

**The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home**

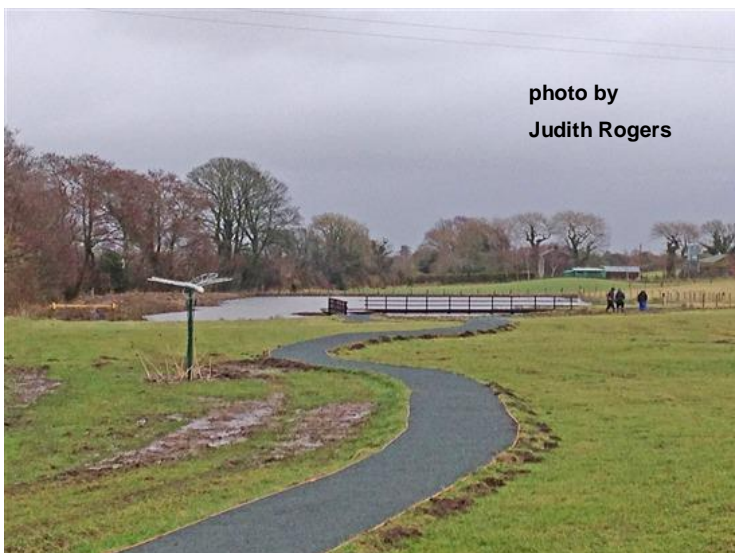
April 2015

## News from Campfield

Avid readers of the newsletter will recall from the last issue that following the opening of the visitor centre at Campfield last year, new access routes were being constructed and nearing completion. The new pathways and 'Family Discovery Zone' are due to be opened on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March to encourage more people, including families with children, to get out and enjoy nature on the reserve.

Adjacent to the car park is a new accessible area designed by the children of Bowness on Solway Primary School. The Discovery Zone includes a large new pond, complete with dipping platform and equipment, wildflower meadows, bug hotel and bug hunting areas, bird feeding station, picnic area, dragonfly and newt sculptures, a children's 'badger sett' and a troll bridge!

The area is designed for use by both visiting families and organised school and youth groups, which are now possible following the completion of the visitor centre classroom and toilets last year.



Beyond this, new paths have been installed to allow a 1.5 mile circular walk around the farmland via the hide, or a 2.5 mile circular walk around the peat bog on boardwalk.

Families following the trails will have their own 'Tale Trail' leaflet, guiding them around the reserve as Elmo the Peewit introduces them to the wildlife and activities at Campfield. The leaflets have been designed and written by Anja Phoenix, who has produced similar trails for a variety of sites around Cumbria. The stories cleverly involve children with nature in a fun way, something which is essential if nature conservation is to thrive in the next generation.

In addition to visitor access improvements, much habitat work has been undertaken on the Rogersceugh area of the reserve. Around the edge of the drumlin, where the once improved farmland meets the peat bog,

a series of dozens of shallow scrapes have been created which have lowered the ground surface, encouraging more prolonged flooding while removing the nutrient rich grass layer from the top. This should encourage the spread of bog mosses and other wetland vegetation, taking away the harsh edge of the farmland and provide valuable habitat for breeding snipe and curlew.

The 28<sup>th</sup> March Open Day will consist primarily of a series of guided walks and introducing visitors to the new resources. This may involve pond dipping sessions, den building or bug hunting! Everyone is welcome to come along during the day, either to help out or simply to sample the new walks!

Dave Blackledge  
Warden, Cumbria Coast Reserves

outwards at birds and the wider natural world. Our outings provide exercise while walking round reserves, sharing the spotting of birds, a look through someone else's telescope, a quick lesson on how to tell a Greater Black Backed Gull from a Lesser when you only have one and cannot compare sizes (it's the legs – Greater are pink; Lesser have all the Ls and are yeLLow!). Being a volunteer obviously involves giving, but is so much more than that.

So, in 2015, keep up your membership of the West Cumbria Group. It ticks all the boxes for increased well-being.

