

# Carsington Bird Club NEWSLETTER



Website: [carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk](http://carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk)

No1 / February 2010

## CHAIRMAN'S THOUGHTS

As I write this it is snowing once more – hopefully winter's last throw despite being only February. If it's been testing our resolve, then it's been a bigger challenge still for the birds. Evidence will probably come from the recently-completed Big Garden Birdwatch, but certainly my 'tiny' garden in Holloway has attracted a bigger variety and greater number of birds this winter than any other in recent times – and you just know they're hungry when eight blackbirds eye up the single garden table with bread on it and await their turn! Jackdaws always come for scraps but even a Rook and Treecreeper turned up this year!

While it's nice to see birds close by, the weather made it difficult to get around to other places, including Carsington, and both John Bradley and I were snowbound on the day we had set aside for the December WeBS count. When we finally carried out the January count the Wigeon seemed already to have gone and small numbers now remain. Roll on Spring!

Among my books, I was recently leafing through the Atlas of Wintering Birds of 1986, and the Atlas of Breeding Birds for 1976 and 1993, and reflected on the fact that even the 'latest' issue was being prepared before Carsington Water existed. Roger Carrington and I have been participating in survey work for a new issue of the Atlas, and have already sent in figures for this area. On publication, I expect it to show what a massive difference Carsington Water has made to the birdlife of mid-Derbyshire. Looking at maps in the 1976 issue, it is extraordinary to see only two Raven breeding sites in the High Peak and Staffordshire borders; compare that with today. And in 1986 there were no wintering Gadwall sites barring two in the north and two in the far south of the county. Now we get dozens of these handsome ducks in the winter months. It's important to do as much survey work as possible for the latest issue – and the comparisons will be worthy of an article when the new Atlas emerges.

We are now well into our 2010 indoor meetings programme, and earlier this month were treated to a fascinating look at wildlife through the eyes of Eddie Hallam (*see later report for a little more on this*). We have just one left before the spring/summer outdoor season gets under way, so can I urge you to attend next month's talk which will be presented by Neil Glenn – a Notts birder, writer of bird guides like *The Best Birdwatching Sites in Norfolk* and a leader of tours to all quarters of the globe. The wildlife of one of these farther-flung spots – the Lower Rio Grande in the US – will be Neil's subject on 16 March (7.30pm). I look forward to seeing you there. And finally, can I remind you that 2010 subscriptions are now due – and a renewal form should also be in the envelope.

## DIVERS PASS THE WORD ON – AND RED-NECKED GREBES GIVE CARSINGTON A TRY!

The freezing weather conditions has prevented much activity from non-water birds, though Barn Owls were seen hunting near the Wildlife Centre and Fishtail Creek, and other highlights have included Crossbill, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll. And before the really bad weather arrived, a Water Pipit – the first winter record and only the fifth ever for Carsington – was viewed on Stones Island on 19 December.

Our seemingly annual pilgrimage by Great Northern Divers has continued this winter, with at least two individuals – often an adult and juvenile – seen regularly since the first arrived on 1 December. This ever-welcome sight was augmented this month with the arrival of two Red-necked Grebes, last seen in 2006.

A Little Egret was a late Christmas present for a number of birders, arriving the day after Boxing Day and staying around until 24 January. The following month, a Jack Snipe was seen near the reed bed in Hopton Arm. Two Bewick's Swans graced the reservoir on 2 December, a day after an Egyptian Goose popped up near both Sheepwash and the Wildlife Centre, and 150 Pink-footed Geese flew east at a low altitude on 8 January.

Coot numbers recorded during a WeBS count in January were well down on the same period last year – 1,424 as against 1,844 in 2009. Other wildfowl maximum counts included 596 Tufted Duck, 232 Pochard, 116 Wigeon, 36 Gadwall, 49 Teal, 20 Goosander, 12 Goldeneye and, respectively, 79 and 50 Little and Great-Crested Grebes. Pintail and Shelduck also featured, while a first-winter female Scaup was sighted in December and January.

Anyone spotting ducks with unusually coloured bills might like to know they are marked this way in France and Spain, generally with numbers added, for identification purposes. During December, a female Teal was seen with a pale green

nasal saddle, proving it had been marked in Normandy, while a pair of Tufted Ducks sporting bright turquoise bills were also noted.

