

Carsington Bird Club NEWSLETTER



Website: carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk

No 2 / May 2009

CHAIRMAN'S THOUGHTS

As I write this in early May, a Great Northern Diver was still popping up around the reservoir. It will already have seen many summer migrants arrive and by now will probably have made its own exit. This period of comings and goings – when changeable weather can send some unusual migrants our way – is possibly the most exciting period for birdwatching at Carsington. Sightings come thick and fast, but don't assume that everyone else makes the effort to record them, so you don't need to ... please keep recording what you see!

It is also the time when members tend to go on holiday most regularly and with the credit crunch, maybe we're beginning to see a trend towards more holidays taken in the UK and less abroad. Passenger numbers at the three major London airports are down, and the recession does seem to be taking effect. Personally, I've experienced the disappointment of trying to book a birdwatching trip to the Arctic with two companies that ultimately had to conclude they simply didn't have enough clients to run them economically.

These are probably two of the best known and most important carriers, one stating the trip was their 'Blue Riband' holiday that had previously run consistently for 17 years. So perhaps the scene is set for more birdwatching 'within these shores' – yet nowhere in the world can offer more opportunities, and more guides to help you find the birds. There is a plethora of books detailing 'Where to watch ...' and 'Best Birdwatching Sites', local ornithological logs (our own excellent annual report included) and information leaflets from reserves covering widely differing birding habitats.

Add to this the latest 'what's about?' information on the internet (or even pagers) and nowhere on the planet can it be easier to find birds than here on our own doorsteps. This, of course, also means more visitors to Derbyshire in general and Carsington in particular so we in turn can help those strangers to our area. All we need is good weather (and I believe this summer's long-range forecast is favourable) to make the most of birding in the UK so much so, in fact, that I've convinced myself and my family to pull out of a holiday to the Algarve and book a week in Scotland and another in Devon! Two different ends of our fantastic country – and, with luck, two good lists!

Peter Gibbon

SUMMER ARRIVALS SWARM INTO CARSINGTON

It's that exciting time of year when early spring weather may blow in just about anything as birds begin their migration journeys, and when the date-stamp comes out to log the earliest arrivals of those birds choosing this area as their summer retreat and, hopefully, breeding ground.

First across this imaginary finish line were Sand Martins on 12 March, the same day the first Chiffchaff was heard (though up to five were singing just three days later). A Wheatear arrived on the 22nd, followed by the first Swallow a day later, and a Blackcap on the 30th.

A Swift lived up to its name by turning up 8 April, a week earlier than the species had ever been logged before at Carsington Water, and beating House Martins to the site by three days. Other April arrivals included Common and Lesser Whitethroats, both recorded on the 19th, a Pied Flycatcher that was heard singing in Hall Wood on the 20th, and a Garden Warbler noted the following day.

Both Rock and Water Pipits were recorded in March on the dam wall, a favourite with White Wagtails, though they also took a liking to Stones Island. A maximum of only eight Yellow Wagtails were seen this year. One of the latest migrants logged was a Cuckoo, noted on 18 May.

By contrast, two Hobbys had turned up earlier than usual on their migration, on April 15, but a Honey Buzzard was perhaps the star raptor turn that month, making only a fleeting visit before being escorted away by two Common Buzzards. Common by name and nature, up to 13 Buzzards were seen in the air at the same time a month earlier, when a pair of Peregrines was also spotted over Hall Wood. Meanwhile, Red Kites – an increasingly regular sight at Carsington – were seen four times during May.

April's wader passage was poor, but a total of six Avocets made up for the lack of variety – though Black-tailed Godwits were seen in both March and April, their Bar-tailed cousin cropped up in April, and a Woodcock was flushed near Paul Stanley Hide in March, when the largest Curlew flock seen numbered 44.

By May, easterly winds brought in Turnstone, Sanderling and Ringed Plover, but this month also saw the final departure of the long-staying Great Northern Divers – by this time in their summer plumage. Two months earlier, they had been joined

by a single Red-throated cousin (divers must be giving Carsington a good travel report!) which gave little chance of views as it stayed just 50 minutes.