Sandra Shaw

## Well-Being

Last autumn, I found myself in a couple of conversations in which friends were saying, either of themselves or others, that our RSPB group had saved their lives. Allowing for a bit of hyperbole, I think they were meaning that it had filled a gap in their lives, or given them a purpose; something to live for that they might otherwise have struggled to find. This set me thinking.

Some years ago I had stumbled on a paragraph about well-being in a National Trust magazine. It obviously struck a chord as it is pinned to the noticeboard by my desk, now rather yellowed and curling at the edges.

That article pointed out that research recently carried out by the New Economics Foundation had found that well-being combined five factors -

- Good relationships with friends and family
- Physical activity, particularly outside
- Alertness to the world around
- Continued learning of a skill
- Altruism

The article pointed to the National Trust as a vehicle for providing all these factors. Soon after having these thoughts, Saga magazine published an article on the same subject, linking it to self-help and improved mental health. In the intervening period, the five factors have become punchier and are now

- Connect
- Be active
- Keep learning
- Give to others
- Take notice

If the National Trust is a vehicle for these, how much more so is the RSPB, particularly our local group where friendships are made and grown. Our talks keep us learning and encourage us to look



greater black backed gull RSPB images



lesser black backed gull RSPB images

## Time for a Change

The time has come for me to retire as leader of the West Cumbria Group. I've been leader for 5 years now, and for 10 years I was Membership Secretary and unofficial general assistant (dogsbody!) to Neil when he was Leader. Before that a spell as Treasurer. So it certainly is time for a change.

It's been a wonderful experience to lead this brilliant group and I've had so much support from a great committee and Norman and Dave at Campfield. I have learnt such a lot. Neil joins with me in saying that joining the West Cumbria Group nearly 30 years ago was one of the best things we've done. Involvement in the Group and through that our involvement with Campfield reserve has enriched our lives.

I hope we will still be working at Campfield for many years to come and we will continue to support the Group in any way we can. We have both been persuaded to remain on the committee for the time being.

Many RSPB Groups struggle to find a new leader, but I am delighted to say that David Smith has agreed to become the new West Cumbria Group Leader. He has the support of the committee and I have every confidence that he will be an excellent Leader.

Marjorie Hutchin

## Extraordinary Days in Norfolk Chapter 2

It's early! It's only 7.30 and we're already on our way. We are heading off down into Breckland (or the Brecks as the locals here in Norfolk say) to see what we can add to our magnificent total of 96 birds from day 1. It's already sunny and the temperature is edging upwards – could be even hotter than yesterday.

Our first port of call is to be Great Cressingham where Chris is reasonably confident he knows where there will be stone curlew – a strange goggle-eyed bird. We are soon up to 97 when a flock of rooks is seen feeding on a roundabout on the outskirts of Kings Lynn.

One of the group turns on his pager and announces a reported golden oriole at Titchwell – only heard and not seen. I would love to see one of those – it would be a lifer for me - but not today. We have other birds to see today.



stone curlew RSPB images

And so to Great Cressingham where we were really out in the Norfolk countryside. Lots of arable fields and a pig farm. Chris has seen stone curlews in amongst the pigs in years gone by, but not today – just a multitude of corvids and starlings. Walking quietly (or as quietly as a group can) back up the road, we firstly hear and then see our only tree sparrow of the day. It very obligingly flew down into the road just ahead of us, hopped along for a few seconds and then disappeared into

the tree tops never to be seen again. And so to the field where Chris has seen stone curlew in the last couple of weeks. It doesn't look promising when we find the field has been ploughed – but thank goodness the stone curlew's nest had been left undisturbed. It was a very tight space but at least it was an undisturbed space and, yes, stone curlew was there. Both adults were to be seen, but they were clearly nervous and we soon beat a hasty retreat to leave them in peace.

