

Carsington Bird Club NEWSLETTER



Website: carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk

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CHAIRMAN'S THOUGHTS

It is mid-August and I have just completed the monthly wildfowl count, which reflected the changing seasons. The first two Wigeon have appeared heralding the approach of winter, yet at the same time I saw two tiny Great Crested Grebe young hiding on the back of one of their parents. Many of you may, like me, be about to go on holiday; on our return, autumn will be upon us and we will see more changes on the reservoir. At this exciting time for birders, we should be looking to submit records every week.

It is also the last winter to participate in tetrad counts for the British Trust for Ornithology's Bird Atlas that started in 2007, finishes next year and will be the most phenomenal census of birds (or any other wildlife group) ever undertaken in the world. Interim conclusions have already shown some dramatic changes in bird species populations. The impressive number of amateur birders taking part is evidence of how important bird-watching has become in the daily life of the UK. Add to this the huge numbers of people submitting records for the Big Garden Birdwatch and we must be the world's number one birding nation.

I like to think that CBC is a small but significant part of this nationwide activity. Already records are being checked to confirm that this breeding season has been an excellent one for many species; current observations, for example, suggest record numbers of Tufted Duck broods. This is important information that will be recorded and published. Following the timely publishing of our 2009 annual report early in the year, we have already discussed content and production of next year's report with a goal to issue it as early as possible. So, even if you don't take part in any national record scheme, now is the time to be involved with our own modest club effort.

"Visit, watch and record" should be our motto. Certainly we appreciate all records – no matter how unimportant you may think they are – which are logged in the books in the hides or on the CBC website. Share what you see and help us build up an even fuller picture of Carsington and its birds: this will then be shared with the Derbyshire Ornithological Society, who in turn will pass appropriate records on nationally. Some birds returning to Carsington this winter may be the earliest on record – here, in Derbyshire or even in Britain. Equally, you might see the very last Swallow seen in Derbyshire this year, so why not pass them on yourselves to the BTO, as what are called 'roving records', for the Atlas. Then you can say you've taken part as an active member of the largest group of birdwatchers in the world!

Peter Gibbon

BUSY BREEDING BRINGS PLENTY OF SUCCESSES – BUT A FEW FAILURES

As adult birds begin to take a breather after bringing their new broods into the world, we can reflect on a largely successful breeding season at Carsington Water.

During June family parties of Nuthatch, Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow were recorded, while a pair of Great Tits ignored a bird box labelled with their species name, choosing instead an unmarked one! No less than 24 House Martin nests were in the vicinity of the Visitor Centre. Both Sedge and Reed Warblers were heard singing, as was a Pied Flycatcher in June, but his efforts remained unrequited and there was no sign of him later in the month.

Of eight pairs of Oystercatchers, four seem to have raised young, and a Redshank chick was noted as late as 13 July. While only one brood of Little Grebe was noted by the end of July, there was more success for its Great-Crested cousin (8 broods), and Tufted Duck (29), Mallard (20) and Coot (12) did well, while three broods of Mute Swan contained 12 cygnets.

Common Terns were kept off the rafts by Black-headed Gulls, but a pair did nest on Flat Island before moving – with two fledged young – onto the Watersports pontoon. Barnacle Geese were less successful: breeding on Horseshoe and Sailing Club islands failed, and the birds seem now to have left the site altogether.

An unusual sight greeted recorder Roger Carrington one July day when he witnessed an adult pair of Black-headed Gulls marching three downy chicks all the way from Flat Island, in front of Sheepwash, down to Horseshoe Island – an enforced exercise regime, perhaps!

Wildfowl numbers are beginning to rise as autumn approaches: Up to 500 Canada Geese have been counted, while 422 Coot were recorded in late July, and a combined total of 300 Mallard and Tufted Duck were noted on the same day. Much fewer numbers of Shelduck, Gadwall, Teal and Pochard have been spotted among these crowds, along with a single Red-Crested Pochard.

