



# DURSLEY BIRDWATCHING AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY



## FROM THE CHAIR - Welcome to the December edition of the Society Bulletin.

Some of you may already know that I have been out of action, especially peering through a telescope as I have just had surgery for a cataract. Although I was dreading the prospect of having someone performing surgery on my eye, by the time I was at the hospital I had resigned myself to what was about to happen. Like a lot of men I am not too keen on medical procedures but it was really nothing to worry about. Except for the very centre of my left eye, my vision is a lot clearer now and I am looking forward to being able to get out in the countryside and observe birds and other wildlife. I had hoped that the sunny weather would hold on for a few more days so we could enjoy a trip to the Cotswold Lakes (formally Cotswold Water Park) on Sunday 24th November. Sadly due to the awful weather brought by Storm Bert, the decision was taken to cancel this event and looking back it was just as well that we did.

I am looking forward to our December meeting with a general (birding) knowledge quiz and a bring and share buffet. Please do bring a raffle prize, and if you can bring something to share for the buffet, email [caroline.sandrey@gmail.com](mailto:caroline.sandrey@gmail.com) as she will coordinate this. Ken



## INDOOR MEETING DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### 9th December 7:30 - Christmas Quiz, Buffet and Raffle

Alan Keith has kindly agreed to provide a quiz. Alan will be testing your knowledge with a general birding quiz. **Don't Forget** - 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 wild life 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 7:30 - AGM

This is a provisional date. More details to follow.

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



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### 3 Hour Guided Birdwatching Cruise - Departing from Exmouth Marina (EX8 1FE)

There are still a few places available on this trip on Saturday 11th January 2025. There is a free mini bus - leaving Dursley at 7:30 am. Final numbers need to be in by the end of November. Booking is available online or you can e-mail [simonashley65@gmail.com](mailto:simonashley65@gmail.com)



**NB: If any trip is in doubt because of bad weather or unexpected circumstances or has to be cancelled-we will try and contact everyone by telephone or through the 'WhatsApp' group. We will also put a notice on our web-site and inform members by e-mail. It is important therefore that we have your contact details.**

If you would like to be added to the 'WhatsApp' Group, please contact Caroline Sandrey (Membership Secretary) [caroline.sandrey@gmail.com](mailto:caroline.sandrey@gmail.com) or Simon Ashley (DBWPS Secretary) [simonashley65@gmail.com](mailto:simonashley65@gmail.com)

## MEETING REPORTS

### Sunday 10th November Chew Valley Lakes

Report from: **Mike Tranter**

Six members met up at Harriott's Bridge on a morning that promised to see the end of what meteorologists had called an 'anti-cyclonic gloom' that had covered the country for over a week. We pulled our scopes from the cars and commenced a scan of Harriott's Mill Pool. There were many ducks, a large roost of gulls and a pleasing number of Great White Egrets. A Water Rail was also heard but unsurprisingly, not seen.



*Chew Valley Lake from Harriott's Bridge*

We crossed the road to view the main lake and were soon treated with a Kingfisher on the edge of a tree, and a patrolling Marsh Harrier. As we watched a car pulled up and an excited birder leapt out asking if we had seen a pair of Red-Crested Pochards that had flown towards us. This focused our scanning of the diving ducks on the lake. The first Goldeneye of the day were found, as well as the male and female Red-crested Pochards. An unexpected surprise for us. This took us up to 10am, our scheduled time to visit the Chew Valley Ringing Station, and so we packed up and walked the short distance to their base.

The volunteer team at the ringing station were just completing their latest round of ringing as we arrived; a male House Sparrow and a female Blue Tit. It was interesting to listen in on the debate between the ringers; was the House Sparrow, a rare bird in the nets here, a first year bird or older? After some deliberation it was concluded that it was in fact a 1st year bird, based on very minor detail in colouration of a small number of its wing feathers. No wonder it takes 2 years to gain the necessary identification skills to qualify as a ringer. After a quick tour of the nets the next half-hourly collection of trapped birds was ready for processing. We were all highly excited to see a pair of Bearded Tits. A year tick for most of us. Other birds trapped during that round were; Cetti's Warbler, Song Thrush, Robin, Dunnock, Blue, Great and Long Tailed Tits. After tea and biscuits we thanked the team and bode our farewell. A thoroughly interesting visit which helped us to appreciate the dedication, knowledge and skill of those who undertake this aspect of birding.