Our next stop is Lynford Arboretum where we spent a very pleasant and productive couple of hours. Owned by the Forestry Commission, Lynford Arboretum is a beautiful and popular place for quiet recreation and peaceful walks that holds quite a variety of bird life. We were soon treated to views of at least 12 crossbills (that's species number 100 for the group!) flying to and from a pool of water behind a rather large gate that was difficult to see round. Suddenly, we were watching a spotted flycatcher up in the trees – and then there were two – and then three (and we saw a fourth later) – marvellous! Walking through the Arboretum, we had good views of garden warbler; goldcrest and firecrest; nuthatch; treecreeper; marsh and coal tits (although I "dipped" on this last bird); siskin; great spotted woodpecker; and on one of the pools a lovely little grebe.

A few miles further down the road and we were soon walking round another Forestry Commission area at Santon Downham. We were looking specifically for tree pipit and woodlark, and we were lucky enough to have good views of both, singing away to their hearts' content. As if that wasn't enough, we also saw gorgeous yellowhammers and stonechats and heard green woodpecker.

On our way to Lakenheath, I was the only one who did NOT see the grey wagtail. Despite lengthy (and complicated – and conflicting) directions from others in the minibus, I just could NOT see it at all!

By now it was getting pretty hot, and so our lunch stop at Lakenheath was very welcome. Our first new bird was a drake garganey, albeit at a distance (we were treated to magnificent views of another drake garganey the following day at Cley). Almost at the watch point - we had already added jay to our list – and we were lucky enough to find two common cranes feeding out in the open. Over the next hour we were in for a real treat! We had up to four bitterns flying around together, with one flight lasting several minutes, as well as at least ten hobbies and twelve marsh harriers! Wonderful! And we heard water rail into the bargain.

The day was not yet over. Most of us had a little nap on the way back to the B and B in Hunstanton where we had a quick freshen up before heading out again for a pleasant early evening meal – and

then it was off again for owls and nightjars. Unfortunately, the owls were not playing ball and we did not see a single one (we were hoping for tawny, barn and little). The rest of the evening at Dersingham Bog (not far from Sandringham) was much more successful. We managed to see in the dusk four male nightjars performing very well and a couple of woodcock flying over, and heard four grasshopper warblers reeling away in the scrub.

A very happy and contented band returned to the B and B at about 11 o'clock after a very long day that added another 29 species to the group's list – that's 125 in two days! Not bad, eh! And, no, there were no other reports at all from Titchwell about a golden oriole!

It's day 3 – our final day and the excitement is building. Chris had told us the previous evening that his highest ever total for a 3 day trip was 134 species. We were up to 125 so could we beat his record? It was going to be hot and sunny again – yesterday, radio reports said that Santon Downham where we had been hunting for woodlark and tree pipit in the heat of the day had been the hottest place in the UK!

Today was to be our most leisurely day and we started off at Holkham. Was that a peregrine flying over that field? Chris was driving and didn't see it so now we will never know. At Holkham, there were distant views of a lot of birds including amongst all the little egrets and cormorants a spoonbill flying through. In comparison to the birds around it, it was huge! There were also several late pink-footed geese present, as well as Egyptian geese and about 30 curlews. That's 129 already!

On to Cley, where from Bishops Hide we added curlew sandpiper to the list. Walking towards the shore and the west bank, a raptor flying high proved to be an osprey. There were numerous other birds around, but it wasn't until we visited the north scrape that we added something else to the list when four ruff were seen.

After a very leisurely lunch, we checked Simmonds and Pat's Pools and found two little stints. 133! Eureka! There's a pintail. 134. But you can't count that – it's got rings on its legs and it escaped from a reserve just down the road when we had that tidal surge just a few months ago. Drat! Back to 133. But you can count that pintail over in the far corner. That's a proper wild bird. We've equalled Chris' record. And we are going to beat Chris' record because he knows where we are certain to see a red kite. Strange how two brilliant days of birdwatching have turned into a third day when it seems to be a race to try and beat a record!

We broke off in the real heat of the day for ice creams, and then it was on to a raptor watch point for a pleasant and reasonably successful hour. There were several buzzards, a number of marsh harriers, two sparrowhawks and a kestrel. The promised red kite stayed stubbornly out of sight. Ah well, you can't win 'em all!