May highlights also included the arrival of Spotted Flycatchers and a Mandarin seen regularly at Penn Carr. After a good tern passage, with Common, Arctic, Black and Sandwich varieties all logged, a determined Common Tern remained on the Watersports pontoon having had to watch Black-headed Gulls take over the tern raft. Nevertheless, it again looked unlikely Carsington would be able to claim any tern chicks.

By mid-May breeding was under way elsewhere, however, with five broods of Mallard, two of Moorhen, one, maybe two Oystercatcher broods and one successful Redshank nest all being monitored, along with active nest boxes containing apparently successful Great and Willow Tits.

BIRD IN FOCUS: RED KITE

Milvus Milvus – or Red Kite – was seen several times at Carsington in May, which is a reflection of an astounding conservation success story that brought this beautiful bird of prey back from the brink of extinction in Britain. In the Middle Ages it was one of the commonest birds in towns and villages, and protected by Royal Decree for its value as a scavenger, the refuse collector of its day. Ironically, it is today once again protected by law and, thankfully, seems to be thriving with what's reckoned to be over 1,000 breeding pairs in the UK.

Wales remains this graceful species' main stronghold, but there are growing populations in England – notably in the Chilterns, Yorkshire and Oxfordshire – and in Scotland, mainly in Dumfries and Galloway. Non-breeding kites, though, could be seen just about anywhere – including reservoirs in Derbyshire!

It's been a long road back following a Europe-wide wave of persecution, especially in the late 19th century, as landowners wrongly viewed kites as game-hunting vermin: this saw its extinction in England and Scotland, with just a few pairs remaining in the ancient oakwoods of mid-Wales. Active protection to redress the decline began in 1903 but progress was painfully slow for various reasons.

Apart from persecution (usually poisoning) by gamekeepers, as kites became rarer they became a target for egg collectors and taxidermists. Also, the specific area inhabited by the sparse remaining population had relatively poor food availability – particularly during and after the myxomatosis outbreak that devastated the rabbit population – which in turn resulted in limited breeding success.

Furthermore, genetics were playing a part as it was later proven (by DNA analysis!) that the entire Welsh population was descended from a single female! Consequently, the population did not exceed 20 pairs until the 1960s, but as they spread to new territories at lower altitudes it became clear more productive habitats were behind their accelerated success – and re-introduction programmes began in England and Scotland.

Anyone who has seen this majestic bird in flight will agree that the programme has enriched our natural environment ... those that have not should head for Wales, or the M40 that runs through the Chilterns, or Yorkshire's Harewood estate, or the Galloway Kite Trail in Scotland. It would be well worth it!

DANNY ANSWERS ARCTIC CALL ... BUT BIRDS KINDLY STAY PUT AT CARSINGTON!

Prizewinning photographer Danny Green should have given the last indoor talk in March but at the last minute had to step in for a business partner as guide for a trip to the Arctic. Apologies to those who turned up especially to see him, but it could not be helped. Instead, CBC Chairman Peter Gibbon stepped into the breach with a talk on a trip to Shetland/Fair Isle. Some of the audience had been there and one couple had a son living on the most northerly Shetland isle, so there was plenty of interest in the striking scenery and huge birding interest of this remote corner of Britain. When the indoor meetings begin again in September, the subject will take us even further, to the most famous wildlife islands of all, the Galapagos.

So to the big outdoors nearer to home – and those attending the first summer walk on 21 April had fresh, dry conditions and found there was more insect life than birds on display on and around Stones Island – though two of the long-staying Great Northern Divers were seen clearly along with a single Shelduck. Yellow Wagtails are often a feature of this walk, but only Pied showed themselves this time, while summer migrants included House and Sand Martins and Swallows in good numbers. Little Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Redshank and Curlew were also on view, and a Snipe and Common Tern were seen by some.

The Dawn Chorus walk, braved by 16 club members prepared to rise in the middle of the night to make a 4.30am start, brought the usual early spring arrivals – including Chiffchaff, Garden and Willow Warblers, Blackcap and Whitethroat – plus an excellent view of an early-morning fox trying his luck on the shore just opposite the Wildlife Centre. Whimbrel and Dunlin were among the waders spotted over breakfast in the centre.