The gull roost has seen peaks of 4,000 Lesser Black-backed, 600 Common and 500 Black-headed in January, with relative rarities including an adult Mediterranean Gull and Ring-billed Gull in December and adult Caspian Gulls in both December and January, when a Kittiwake was also recorded. Meanwhile, an apparently 'resident' flesh-eating Yellow-legged Gull has been witnessed eating Little Grebe and dead fish.

Raptor records have been rather thin on the ground, but Peregrines were seen in both December and January, when one was witnessed mobbing a Buzzard. As many as six Buzzards have been seen in one day in February, when two Ravens were also logged.

## WHAT'S THAT BIRD? ... JACK SNIPE

A Jack Snipe was one of the more unusual sightings at the reservoir in recent months – and arguably a lucky one since these small waders are highly secretive in the winter. Hopton Arm reed bed, where it was spotted in February, is a typical habitat, though, along with other wetland sites such as lagoons, river edges and muddy ditches, where its slim bill probes for insects, earthworms and plant material.

Photo by Glyn Sellors



*Lymnocryptes minimus* is the world's smallest snipe, and actually in a genus of its own, though very similar in many ways to other snipes in the Gallinago family. Jack Snipe has a shorter bill than the Common Snipe, and lacks the central crown stripe of its larger cousin, instead having two pale lateral crown stripes that are separated from the supercilium by an area of dark plumage. Its upper body is mottled brown, pale underneath, and yellow back stripes are clearly visible in flight; its wings are narrow and pointed.

Another difference from its close cousins that may help in identification is that Jack Snipes will keep still until an intruder is only a metre away, then fly low only a short distance when flushed before dropping back into cover, while Common Snipe will fly some distance in a high, zig-zagging flight path.

Jack Snipes are migratory, preferring the tundra/taiga of northern Europe to breed (laying 3-4 eggs in a well-hidden ground nest), but wintering in locations such as the UK and Atlantic coastal Europe and travelling as far as Africa and India. While silent in winter, they are easier to see and hear in the breeding season, with the male performing an aerial courtship display, incorporating a sound like a galloping horse! When feeding, a Jack Snipe has a distinctive bobbing motion, rather like it's attached to a spring!

Groups of snipes have an odd array of collective nouns – including a walk, leash, whisper and volley!

## NEW PLANS FOR OUTDOOR EVENTS

In the 'What's on' section later in this newsletter, you will notice some subtle differences in our spring and early summer outdoors programme. These reflect the experience of the last couple of years, with diminishing numbers of people attending events and signing up for trips, and the demographic shift of the overall membership.

We plan to begin some evening walks a bit earlier, introduce one morning walk (as well as the annual Dawn Chorus walk), stage one walk away from Carsington, and eliminate the August walk altogether, since it's a poor time for birds and, as it's also prime holiday time, few people have historically turned up.

It's a similar picture with club trips. Traditionally, we have undertaken around two each year – usually all-day affairs to far-flung locations involving the hire of large coaches. For the last couple of years filling seats (even enough to break even) has been an increasing struggle, to the point where a trip last year had to be cancelled altogether. This was disappointing – particularly for the 'hard core' of around 15 people that did still want to go, but couldn't because of the economics and inflexibility of booking a large coach.

Though no trips have yet been arranged for 2010, those that are may well prove to be half-day trips, or involve more flexible transport, such as our own cars, mini-buses or community buses (possibly self-driven), to locations nearer at hand ... anything that allows us to keep trips on the diary however many – or few – people want to go.

Please give us feedback (*call the committee, or comment via the 'forum' on the website*) if you have any thoughts on these planned changes.

## **EDDIE HALLAM – A WILDLIFE STAR IN EVERY SENSE**

The amazingly varied life of Eddie Hallam was the entertaining focus of the club's February indoor meeting at Hognaston Village Hall. This remarkable man held his audience in thrall as he used virtually no 'props' (in fact he almost forgot to show the few slides he'd brought along to help illustrate some of his many activities) to describe the central core that wildlife had played in his long, busy and clearly very fulfilling life.

He has been to university twice, gaining degrees in biology and wildlife conservation, he has been assistant curator at Chester Zoo, managed a wildlife collection at Riber Castle, which boasted an exemplary breeding record for various animals – notably his favourite, the Lynx – led numerous wildlife expeditions to all corners of the globe, and is now a wildlife artist who produces stunning and much sought-after studies in bronze. Not only that he owns his own nature reserve near Lea and Cromford Canal, which (partly by keeping human visitors to a minimum) has one of the highest concentrations of grass snakes and dragonfly species in the county.