John Lapraik



sparrowhawk  
M Hutchin

## Beached Bird Survey

This year the beached bird survey fell on the weekend of 21<sup>st</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and a week either side of these dates.

The forecast was good for Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> so I decided to take advantage of the weather and went to do my section, Beckfoot to Silloth, on that day. We arrived about 1 hour after the tide had turned so birds were still at roost on the shore. It was quite windy but the sun was warm and both wind and sun were at my back – it was a lovely walk with just a few wings, not like last year when dozens of Auks (razorbills and guillemots) had been washed up due to the winter storms; probably most of them had starved.

The only complete dead bird (almost – the soft parts had been eaten) was a Pinkfooted Goose quite close to Silloth. Some distance before finding it I flushed a Pinkfoot which flew off over the Solway; had these 2 become detached from the flock? Was one waiting for its dead mate? These birds do mate for life.

Apart from this there were lots of waders – carpets of Oystercatchers, at least a hundred Sanderlings and Golden Plovers, several Turnstones and Ringed Plovers and Curlews and the usual gathering of Cormorants on the sea tower outside Silloth harbour; as well as various Gulls - mainly Herring.

After that a trip back for coffee at the Gin Case at Mawbray Hayriggs.

Susan Brandes

The Beached Bird Survey is the one where you hope not to find anything to report. It's a co-ordinated count round the UK coast looking for dead or oiled seabirds washed up by the tide. Ed

## Mull of Galloway

We have visited this area three times during the winter months every other year over the last six years. It is an excellent birding area and this time we were in possession of a great book that tells the reader the best places to visit. Although on previous visits we had managed to find some really good places to view birds this book is more specific and well worth having and gave us guidance to more birding opportunities. On all these visits we have also used facilities on offer from Shearings at the Portpatrick Hotel. They do a self-drive option which gives you independence for your own agenda and offers accommodation on a DB&B basis at a very reasonable rate if booked later rather than sooner (see below for details of book and Shearings).

On our way up we called in at the RSPB reserve at Mersehead, a reserve known by many of you. Our lifer there was a Green Winged Teal. I don't know about you but you go to these reserves and they are listed as a species but can never be seen amongst the hundreds of other teal! This one was, shall I say, a loner, almost! He was in the company of one other male and female and therefore easy to spot and easy to see the differences - the vertical as opposed to the horizontal white stripe. The other great help was from the kind person who had written in the hide book details of where to look for this elusive bird. As usual there were large numbers of duck and waders and 8,000 Barnacle Geese here too.

The next day we did the round of Loch Ryan, a sea loch, which lies on the sheltered side of the Rhins of Galloway. The best time to visit is two hours before and after high tide and using a telescope is essential as the loch is vast. The most productive places we found were on the east side of the loch at Leffnol Point and on the west at Wig Bay. The water moves round these points on the tides and brings the birds with it. There are seven recommended stop off places and all gave us good viewing. We turned up around this circuit Long Tailed Duck, Common Scoter, Scaup and Red Throated Diver. Also Eider, Mergansers, Great Crested Grebes, Wigeon, Mallard, Goldeneye and Tufted Ducks. There were plenty of waders which included Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Curlew, Redshank, Bar Tailed Godwit

and Oyster Catcher. Our last port of call that day was Wig Bay and here we found a flock of Brent Geese.

Next day started with a walk down to the harbour in Portpatrick to view the Black Guillemots that are resident and use holes in the harbour wall for shelter and nesting. Along the cliffs on route to Dunskey Castle there were Fulmars already occupying the cliff ledges. We also visited some of the smaller inland lochs and added to our list Mute and Whooper Swans, Greylag and Pink Footed Geese, Grey Heron, Lapwing, Buzzard, Moorhen, Coot, and Teal.

