



BRACKNELL DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

**SPRING
NEWSLETTER
2011**
– ISSUE 87 –

WINTER WEATHER ATTRACTS UNUSUAL VISITORS TO BERKSHIRE

A few years ago, the sighting of a Bittern in Berkshire would have been highly unusual, but in the past year or two it has become almost commonplace. In 2010 and 2011, in the months between October and March, they have been regularly observed at Dinton Pastures, Lavell's Lake, Dorney Wetlands on the Jubilee River and Woolhampton Gravel Pit. This winter, sightings have been reported from other locations, including Moor Green Lakes, Wraysbury Gravel Pits, the Kennet and Avon Canal, and a pond at Bradfield College.

The exceptionally cold weather in December 2010 brought some other very interesting wildlife records, not just in Bracknell, but elsewhere closeby. David Lloyd recounts the saga of the Waxwings, so I will not repeat that. Extraordinarily, West Berkshire laid claim to three very rare visitors, all within some six miles of each other. A Glossy Ibis frequented Freeman's Marsh, Hungerford from 9 December 2010 to 14 January 2011, and afforded birdwatchers and photographers great close-up views. "Birds of Berkshire", published 1996, records only one previous occasion when this species was seen in Berkshire. That was back in 1793, when a male was shot a few miles from Reading, whilst flying over the Thames, accompanied by a female. The River Lambourne, and the surrounding fields, in the village of Great Shefford, was the home for a Great White Egret from 21 December 2010 to 11 January 2011. This is the first county record for this species and it does not even get a mention in "Birds of Berkshire". The third species, the Dipper, is described in "Birds of Berkshire" as a scarce vagrant. Between 1951 and 1994, there were 12 records of this species in Berkshire over the 44 year period. From 23 December to 21 January 2011, one could be seen on the River Lambourne at Welford.

For a week in October 2010, a Great Grey Shrike was present in the Borough at Wishmoor Bottom. The bird probably moved into Surrey, as during December 2010 and January 2011, there were records of this species at two sites in the county.

On the dragonfly front, there was an extraordinary record from Pembrokeshire. In the UK the extremes of the flying period for dragonflies and damselflies is between mid April and early December. However, on 11 January 2011, a dead female Vagrant Emperor was found on the coastal path near St Davids. It is difficult to explain how the dragonfly got there. When and where did it emerge? Considering the weather, it is amazing that this southern European species survived to reach Wales.

John Ward-Smith

DIARY

WORK PARTIES

For details of the Group's work parties please contact Peter Knipe
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BRACKNELL FOREST NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

(www.bfnathistsoc.org)
South Hill Park, 7.30 pm

21 February
Lundy

by David Rowe

21 March
Natural Quarries
by David Boag

18 April
The Galapagos Islands
by John Britten

BBOWT EVENTS

At King Edwards Hall,
North Ascot SL5 8PD
7:45 – 10pm

Please check for details at
(www.bbowt.org.uk)

18 March
British Amphibians and
Reptiles
by Mike Preston

15 April
Wild Flowers in the
Chilterns
by Brenda Harold

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE

Subscription rates are as
follows:

Family £5; Ordinary £3:
Senior Citizens & Unwaged
£2 and Groups £10

Please send to:
Barbara Jerome,
98 Uffington Drive,
Harmans Water RG12 9JD

Comments on BFC Site Allocation DPD Document

Newsletter 84, Summer 2010, set out the submission I made, on behalf of the Group, relating to the above Consultation Document. I expressed particular concerns over three sites that had been put forward as possible sites for future development. As a result of the consultation process, in November 2010, the local authority published Part 2, Preferred Options. It was pleasing to see that one of the sites about which we were concerned – Land at Bog Lane, New Forest Ride - was not on the list of preferred options. However, two other sites- Land at Transport Research Laboratory, Crowthorne and Broadmoor Hospital, Crowthorne, remained on the list of options. On behalf of the group, I submitted a second response, as follows:

“Table 24, Site scores, demonstrates just how deeply flawed is the weighting methodology employed to prioritise development sites in the Borough. Policy SA13 places a responsibility on the Borough not only to conserve but also to enhance its biodiversity. The Borough is responsible for the stewardship of wildlife sites of international importance. The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area is a European designation recognising the importance of the local heathland areas. An important additional consideration is that wildlife areas should not be fragmented but should be managed at the landscape level. Yet in Table 24, in proposing areas for development, the Transport Research Laboratory is listed first and Broadmoor is listed fourth. This is absurd. It is a consequence of the fact that the policy on biodiversity is not given the serious consideration it deserves. The Transport Research Laboratory was built on a former heathland site and is adjacent to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The Borough has an opportunity to enhance biodiversity by reverting much of the site to heathland. Only a minimum of development should be allowed there. Broadmoor Farm is important for wildlife in its own right. It also provides an essential wildlife corridor linking Wildmoor Heath Nature Reserve with Crowthorne Wood and Swinley Forest. The ponds at Butter Bottom are very important for dragonflies. The Brilliant Emerald, a nationally important species and Bracknell Forest BAP species is resident there. Only a minimum of development around the hospital should be allowed. The Borough is asked urgently to review its weighting methodology. A very high weighting should be allocated to matters recognised as of international importance, as compared to other matters of national, regional or local importance.”