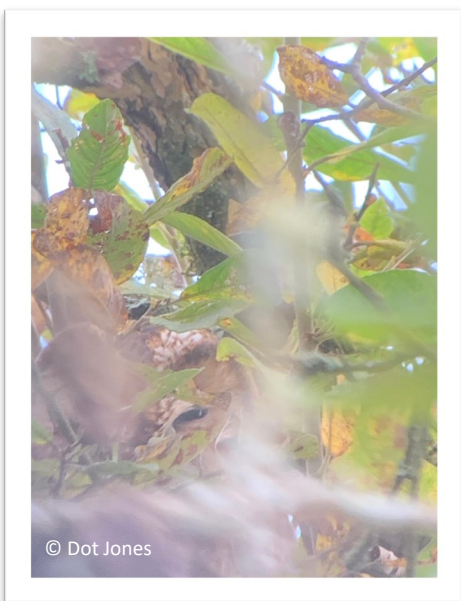
*Male and Female Bearded Tits*



Our tour of the hides and viewing places along the west and north of the lake then continued, yielding some excellent sightings. At Stratford hide amongst the extensive rafts of Coots, were a selection of over-wintering diving ducks; Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye and the Red-crested Pochard again. Also good numbers of Great-crested and Little Grebes. There were Snipe, Lapwing, large numbers of Great White Egrets and a large roost of cormorants along the water's edge. On leaving the hide a local regular was kind enough to point out a Tawny Owl in a tree along the board-walk. It took sometime but eventually we all located it hidden in the branches.



*Cetti's Warbler*



*There's an owl in there, honestly!*

Our final stop was by the dam which we had been advised was the best spot for Goosander. This proved to be the case and we located 3 (2m +1f) on the far side of the dam.

In total we had at least 52 species, List below compiled by Dot Jones.

Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Shelduck, Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Pintail, Teal, Red-crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Goosander, Woodpigeon, Water Rail (heard only) Moorhen, Coot, Lapwing, Snipe, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Little Grebe, Great-crested Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Sparrowhawk, Marsh Harrier, Tawny Owl, Kingfisher, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Bearded Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Starling, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail.



Ken Newcombe is the Education coordinator for the Gloucestershire Branch of Butterfly Conservation. He gave us a most interesting and informative talk.

Ken introduced his presentation with a picture of a Marsh Fritillary, a butterfly that until recently was confined to one reserve near Chalford. We now have 60 species in the UK as the Long-tailed Blue has been added recently. In Gloucestershire we now have 40 species as we have lost the Grayling as a breeding species in the County relatively recently. Butterfly wings are covered with scales that give each species its identity; the males are mostly more colourful than the females, especially the members of the Blue family where the males are blue and the females brown.

The butterfly calendar starts with the Brimstone emerging from hibernation and flying in sunshine in late winter and spring and finishing with the Brown Hairstreak that is on the wing in August and September. Generally the males emerge from the chrysalis first and have a one track mind to find and mate with a female. The female then heads off to seek out the specific food-plant for its caterpillars and tests its suitability by tasting it with sensors in her feet. Once satisfied the female commences egg laying sometimes laying a single egg in the case of the Brown Hairstreak and other species such as the Large White and Marsh Fritillary laying a batch of eggs.