The gull roost is also developing, with an influx of Lesser Black-backs (1,500 by 20 August) joining the Black-headed Gulls. Meanwhile, a Yellow-legged Gull (and maybe the same one recorded performing similar dastardly deeds last year) was seen displaying carnivorous tendencies when swallowing a Tufted Duck chick.

The optimum time for waders is yet to come, but there were four Ruff on site on 17 August, several Black-tailed Godwits flew through on passage during July, and on 22 June a Spotted Redshank dropped in (at a time they were being seen at several locations) – the first recorded at Carsington for five years.

It's been a relatively quiet time for raptors, though a Hobby was seen chasing hirundines on 17 June and, three days later, two Peregrines and a Hobby were recorded. Two Little Owls were seen on 25 June, when two groups of young Tawny Owls were also recorded.

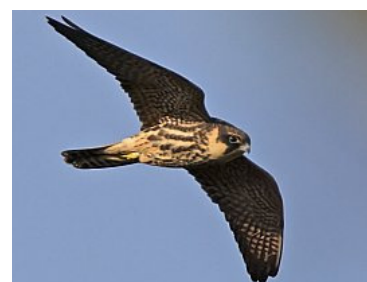
Three Stock Doves were spotted flying high over the reservoir on 28 July, and the day before could have been christened 'corvid day' since 150 Jackdaws, 18 Magpies, 9 Rooks and 4 Ravens were logged. All in all, though, the June and July records were relatively sparse – with the fewest species totals since the early 'noughties'.

BIRD OF THE ISSUE: HOBBY

Just occasionally, the heart will beat a little faster as a dark spot flashes across in front of you and, raising the binoculars, you realise you're looking at an elegant Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) doing what it does best – performing high-speed aerobatics to catch its prey, which can be anything from insects such as large beetles and dragonflies, which they eat on the wing, to birds that also eat insects and are very nimble themselves, like Martins, Swallows and Swifts ... and even bats at dusk.

They are a summer visitor to our shores, arriving late April/early May and are beginning to increase both in terms of numbers and range, having once been confined to the south of a line running roughly from the mouths of the Humber and Severn rivers. They often nest in old crows nests – and their rising population (reckoned now to be around 2,200 pairs) is thought to be partly down to a northerly movement of dragonflies and partly to more crows, so more nest sites. They leave the UK in September/October.

The Hobby is a small, dark falcon of around 30-36 centimetres that itself looks like a large swift, with long narrow wings spanning up to 90 centimetres and a relatively short tail to aid their aerobatic capability. They can accelerate in flight to speeds believed to be around 100mph. Like many of its closer falcon cousins, it has white chin and cheeks with a prominent moustachial stripe. Adult plumage is slate grey above, with dark stripes below and red under-tail coverts.



They unsurprisingly prefer warm locations that attract large quantities of flying insects (or the birds and bats that hunt flying insects) such as heaths, wetlands, gravel pits and farmland with a scattering of hedgerows and woodland. They are seen with increasing regularity at Carsington Water.

CBC WEBSITE REVIEW: GETTING TECHNICAL BRINGS REWARDS!

Last year our website simply recorded visits or hits to various pages. This year we are utilising the power of the internet – courtesy of registering free with Google Analytics, which collects information anonymously without identifying individual visitors – to monitor traffic and visitor trends. This allows us to focus our effort on those areas of the website most people like to visit and try and work out why certain other pages are never or rarely visited.

From January-July 2010, the number of hits to the CBC website was around 32,000 which translated into 15,900 unique visits. For a club as small as ours, this is very good, equating to 184 hits/day or 90 unique visits/day – slightly more than in the same period last year.

Interestingly, on average visitors looked at two pages each visit. The 'bounce rate' (percentage of visitors who left the website on the same page they arrived at) was 45%. This is higher than the average website, mainly because many birdwatchers visit the website for one thing only – the Sightings page. It would be difficult to lower this rate without making it difficult for visitors to reach the Sightings page, which would be counter-productive.

The average time spent on a CBC website visit, was one minute. This doesn't sound much but, think of how quickly you browse websites at home, and a minute is a long time. This figure is also affected by the number of birders who just simply scan the latest sightings, then exit. Encouragingly, 26% of hits were from new visitors – and they averaged over two minutes on the site before leaving. Hopefully they will have got the information they required during this time and will be back for more!