John Ward-Smith

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS TO
THIS NEWSLETTER ARE NOT NECESSARILY
THOSE OF THE EDITOR OR THE BRACKNELL
DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

Peter Williams RIP

At Christmas time, we received the very sad news from Margaret Williams that Peter had passed away on 4th December 2010. Peter's health had apparently been declining for some time. Those members involved in the early days of the Group will remember Peter and Margaret with great affection. From 1989, when the Group was formed, right up to July 2000, when they moved to Aldeburgh, Suffolk they worked tirelessly on behalf of the Group. For most of that period, Peter was Treasurer and Membership Secretary and Margaret was Secretary. But at other times and while the Group was still finding its feet, they stepped into any gap, and were variously involved in compiling, printing, copying and distributing the Newsletter, as well as involving themselves in local habitat surveys.

Words seem inadequate at a time like this. However, I have written to Margaret on behalf of all members who were fortunate to know them, to express our condolences to her on the grievous loss of Peter. Margaret has written to say that she is receiving strong support and friendship from the folks in Suffolk. Over the years, Peter and Margaret had themselves dispensed much kindness to those around them, so it is good to know that such kindnesses are being returned to Margaret.

John Ward-Smith

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David Lloyd's Nature Notes

We have come through the exceptionally cold weather of late November and the second half of December, and, as I write, it is now halfway through January. We have had nearly a week of very mild weather and I have just strolled round the local roadsides and hedgerows and am amazed at how much plant growth there is showing already, annuals mainly, but some perennials and not including the likes of Ivy and Bramble. Of these, Daisy is flowering, the rest just greenery. Celandine, Wild Carrot, Ground Ivy, Wild Arum, Nettle, Red Dead-Nettle, Herb Robert, Cleavers, Common Sorrel, Buttercup, Garlic Mustard, Foxglove, Dandelion, Ground Elder, Green Alkanet. Hazel catkins are growing fast too.

The return of the Waxwings in abundance after a gap of six years is a real treat. Probably due to food shortages in Scandinavia, the birds were soon in the British Isles. Forest Park, where they first came in hundreds in January 2005, this winter were seeing the birds as early as November 6th. They stayed around till about December 18th just before the snow came, in Forest Park, Birch Hill and Great Hollands.. They returned in strength and have been around the 200 mark from 10th January onwards, shuttling to and from Sainsbury's car park off Bagshot Road, to Forest Park, Crown Wood, probably roosting in the woods. I saw the Waxwings on January 15th gathered in the trees bordering Sainsbury's, near the recycling bins, and dropping to feed on berried shrubs right on the roadside at the roundabout junction on the Bagshot Road. I guess there were about 200 birds, and indeed there was so much activity, fast flight for a short while, feeding followed by resting up in the trees, with a continual trilling of their voices. They seem quite used to the noise and proximity of traffic and people around them. A real treat!

In 2005, Bracknell had much the largest share of Waxwing activity in the county. This year, while we have seen larger numbers than in 2005, other areas have also benefited from more activity in their areas, with the largest numbers probably in Winnersh and Whiteknights, Reading. Other counties bordering Berkshire will also have had their share of the Waxwing invasion.

During the 10 days or so of lying snow over Christmas I made several visits to Lily Hill Park, as walking in many local areas was not easy. You could see the molehills appearing black through the snow on the main grass areas below the house, so how deep did the frost penetrate and how easy did the moles find their digging? Once the thaw came, the rate of digging and raising

new molehills increased dramatically. The moles are so very active, needing food to keep themselves going. This week there have been vixens making themselves heard at night, which can be rather alarming if one is woken suddenly by the noise. Another sign Spring is on the way is Robins singing again early long before daylight.