Meadow Brown

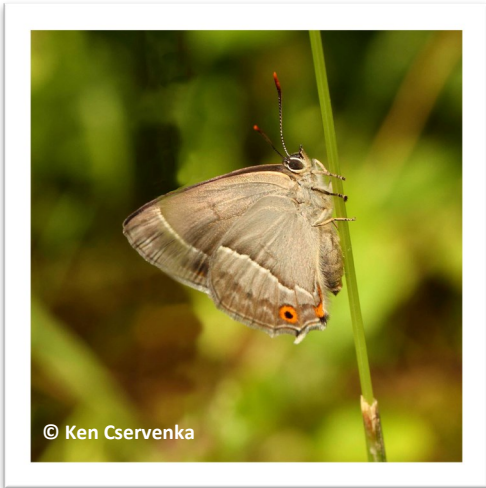
Some grassland species such as Meadow Brown and Ringlet don't bother to land when egg laying but bomb the eggs into the grass below. The caterpillar when it emerges from the egg usually eats the empty egg shell, then go through five 'instars' moulting the old skin and often changing body colour as well. Finally, they seek out a hidden location and change into a chrysalis. In the chrysalis state the internal body parts are dissolved into a soup like state and then rebuild to form the butterfly. On emerging from the chrysalis the butterfly climbs up a stem to allow the wings to pump up to full size.

The Large Blue has recently been re-introduced having become extinct as a British breeding species in 1979. (They were believed to have become extinct due to a change in grazing practices.) Suitable stock was sourced in Sweden as they are very close in appearance to our native British stock. The Female Large Blue lays its eggs on the flowers of wild Thyme and or Marjoram only on south facing banks. The tiny freshly hatched caterpillar then waits for a specific species of ant to find it whereupon it hunches its body and exudes a drop of sweet honeydew. The ant having secured a reward then carries the caterpillar to its nest where it continues to reward the worker ants, while at the same time feasting on the ant grubs. Eventually, having greatly increased in size it pupates. In the following June it emerges from the ants nest and transforms into an adult Large Blue Butterfly. All the stages face considerable threats from other taxa, the adult from birds and spiders, the egg, caterpillar and chrysalis from attack by parasites. Parasitic wasps lay eggs either on or in their host using an ovipositor on their abdomen. In some cases a hyper parasite parasitizes the larvae of the parasite, all a bit grim from a human perspective.



Large Blue





© Ken Cservenka

*Purple Hairstreak*

The Purple Hairstreak is rarely seen as they live high in the top of an Oak Tree; however, they can be seen flying around the canopy, sometimes quite late on a sunny evening. The caterpillar feeds high in the canopy and when ready to pupate they drop down to the ground where they stay in the leaf litter. A recording was played of the barely audible chirping noise coming from the chrysalis.

Purple Emperor is our largest butterfly and also flies high in the canopy of an Oak Tree. Its caterpillar feeds on sallow and hibernates in the bark of its host tree. The butterfly emerges in late June and July and is very aggressive to anything flying nearby. It has some unpleasant habits as it comes down to the ground to take salts from animal poo, fish paste and anything else unpleasant.

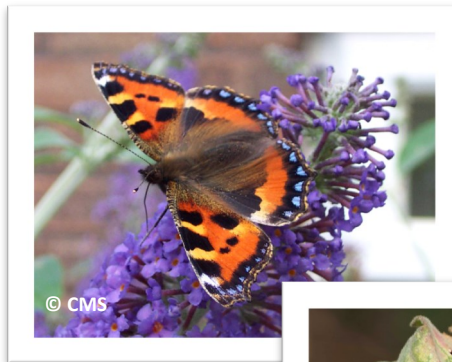
In Gloucestershire we have lost the Grayling, the Wall is now scarce except on the highest hills and the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary is just about holding on in the Forest of Dean but worryingly there were no records for it in the 2024 flight period. The Wood White is getting scarce nationally but the population is doing well in the Forest of Dean.

The Small Tortoiseshell a once common butterfly has crashed dramatically due to a fly species that has spread from the continent.

Several species hibernate as adult butterflies, usually in Ivy or sometimes in our sheds and lofts; these include the Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and the Brimstone.

Day flying moths can be just as colourful as most butterflies, with common examples being the Five-spot Burnet, Six-spot Burnet, Scarlet Tiger and the Jersey Tiger, the latter has been steadily spreading from the South. There are as many if not more day flying moths as butterflies but are not so noticeable in most cases.

Alan Keith gave a vote of thanks on our behalf and I'm sure we all learnt something during the afternoon.