Visitors landed on the website from 51 countries during this period. Most were from the UK, followed by the Netherlands, United States and Canada. I must admit, I've seen lots of Dutch birders in the UK this year! More unusually, we had visitors from Brazil, Papua New Guinea, Taiwan and China.

Apart from trying to provide pages that visitors want, it is also important that the website is clear and readable. Knowing the types of browsers used and the different screen resolutions, means that almost no-one should have difficulties accessing information on the site. While screen resolutions are really high these days, there are still those who have older gear, with smaller screens – we have to cater for them all. It's also important to ensure that the website functions with all the types of browser used, not just Internet Explorer (83% of users). There was in fact 1% who visited the website from their Blackberry!

CBC website visitors arrive from various sources - 55% direct, suggesting they'd previously book-marked the Home or Sightings pages as favourites. Interestingly, 13% of visitors came via Derbyshire Ornithological Society website link - not surprisingly, since they also have an online sightings page for Derbyshire birds. I wonder how many DOS site visitors originated from the CBC site.

Finally, let's have a look at examples of what the visitors came to see during this 6-month period:

- 14,000 hits for the "Latest Sightings" page
- 11,200 hits for the "Home" page
- 2,000 hits for Roger Carrington's excellent "Monthly Bird Notes" page
- 1,000 hits for the "Where is Carsington Water?" page

Such techno-garb may not appeal to everyone, but it is starting to reveal lots of useful information, allowing us to maintain the website, keep it fresh and up-to-date and cater for all visitors' demands and preferences. Thank to all of you who continue to visit www.carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk.

Richard Pittam – Webmaster

NEW TIMES, PLACES REFRESH CLUB WALKS PROGRAMME

Our series of indoor meetings gets under way next month (see "What's On" below) following an enjoyable outdoor programme of walks that was a little more varied than usual in terms of both timings and location.

The first walk, our traditional 'wagtail walk' around Stones Island on 20 April, started at 6pm to make the most of the natural light. We always hope to see passage Yellow and White Wagtails in among the usual Pieds, but this year were out of luck, though the group was treated to a large number of Swallows, Sand and House Martins flying low hawking for insects. There was also a distant view of the Great Northern Diver, which stayed around for several weeks further until developing summer plumage and later, from the Wildlife Centre, Dunlin, Curlew and Common Sandpiper were spotted as dusk settled over the reservoir.

Anyone looking out of the window at the downpour in the early hours of the day of the annual Dawn Chorus walk could be excused for deciding against it – and that was just about everybody! Only two hardy souls – together with three leaders – turned up at 4.30am on 8 May, but they were rewarded by numerous phlegmatic bird species whose enthusiasm was barely dampened by the rain. Breakfast for the humans was, though, cancelled!

There was a rather better turnout when we moved away from Carsington for the evening walk at Coombes Valley, an RSPB reserve near Leek. Again beginning at 6pm, 12 members turned up on 18 May, when woodland species were the main target. Patience was rewarded with good views of a pair of Pied Flycatchers on their final feeding foray of the day, and a fleeting glimpse of one Redstart. Other birds among the 31 species noted that evening included Gt Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Coal Tit and Goldcrest - while a Blackcap and Garden Warbler obligingly sang from neighbouring trees, displaying the difference in their readily confusable songs!

The next test of members' adventurous spirit and flexibility was a morning walk from Millfields car park taking in the dam wall and a footpath below the dam wall, as well as a segment of the reservoir bank. Twelve members gave a thumbs-up to the 9am start, and were rewarded by the sight and sound of 38 species – among them singing Sedge Warbler, two Spotted Flycatchers and a flight of four Grey Herons.