May's walk, from Millfields, is commonly called the 'warbler walk' and it lived up to its name though again it was another species that was the real star when a Tawny Owl was spotted being mobbed by four smaller birds – a Blackbird, Wren, Long-tail Tit and Willow Tit.

FINAL MONTH TO SUBMIT THOSE PRIZE-WINNING PHOTOS!

May heralded the start of 'Compose Carsington' - a nature photography competition to highlight the beauty of the reservoir and its wildlife. As we enter June any competitors have only a few weeks left to submit their entries.

The competition is open to amateurs as well as professionals so don't waste any time getting out and about to find those winning shots. Knowledge of the area will definitely be a huge advantage to entrants who know where to find the most popular spots for wildlife.

There are a number of exciting prizes being awarded in several categories, and judging will take place soon after the competition closes on 30 June. Our star judge, Ben Osborne, will be casting his eye over the entrants to help pick the best of the best. His spellbinding shot that won the 2007 Wildlife Photographer of the Year award was a rich mixture of movement and abstract composition so bear this in mind for the water category.

Project assistant Michaela Hancock and I are also planning some photographic tuition workshops to complement the competition. Keep an eye out for these in order to pick up some tips for any late entries to the competition. I'd one again like to thank the Carsington Bird Club for their generous donations to the prize-list and wish any entrants the best of luck. All the details are on www.rspb.org.uk/composecarsington

Chris Johnstone - *Aren't Birds Brilliant!* Project Officer

VOLUNTEERING PROVIDES TWO-WAY BENEFITS

Severn Trent Water's band of volunteers do, we hope, get fulfilment from the activities they are able to undertake for us at Carsington, and certainly it's a two-way street for us as the volunteer rangers play an invaluable role in helping to maintain and develop all of our public access sites. In 2008, 649 duties (totalling 3,205 hours) were performed by STW volunteers at our sister Derbyshire reservoirs - Carsington Water and Ogston.

In July 2008 we began recording and compiling data to assess the financial savings that volunteer rangers help Severn Trent Water to achieve, and in the succeeding six months the volunteer rangers' time amounted to an equivalent value of £10,941. That's almost £ 2,000 per month, or £60 every day – valuable in every sense.

Rangers carry out a number of important tasks at our sites including conservation work and site maintenance/improvements to assisting at special events and open days. Conservation takes in the widest range of activity – from woodland and island work, and grassland management to collecting seeds and building objects as varied as bird feeders, hedgehog boxes and dry-stone-walls. Volunteers are involved in vital maintenance tasks such as erosion control, vegetation control and dead hedging, and maintaining the miles of track around the site.

As well as helping out with open days, and serving as well-informed guides on wildlife walks (not forgetting the twice-weekly duties alongside the RSPB project officers managing the *Aren't Birds Brilliant!* initiative), volunteers even found time to raise some charity cash themselves – by staging a car wash in aid of Children in Need. Yes, variety truly is the spice of life for the Carsington volunteer ranger.

Rose Day, STW Ranger

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The club has had a number of new members over the last several months. We hope they are enjoying the outdoor activities at such an excellent 'home' venue, will join some of the club's forthcoming coach trips and will enjoy the fabulous insight into the natural world we get from local speakers during our winter indoor season.

Those new members for 2008/09 include: Kay Billings, Quarndon; S Daffin and S Mason, Chesterfield; Roger Jaques of Somercotes; David and Sue Edmonds, Ashbourne; Don Newing, Belper; Bill Samson, Matlock; Ed Whiting of Cheddleton in Staffs; Peter Wright, Darley Dale and S Wright of Mansfield ... Welcome one and all!