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*Red Admiral*

*Small Tortoiseshell*



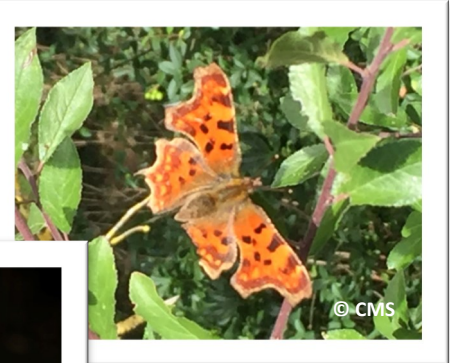
© Ken Cservenka

*Peacock*



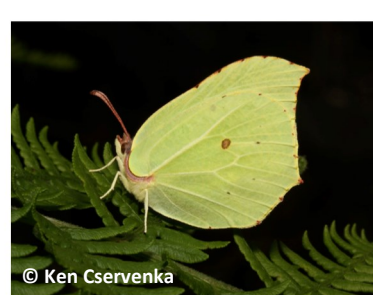
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*Comma*



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*Brimstone*



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## FROM OUR MEMBERS

### Nurture Nature Notes for December 2024 - Otis Tarda

Referring to a recent Nurture Nature article on crows, a current news item states that crows can hold grudges against humans, who have harmed family members, for up to seventeen years.

The dramatic sea cliffs, crags and stacks of Rathlin Island, county Antrim, rise more than 200 metres above the Atlantic Ocean and host one of the UK's largest seabird colonies, including hundreds of puffins. From September, when the puffins have left to spend the winter at sea, skilled teams started culling the Island's predators, as the final phase of a project to protect puffins. In the first phase ferrets were targeted and none has been seen for a year. Puffin numbers had declined by 74% between 1991 and 2021. This initiative is a Life Raft Project led by a partnership with the RSPB Northern Ireland and the local community. The traps are baited but scientifically designed to keep out non targeted species. This control scheme is necessary to enable the sea birds, especially puffins and their young, to survive.

A recent Kew Gardens report concluded that a third of the world's tree species could be wiped out due to climate change and other environmental negatives. Species such as the whitebeam, spindle, hawthorn, and in Scotland the aspen. Trees are essential for wildlife. Spring blossom provides nectar for pollinators and the leaves are a food source for a range of insects, including caterpillars, leafhoppers and beetles. The berries attract a range of bird species for food in the autumn and winter including migrants, mainly from Scandinavia. Although one is unlikely to spot a Scarlet Tanager on their washing line as the one recently seen in a Yorkshire garden, which has attracted hundreds of twitchers. This bird is a resident of the eastern seaboard of America, weighing approximately 30 grams and blown off course in the recent gales.

Bird Life International is a worldwide conservation organisation concerned in preventing species decline and extinction. Currently it has launched an appeal entitled 'The Lark Descending' to save the east African Liben Lark from extinction. It is quite shocking, should one log on to its website, to learn how many world species are on Red Lists, due not only to changing climate patterns but also to over population, loss of habitat through over development and predation.

The recent extreme flooding in many areas of the populated continents and the decline of sea ice in both polar regions are causing alarm worldwide. The recent COP 29 (Conference of the Parties) has been commented in the press as 'not fit for purpose', and the fact that it was held in Baku, Azerbaijan where oil and gas exploration started, was a strange choice. COP 30, to be held in Brazil, will hopefully be more constructive, especially as the rain forests (the Lungs of the World) are getting near to tipping points due to deforestation, mining developments and increasing human populations, and it has recently been raised in the media about whether the last indigenous tribes can survive.

Remember that December 21<sup>st</sup> is "Robin Day" for our national bird, so put out some Christmas treats for them.

Let us all make New Year Resolutions to improve our environments and to discover Nature again for our children in 2025.