On 20 July, we reverted to a 7pm start for a walk beginning at Sheepwash and taking in a short section of the new perimeter path as well as Paul Stanley/Sheepwash hides. Just six members braved the damp but humid conditions. In this often quiet month, though, they were able to enjoy Chiffchaff, Blackbird and Song Thrush all singing in the woods, plus views from the hides of Tufted Duck and Gt Crested Grebe families, Teal and Pochard among the more numerous Mallards/Tufteds – and a single Yellow-legged Gull polishing off a dead fish.

NEW PARTNERSHIP TO TEACH YOUNGSTERS ABOUT NATURAL WORLD AT CARSINGTON

A three year project in the form of an education partnership between Severn Trent Water and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) has been established with the aim of delivering classroom and outdoor education to up to 5,000 pupils each year.

Severn Trent Water has offered the use and upkeep of the education room, and agreed to provide safe areas for outdoor learning such as pond dipping pools, streams and river surveys and a range of learning resources, while DWT has agreed to fund the education officer and use the resources to offer a leading education centre for use by schools and colleges.

Site manager Ben Young expects the partnership to inspire and educate groups of all ages about the natural world – and our place in it: "I would like to welcome Kathy Clarke who has become the new partnership

education officer, based at Carsington Water. The partnership's prime aim is to run an environmental education programme that will complement our existing activities at the reservoir and DWT's wider work – focusing on water conservation and the environment and wildlife here at Carsington Water and in Derbyshire as a whole."

Kathy will be taking advantage of Carsington Water as a safe as well as stunning location with a wide variety of habitats for children to experience wildlife. She will run various events in the wildlife discovery room in the visitor centre courtyard as well as delivering the education programme to schools, colleges and groups around the region.

Main reception at the Visitor Centre will post more details about the partnerships activity programme – both inside and outside the classroom.

WHAT'S ON

Our first speaker during the 2010-11 series of CBC indoor meetings is Warren Slaney, Head Bailiff for the Haddon Estate, whose radical policy to end a 150-year tradition of fish farming on the estate in favour of the natural creation of wild fish stocks was so successful he won a national award. Many river keepers now aspire to Warren's model that has promoted not just a healthy stock of wild trout along miles of the River Wye as it meanders through the Haddon Estate but also a diversity of birdlife – from Kingfishers and Herons, to Dippers, Wagtails, Barn Owls and raptors – even the occasional Osprey!

Warren addresses the club at Hognaston Village Hall at 7.30pm on 21 September. The remainder of the CBC indoor programme this year, together with various events at Carsington Water, is listed below:

First Sunday of each month	Birdwatching for Beginners (enjoy a gentle two-hour walk led by experienced STW volunteer Dave Bennett)	Meet Visitor Centre 10am
19 September	BBC Radio Derby's Derbyshire Day (a whole day of fun activities - listen out for details)	
19 October	CBC indoor meeting: Talk on wildlife artist Charles Tunnicliffe	Hognaston V/Hall (7.30pm)
23/24 October	RSPB Feed the Birds days (various activities – free for all)	Visitor Centre 10.30am-4pm
29 October	RSPB date with nature children's activity sessions (fun, hands-on education to learn more about wildlife, for 5-12 year olds; charge)	Education Room, Visitor Centre (10.30pm-12.30am)
16 November	CBC indoor meeting: Talk - <i>Farm Birds</i> by Paul Hobson	Hognaston V/Hall (7.30pm)
4/5 December	Christmas at Carsington (a festive weekend for all)	Visitor Centre 10.30am-4pm
20 December	CBC Christmas party	Hognaston V/Hall (7.30pm)

FOOTNOTE: AN APPEAL ...

Sheffield's Tropical Butterfly House, Wildlife and Falconry Centre is keen to hear from anyone interested in joining their team of Public Interpretation Volunteers. The role offers volunteers an opportunity to gain work experience, be part of a team, and learn about the centre's collection of exotic birds, mammals, butterflies and insects.

Volunteers work alongside the centre's wildlife experts and supervise animal areas at busy times. "We are looking for people with an interest in wildlife or animal husbandry experience who can present a friendly, welcoming face and be confident talking to visitors," said head keeper Chrissie Jackson. Call Chrissie on 01909 569416 / 07756 993834 to register interest or for more information.