The following day we did a tour of the Mull of Galloway which includes some great stops at



greenshank N Hutchin

Sandhead, Ardwell and Drummore harbour and picked up a few more species to our list. These included Dunlin, Greenshank, Twite, House Sparrow, Rock Pipit, Starlings, and Sky Lark. Castle Kennedy has two lochs with lots of dabblers and divers and woodland to explore where we

found Siskin and Nuthatch. We were told by other birders we met about the Hen Harrier roost at the MOD site at West Freugh and also a Sea Eagle had been seen about around Loch Ryan. Not by us though, although we did try. Maybe next time!

The book we used covers the Solway, Cumbria and Dumfries and Galloway. It describes for each place, possible birds at different times of the year and recommends access, parking, OS maps and map references. Each area has a diagram of the area and gives the parking places and the things you are most likely to see.

The book is *Best Birdwatching Sites, The Solway- Cumbria/Dumfries & Galloway* by Buckingham Press Ltd  
ISBN 978-0-9550339-3-3

Their web site is [www.buckinghampress.co.uk](http://www.buckinghampress.co.uk) and gives a list of other books in the series covering other parts of the country.

You can find Shearings at [www.shearings.com](http://www.shearings.com)

**Val and Bill Young**

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## Red Squirrels

Many thanks for the response to my appeal for help with the red-squirrel rota which has eased Susan's job in finding someone to fill the feeders each day. The season is nearly over as the Osprey Project will be taking over when it opens towards the end of March. If you feel like ticking some well-being boxes from September, you would be very welcome. Sandra Shaw

## Butterfly Gardening

With temperatures starting to rise and the days lengthening thoughts will be turning towards the garden. If you have empty spaces to fill you could plan to have a butterfly border.

Butterflies are some of Britain's most colourful wildlife. Their dependency on a limited number of plants makes them especially vulnerable in a changing landscape where habitats and food plants are being lost. This has unfortunately led to the extinction of some species, whilst others are in decline. However the garden can offer real hope if a variety of plants are grown in a sunny, sheltered

spot. They can be encouraged to stay longer, if there are a few 'food plants' for their young.

Many of the plants will also be attractive to bees and other insects. These will in turn provide natural food for birds and bats, especially if a few night-scented plants are included for nocturnal moths.

**Select a site** Chose a sunny, sheltered spot. Butterflies need the sun to warm them up and get them going. They will not visit flowers in the shade and they enjoy basking in the sun.

**Choose your plants** Pick some that flower in spring, summer and autumn to provide a continuous supply of nectar. Old fashioned varieties tend to be more nectar rich, whilst double flower and new hybrids have very little. Plant



tortoiseshell Hutchin

groups of the species in 3s or 5s. This will give a strong visual sign to passing butterflies and better scent.

**Caterpillars** Try to include some food plants for caterpillars. Nettles in a sunny location will host the caterpillars of the Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma. Avoid using pesticides as they can kill caterpillars.

**Hibernation** Thick vegetation will provide cover for butterflies that hibernate in winter. Whites, Browns & Blues over-winter as chrysalis. Painted Lady & Red Admiral migrate to Europe. Brimstone, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell hibernate in shrubs and buildings as adults.

## Nectar-rich plants for butterflies

Spring flowering - Aubrietia, Alyssum, Cowslip, Forget-me-not, Grape hyacinth, Honesty, Polyanthus, Primrose

Summer flowering – Field scabious, Goldenrod, Hyssop, Lady's smock, Lavender, Marjoram, Marigolds, Thyme, Verbena, Wallflower

Autumn flowering – Buddleia, Fuchsia, Ice plant, Ivy, Lavender, Michaelmas daises, Russian sage

## Nectar-rich Wildflowers

Betony, Birds foot trefoil, Bluebell, Bugle, Common mallow, Common toadflax, Corn marigold, Cowslip, Dog violet, Feverfew, Harebell, Herb Robert, Knapweed, Lady's bedstraw, Lady's smock, Meadow buttercup, Ox-eye daisy, Oxlip, Purple loosestrife, Ragged robin, Red campion, Red clover, Soapwort, St John's wort, Teasel, Thrift, Viper's bugloss, Wild cornflower, Wild thyme, Yarrow

Dave Smith

## The Snowy Owl

I feel very lucky to be one of the few people who have seen a snowy owl in the wild in the United Kingdom. It was just a chance sighting, but one that I will never forget. But before I tell you about that, a bit of background about snowy owls in general.