In earlier editions of the Newsletter I have mentioned the rapid increase in a disease attacking trees. The sudden oak death arrived nearly ten years ago from America by way of imported plants. It had decimated oak tree populations over there. Over here the fungus, known as *phytophthora ramorum* attacks rhododendron and Japanese larch trees. This has rapidly taken a hold on woodlands in the west of the country including 120 Forestry Commission sites, 20 National Trust properties and two Woodland Trust areas. They have now felled or marked for felling some 4 million trees. The rate of felling may increase with warmer, wetter conditions likely to follow climate change as this encourages the disease to spread. There is little or no compensation for landowners and no demand for the timber because of oversupply. There is no known antidote or cure for the disease. It could mean the Japanese larch tree being eradicated in the South West. Our tree population is affected by other diseases, acute oak decline is killing oaks and chestnut trees are badly affected by infections spread by moths.

Climate and weather feature in every-day topics and this winter it has affected us badly with extremely low temperatures and heavy snow, particularly further north in the country. Some of the extreme weather makes us forget that it is all part of the normal weather patterns. Last year may have been the coldest, overall, since 1986, but 14 years were colder during the 20th century and even more in the two preceding centuries. 2006 was the warmest year overall of the past 10 years, but the difference between the mean temperature of 2006 and 2010 was much smaller than the difference recorded in other earlier examples. The experts in the recording of British weather assure us that we are within normally expected bounds. Having said that the figures just out for 2010 for the world as a whole state that 2010 was equally as hot as 2005, above the averages for the 20th century when looking at land and sea temperatures. The Earth's temperature has now exceeded the 20th century average for the past 34 consecutive years. All part of the global warming trend which appears to be inexorably upwards.

Finally, may I point to a first-rate article "Winds of Change" in the online Planet Earth outlining the oscillations in the jet stream that affect our weather and why sometimes it all comes to a full stop and gives us the Arctic weather conditions of December. Possibly a small contributor to global warming but not caused by it, something which still has to be discovered by scientists in the years to come. The link is <http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/tools/elink.aspx?m=110124&c=2&id=881>

BRACKNELL DISTRICT URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

Bracknell, together with the surrounding villages of Binfield, Warfield, Winkfield, Crowthorne and Sandhurst, is an area subject to substantial development pressures. Yet, if we want it, wild plants and animals can survive and flourish in our gardens, roadsides, parks and open spaces. We believe the presence of this wildlife enhances the quality of our environment.

What do we do?

- discover what wildlife there is and where it is, and how best to encourage it
- press for recognition of its value
- watch out for threats it might face

How do we work?

- by surveying the wildlife in the area covered by Bracknell Forest Borough Council
- by undertaking and advising on practical management of open spaces for the benefit of wildlife
- by running projects on particular plants and animals
- by holding regular open meetings, occasionally indoors but usually at outdoor sites

We are affiliated to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and to the Bracknell Council for Voluntary Service (BCVS). We also work with other local conservation groups and have the active support of English Nature and our local wildlife trust: the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

FROM THE EDITOR

Please can I have your contributions to the next newsletter by Saturday April 23rd. All articles on our local wildlife and habitats will be very welcome.

Please send to: David Rowe,
34 East Stratton Close, Bracknell, RG12 0XY

CHRISTMAS ON LUNDY – David Rowe

Welcomed by the worst winter weather in North Devon since 1963, it was a unique experience to see the island covered with snow. At worst the night's fall usually disappears by lunch time; this had been around for three days. Within a few minutes of our arrival a Snipe was seen from the Tavern window searching in the tussocks hoping for easier pickings than on the mainland, but during this mini-ice age food was scarce everywhere. We saw a dead thrush, blackbird and lapwing, literally having starved to death.

We were later to learn that in those first few days there were over 150 Snipe visiting Lundy and also a high number of Lapwings plus a few Woodcock. Even a Wood Pigeon popped over to seek its fortune - a rarity for Lundy. Raptors were the only birds not appearing to suffer, and evidence of Peregrine kills were numerous. There were also a few sightings of Merlin and Kestrel plus an unconfirmed Sooty shearwater. A water rail living in a pool by our cottage - rarely seen, although we could hear its cry at regular intervals at dusk and early in the morning.

On Christmas day we saw two Great northern divers in the Landing Bay. Up to five were seen over the next few days along with Great Crested Grebe and Teal feeding on the open water.

During a stroll up the east side last year we found a very lively Pygmy Shrew - the island's only native mammal. This year the only mammals present were a herd of 'wild goats' - so wild they wander over for a look. More elusive are the Sika Deer - only a favourable wind and good stalking skills will allow close observation.

Towards the north-eastern corner of the island where you can descend close to the sea at Brazen Ward we had excellent views of Grey Seals. They provided a good hour's entertainment. The island has around 70 resident seals.

By the time we departed the snow had gone and the temperature had warmed up so that thankfully the birds could catch up on feeding to prepare them for the next cold spell.



PYGMY SHREW

'WILD' GOATS

