Departure Time: 10:15 am Duration: approx.: 3 hours

More details will be available soon.

Thank you Simon Ashley, Chris Newton, Otis Tarda and of course Ken and the DBWPS committee for their contributions this month.

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.

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

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