Earlier, two of the club's committee stepped into the breach to give fascinating illustrated talks to those hardy members who braved the freezing weather conditions to turn out for December and January's indoor meetings. Secretary Paul Hicking's subject was biodiversity, and he explained how elements of nature had interacted over centuries and millennia to produce the world we know today – and the delicate balance required to maintain that world and the mind-boggling animal, vegetable and mineral diversity of the planet. Chairman Peter Gibbon then called on pictures and experiences from a recent trip to some of the most northerly territories of Europe for a look at the wildlife inside the Arctic Circle.

## **WEBSITE SHOWS VALUE IN FACE OF EVER-ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY**

Seems like each year flies by faster than ever: Technology never pauses for breath and the way birdwatchers get their information changes, too. We have pagers, email and text alerts, online alerts, mobile-to-mobile calls, iphone apps, Blackberrys ... you name it, birders have them! However, there is still some good old-fashioned word of mouth news. Against all that pressure, the Carsington Bird Club website still held its own.

Over the year we had almost 63,000 hits on the website. Apart from the UK, visitors came from the US, France, China, Ireland, Spain, India, Malta, South Africa, Australia, Russia, Canada, Malaysia, Italy, Slovenia, Romania, Singapore, Czech Republic, Poland, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Greece, Taiwan, Colombia, Kuwait, Iran, Turkey, Israel and New Zealand.

'Latest Sightings' continues to attract the highest level of traffic (25,000 hits) – thanks go to those who submit sightings online. It's really easy, so why not try it out during 2010. Another success story is Roger Carrington's 'Bird Notes', which saw an increase of 75 per cent (nearly 3,000 hits) in 2009. They are published monthly on the web page for viewing or download, and are available all the way back to 2004.

During 2009 we sought to save on postage with an experiment to see how many members would be prepared to receive their quarterly newsletters as a download from the website. Though the newsletter had been reproduced online for over two years, the new initiative resulted in visits to the 'Newsletter' rise above 3,000, an increase of 75% on 2008. Thanks to all those members who opted to take the electronic newsletter!

Our online 'Definitive Bird' List has been available from the website for some years, but extra features have added to make it more interesting and informative – sorting data to show which birds were at Carsington for the same month the previous year and links revealing more information about individual bird species. It is a valuable resource for teachers wanting to have some information for a school visit, and its popularity was reflected in 2,500 hits in 2009.

Two "static" pages – "What is Carsington Water" and "Where is Carsington Water" – saw a 200% increase in visits. Hopefully all these virtual visitors became real visitors – and maybe led to one or two new members!

The site still tries to provide diverse articles and items to browse: Bird of the Month, UK and World bird news, ads for CBC events, quizzes, items for sale/wanted and links to other websites and holiday destinations. The forum (which is moderated) was quiet in 2009, but hopefully some visitors will find it useful in sharing information or engaging others in debate or conversation. Picture galleries were changed to make it easier for photographers to upload their own images and to review and rate others. There are a few regulars using this facility – so why not upload some of your own images for 2010 [*follow the instructions from the gallery link*].

Site development will continue this year, aiming to keep the content fresh for all visitors – but the important thing to remember is that it is your website and you determine how it grows. So please, if you have anything you wish to submit to the website, we welcome all suggestions. Here's to an exciting 2010!

**Richard Pittam – Webmaster Carsington Bird Club**

## **NEW BRIDLEWAY LINK CREATES SAFER ROUTE FOR CARSINGTON VISITORS**

For more than two years Severn Trent Water has been developing a proposal to create a new link along the Carsington Water bridleway. Currently when visitors come to the two road crossings over the B5035 at the north end of the reservoir,

they could either cross the road and walk through Carsington and Hopton villages or walk alongside the busy B5035. After several near misses were reported along this stretch, and accidents occurred further on up the road, the team at Carsington Water began to plan how it could offer a safe alternative.

Middlemarch Environmental Consultancy was commissioned to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to see what effects on wildlife would result from the creation of a new link to the path along the reservoir side of the B5035.