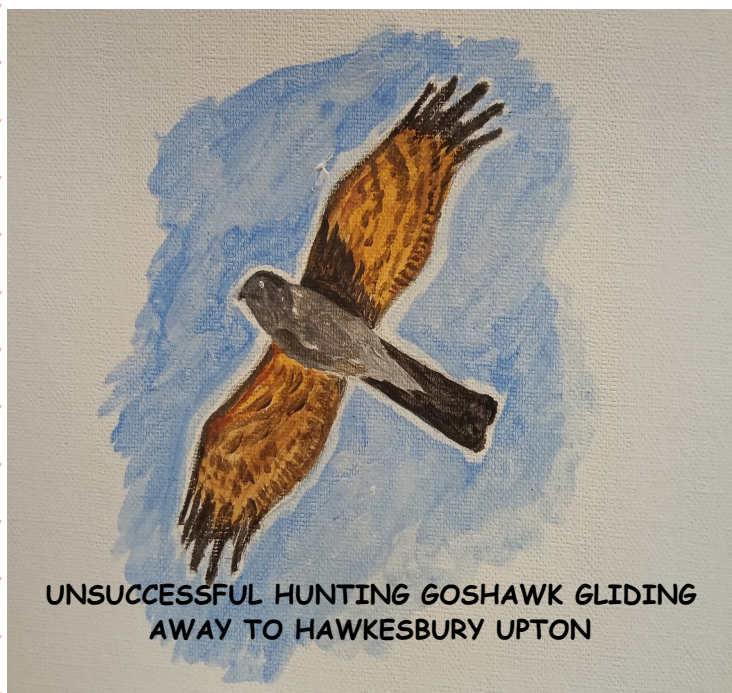


## "NO MOW MAY" - Tony Johnson

So with the suggestion that we should all adopt 'No Mow May' we decided we would duly abandon the mower, and what a big success it was. The wild grasses, vetch, dandelion and other wild flowers attracted many insect species. The wild vetch in particular attracted such a lot of insects. In other areas of our wild garden growth we had Potter Bees, Wild Bees, Grasshoppers as well as Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Comma and Brimstone butterflies. It was super to watch the Teazels bloom and flower with their mauve and white encircling coronets of flowers. As a bonus too they were host to a beautiful Forest Shield Bug who stayed on the Teazels for weeks, living off the sap. He stayed around until the first cold snap and then decided to up and away to hibernate.



FOREST SHIELD BUG AT HOME ON THE TEASELS



UNSUCCESSFUL HUNTING GOSHAWK GLIDING AWAY TO HAWKESBURY UPTON

Now as the season progressed and the 'No Mow May' undergrowth in conjunction with the wet, wet weather decided to morph into a jungle, we decided to re-establish some order to the garden. It was whilst trying to achieve this during a warm blue sky day we decided to have a tea break and whilst enjoying this well earned cuppa we became aware of a large volume of noise above us. Looking up into the blue sky some 200 feet above, we were astonished to see that the noise was being created some hundred plus Crows, Rooks, Jackdaws and Ravens circling frantically, alarm calls being shouted, whilst flying tightly in a rotating circle about fifty feet in diameter - not unlike a tight circle of starlings.

It was whilst laying back looking skyward trying to figure out what was going on, I saw to my astonishment **two Goshawks** hunting together at ninety degrees to each other, trying to split apart the angry circular formation. The pair tried many times but had no success and after about five minutes of trying this hunting strategy they decided to save their energy, opened their wings into full glide mode and wandered off toward Hawkesbury Upton. The angry black circle quietened and dispersed into the four directions of the compass from which they had been summoned to deal with the Bandits... Peace and quiet returned to the valley once again.



## OSPREYS IN FRAMPTON - Chris Newton

Members will be aware of the Ospreys which made a prolonged guest appearance at Frampton Court Lake in September. There were two birds, the first one reported by patch expert Nick Goatman on September 10, and at least one of them was still there on October 9. This appears to have been the most prolonged and conspicuous Osprey appearance in the county in recent memory and one that gave local birders, and some from further afield, a great deal of excitement and many wonderful images.

Birders will know that the Osprey is one of the many birds of prey which have recovered from near extinction (or complete extinction in some cases) in Britain in the past half-century or so. A few are seen on passage in the county each spring and summer, usually in April or September, most of them distant flyovers. In 2015 there was a record of two birds together at Dowdeswell Reservoir. This was on June 21 (*Gloucestershire Bird Report 2014-2016*), a very unusual time of year, and must have raised wild hopes of local breeding - perhaps not so wild, given the recent breeding success of Ospreys in other parts of southern Britain, notably Rutland water.