The snowy owl, *Bubo scandiacus*, also known as the Arctic owl normally inhabits the Arctic tundra of Alaska, Canada and Eurasia but they can move further South in search of food. The tundra is a harsh cold environment, where the landscape is barren with no living trees. It is covered with snow and has an underlying layer of permafrost for much of the year.

The snowy owl however is a hardy soul and is a large powerful bird, with a wingspan of 1.25 - 1.5 metres. Snowy owls are predominantly white with flecks of black or brown on their plumage. The female has more of this colouration than the male. Due to the whiteness of the snowy owl it can be mistaken for the smaller barn owl. It has downy feathers on its legs and feet to help insulate against the cold. It is a proficient hunter and feeds on mammals such as marmots, lemmings and mice.

Snowy owls have been sighted in the United Kingdom for many years, but it is still unusual to see them. Until around 1975 they were known to

be breeding on the Shetland Isles on Fetlar and since then sightings have been much less frequent. However there still has been the odd sighting in winter in the Hebrides, Shetland and the Cairngorms. Amazingly in the winter of 2008 - 2009 snowy owls were spotted as far south as Cornwall, Alderney and Guernsey.

In February 2013 I was ski touring in the Cairngorm Mountains in Scotland, where on the plateau the habitat has been described as similar to that of the Arctic tundra. I was near Carn Etchachan when I came over a small rise and there was a flutter of white wings. My first thought was "that is too big for a ptarmigan!" I was amazed to see that I had come across a snowy owl. Fortunately the bird flew only a short distance way and I stopped dead in my tracks and had time to get my camera out and take a couple of basic photos for identification purposes. The owl looked around for a while longer and then eventually flew off. I am pretty sure the snowy owl



that I spotted was a male, as it appeared to be pure white with no markings.

I knew that snowy owls were a rare thing to see in the UK and when I got home I posted my find on a species sharing website I use called iSpot. Shortly after this I was contacted by BBC News Scotland and they published an article on my sighting and only then did I really realise how lucky I had been. Having done a little more research there have been some sightings in Scotland in the winter of 2014, but I haven't heard of any more reports. It is great that they visit us occasionally and I am not sure that I will see another one. I certainly didn't set out with the intention of hoping to spot a snowy owl it was just my lucky day!

Lucy Dunn

## Outings 2015

April 25<sup>th</sup> Brockholes Wildlife Trust Reserve near Preston

May 23<sup>rd</sup> Leighton Moss RSPB reserve Silverdale

June 7<sup>th</sup> Farne Islands

These trips will be by coach, fare £10 to £15 depending on numbers. Outings are open to all. Whether you are a beginner or an expert birder or somewhere in between you will be very welcome. Be sure to take suitable footwear and waterproofs.

For more details and to book for a trip phone Brian Furness on 01900 823881

Details also on the Group Website.

A deposit of £5 is payable when booking. Please let Brian know as early as possible if you are not able to go on a trip for which you have booked.

## Indoor Programme

April 7<sup>th</sup> AGM (very brief) followed by Butterflies of Cumbria  
Steve Doyle  
Butterfly Conservation Cumbria

The Sept 2015 / April 2016 programme will be published in the Summer Newsletter and on our website

The **Group Website** is a good source of news and information with a link to the Campfield blog and other sites.

[www.rspb.org.uk/groups/westcumbria](http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/westcumbria)

Our website manager is Val Young  
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## Coffee Mornings 2015

in URC Hall Main St  
Cockermouth  
from 10.00 to 12.00

**Sat May 9<sup>th</sup>**

Sat August 22<sup>nd</sup>

Sat November 14<sup>th</sup>

## Newsletter by email

If you don't already receive the newsletter by email and would like to do so and help us to keep costs down (and get the photos in colour!), please send me an email

Marjorie Hutchin Tel 01900 825231  
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