After a wide-ranging consultation – including detailed surveying with all interested parties such as the Carsington Bird Club, Natural England, RSPB, Derbyshire Dales District Council, Carsington/Hopton Parish Council and the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust – a way forward was found and it was put to planning in July and finally passed in November 2009.

The proposed new pathway is currently under construction using traditional methods and natural materials such as recycled rocks, crushed aggregates and topsoil taken from the site. All these materials will be sourced locally to blend in naturally with the surrounding area and existing paths. The rocks will be used on the steepest slopes of the north shore to stabilise the embankment retaining the new path in a similar way to the rocks used on the reservoir's dam wall. The new track will be screened at several key points as outlined in the EIA report.

Construction began at the beginning of 2010, and major works should be completed by mid March. It is hoped to be open for the summer 2010 season. The new link will offer excellent views of the stunning water and wildlife, and offer a safe and enjoyable alternative to the existing roadside route. The path through the villages will remain an option for visitors preferring that route.

I would like to personally thank members of the Carsington Bird Club committee for their valuable input and support throughout this project. The committee has been instrumental in monitoring the wildlife during work and helping to ensure little to no disturbance takes place to the wildlife at Carsington Water.

**Ben Young - Site Manager, Severn Trent Water**

## WHAT'S ON

The **Bird Club** is now nearing the end of its winter programme of talks at Hognaston Village Hall, and before long will be venturing outside. After one of the coldest spells in recent years, it will be particularly pleasant to feel a little warmth and see and hear the returning summer visitors. This year, recognising the CBC programme of walks has changed very little for several years, there are a few changes (*see earlier article with more detail on the committee's thinking in making these*). Full details up to the middle of the year are as follows:

16 March	Talk by Neil Glenn: ' <i>Valley Parade – the Wildlife of the Lower Rio Grande</i> '	Hognaston Village Hall (7.30pm)
20 April	Evening walk around Stones Island/Wildlife Centre (looking for Meet Visitor Centre 6pm migrants including yellow wagtails)	
8 May	Dawn chorus walk (for early risers – includes breakfast £2.50 p/p)	Meet Visitor Centre 4.30am
18 May	Outing to RSPB Coombes Valley reserve, nr Leek (make own way or speak to committee member with transport request)	Meet at reserve from 6pm
15 June	Morning walk from Millfields car park	Meet 9am

The 2010 activities programme for **Severn Trent Water** and its partner the RSPB has begun busily, with a mixture of regular and special events. Full details are as follows – and please be advised that booking is often essential (c/o 01629 540696).

First Sunday each month	Bird-watching for Beginners (min age 13+, bring boots, binoculars notebook and suitable clothing ... booking advisable)	Visitor Centre (10am-noon)
Each Tuesday and weekend	RSPB/STW 'Date with nature' (access for all, free ... learn about wildlife at Carsington Water; use scopes/binoculars provided)	Wildlife Centre (10.30am-3.30pm)
20 March	World Water Day (find out more about why water is important through various games, activities and competitions)	Visitor Centre (11am-3pm)
28 March	RSPB Future Generations Day (special activities – free)	Visitor Centre (10.30am-4pm)
April/May	Horse and dray rides (weather permitting) during Easter and spring bank holidays	
6-10 April	Easter Egg Hunt (family fun... Cluesheets £2)	Visitor Centre (10am-4.30pm)
9 April	RSPB wildlife watching for children (ages 5-15 ... free)	Wildlife Centre (10.30am-12)
13 April	Wagtail Wander (join volunteer ranger to identify early migrants)	Visitor Centre (6.30-7.30pm)
16 April	Wildlife detectives (partnership event, waterproofs/wellies ... £3)	Visitor Centre (10.30am-12.30)
25 & 30 April	Vistas of Carsington (part of Peak District Outdoor Festival 2010: Join a volunteer ranger on a 6-mile circular walk – free)	Meet Visitor Centre 10.30am
26 April	Beginners photography tuition (£10 – RSPB members £7)	Visitor Centre (10am-1pm)
8 May	Reservoir ramble (part of Peak District Outdoor Festival 2010 - £2)	Meet Visitor Centre 10.30am
22 May	Bat Safari (c/o rangers/Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group - £2.50)	Meet Millfields c/p 8.45pm

**KNOW YOUR COMMITTEE – Here are the club officials and their contact details .....**

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