On September 11 I was about to leave for a visit to Slimbridge when I saw that the 'Gloster Birder', Mike King, had tweeted an Osprey in Frampton which had been spotted by Nick Goatman the previous day, so I diverted to Frampton and was thus one of the first to see the bird. It was very obliging, perching in tall trees around the lake, often in view, and intermittently touring the lake at treetop height looking for fish. Court Lake is rich in coarse fish, and from sightings and photographs by others it seemed Rudd were a favourite target for our bird. Rudd are a sizeable species with bright red fins which spends a lot of time near the surface and must thus be relatively easy to see and catch.

From the pale edges to its plumage - as well as its apparent lack of hunting skill, with many unsuccessful dives - it was pretty clear that this Osprey was a



young one, and it wasn't long before we had proof. A blue leg ring was visible, and on some of my pictures the number was clearly legible. I sent a photo to Gordon Kirk of Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group (who was with me at the lake) and by tweeting it he established that it had been ringed on July 5 in the north-east Highlands - in fact the ringer, Jimmi Hill (@Raptor\_Aid) responded by sending him a photo of the same bird in the nest at just a few weeks old.



The second Osprey, unringed and also a juvenile, was first seen at the lake on the same day, and one or other bird, sometimes both, continued to entertain the birders for the next four weeks. We enjoyed something of a multi-species raptorfest. At one point on my first visit a Peregrine, a Buzzard and several late Hobbies hawking for dragonflies were visible in the sky at the same time as one or other Osprey, and a Sparrowhawk also made an appearance. Buzzards were seen to harass the Ospreys, but their most persistent persecutors were Carrion Crows.



*Ospreys generally do not start catching their own fish until they have begun migration, so they must have to put in plenty of practice before leaving these shores. They are not persuaded to leave by their parents withholding food, as are many juvenile raptors, presumably to help send them on their way well-nourished rather than hungry. The young Osprey does not join adult fellow Ospreys on migration but sets off alone, navigating by instinct, or more precisely 'summation', which amounts to using its own inherited 'satnav' route. The birds set off when the weather is favourable - in particular, they need a helpful tailwind - and will take a break when it is not. Birds from north-east Europe head due south through Eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean to East Africa, but the migration route of British Ospreys is thousands of miles to the west. They travel down through France and Spain to the west coast of Africa, where they overwinter in Senegal, Guinea and neighbouring countries.*

The above information is from Tim Mackrill's fascinating book *The Osprey*, in which he also states: "Adult birds are navigating to known stop-over locations that they use every year, whereas juveniles might linger at a site they encounter by chance en route." It seems remarkable that the 2023 and 2024 birds found Frampton Court Lake by chance - will it keep happening? I'm keeping my fingers crossed for 2025.



## EDITOR'S 'BIT'

**Don't forget the raffle and buffet on December 9th**

- Bring raffle prizes on the night
- Please email [caroline.sandrey@gmail.com](mailto:caroline.sandrey@gmail.com) to let us know what buffet items you will bring. So far we have 2 x Quiches, sausage rolls, egg sandwiches, mince pies, crisps and a Christmas Cake



Thank you to Dot Jones, Chris Newton, Mike Tranter, Tony Johnson, Otis Tarda and Ken Cservenka for their contributions this month.

Please think about sharing any items of news you have, or birds you have seen - even if only in the garden. Send any articles or photographs for the next bulletin by **15<sup>th</sup> of the month** to me by email at [caroline.sandrey@gmail.com](mailto:caroline.sandrey@gmail.com) or by post to the address below.

**DON'T FORGET to renew your membership!** Membership run from 1st January to 31st December - You can send a cheque to the Membership Secretary (address below), you can pay with cash at the December or January meetings, or pay by bank transfer. Our details are:

**THE DURSLEY BIRDWATCHING AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

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**CMS**

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

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