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

Chairman & Treasurer	Peter Gibbon	01629 534173	chairman@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk
Secretary	Paul Hicking	01773 827727	secretary@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk
Recorder	Roger Carrington	01629 583816	recorder@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk
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Outdoor trips organiser	Peter Oldfield	01629 540510	trips@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk
Ex-officio	Steph Hicking	01773 827727	secretary@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk
Membership secretaries	Maria Harwood and Pat Wain	01629 823693 01629 824748	membership@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk membership2@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk
The website address:	www.carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk		webmaster@carsingtonbirdclub.co.uk

WHAT'S ON

The **Bird Club** summer programme continues with a series of outdoor walks, together with a coach trip to Bempton Cliffs on 6 June. Paul and Steph Hicking will once again lead a trip to Clumber Park for some highly satisfying Nightjar spotting. Some members may have logged the possibility of a boat trip on the Wash in the autumn, but that will not now be going ahead; instead, the wildfowl wonders of Slimbridge will be the next target (*see cut-off form below*). The full list of CBC-run events is as follows:

6 June	Coach trip to RSPB Bempton Cliffs reserve, Yorkshire	Leave Visitor Centre 7.45am
16 June	Guided evening walk for club members	Sheepwash car park 7.30pm
21 July	Nightjar walk at Clumber Park (own transport if possible)	National Trust car park (8pm)

28 July	Committee meeting	Visitor Centre (8pm)
18 August	Final guided evening walk of the summer	Visitor Centre (7pm)

Meanwhile, **Severn Trent Water** has a number of regular activities plus a few 'one-offs', including one that will particularly appeal to bird-lovers – a birds of prey family fun day on 5 July. And remember, booking is often essential (c/o 01629 540696). The full STW events programme is as follows:

Each Tuesday and Sunday	<i>Aren't birds brilliant!</i> at Carsington Water: Learn about the site's exciting wildlife; just turn up and use the scopes/bins provided	Wildlife Centre (10.30am-3.30pm)
First Sunday each month	Birdwatching for Beginners (booking highly advisable; bring boots, suitable clothing, binoculars and notebook)	Visitor Centre (10am-noon)
6 / 20 June	Introduction to fly-fishing: chargeable tuition - to book call 540478 (minimum age 10)	Two sessions: 9.30am-12.30 and 2-5pm 01629
7 June	<i>Aren't Birds Brilliant!</i> family fun day (RSPB partnership event - various activities, some chargeable)	Visitor Centre (10.30am-4pm) and Wildlife Centre
	Marvellous moths: see some of the UK's 4,000 species	Meet Wildlife Centre 10.30am
4 / 18 July	Introduction to fly-fishing (<i>for full details see previous entry above</i>)	
5 July	Birds of Prey family fun day (partnership event; £2 per child for various activities with funds going to RSPB's Birds of Prey appeal)	Visitor Centre (10.30am-4pm)
22 August	Bat Safari: evening walk with rangers/county Bat Conservation Group (min age 6, stout shoes and torches – £2.50; booking essential)	Millfields car park 7.45pm



COACH TRIP – WWT SLIMBRIDGE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 14 November 2009

This large Gloucestershire reserve is HQ to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, set up by natural world guru and artist Sir Peter Scott in 1946. There are numerous hides, an observatory, a tropical house, and a range of facilities. Slimbridge is much more than simply a bird reserve, being home to research projects on bird population dynamics, behaviour and ecology, and there are exhibitions and galleries reflecting this. Up to 30,000 wetland birds flock to Slimbridge each autumn/winter, enjoying the rich reedbed, salt marsh, freshwater and mudflat habitats that exist or have been developed there. Slimbridge was originally chosen because it attracted Britain's largest wintering flock of White-fronted Geese; this is still the case with thousands visiting each year from October. Several hundred Bewick Swans is another highlight, together with floodlit feeding sessions to end each day between autumn and spring. As well as a wide range of wildfowl, the reserve also regularly throws up specialities such as Kingfisher and Peregrine.

The coach will leave from Carsington Water Visitor Centre at 7.45am.

The cost is £15.00 per adult (children under 16 go free) – to be paid when booking, please – and note that there may well be an additional entry fee for non-WWT members.

I/we would like to attend this trip. Please reserve the following number of seats:

Adults

Children

Name Address

Tel No e-mail

I enclose a cheque (payable to Carsington Bird Club) / postal order for £

Please return the slip with payment by 30 October to: Peter Oldfield, Owslow Farm, Carsington, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 4DD. If you have any further queries on this trip call Peter on 01629 540510.