



West Oxfordshire Field Club

Newsletter

[About us](#)

[Events](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Recent News](#)

[Membership](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Links](#)



No.91
SPRING
2010



EDITORIAL

As I write, a greening is at last taking place outside. It has been a very late spring this year, and soon the effects of the long, cold winter will be seen – dead shrubs, a few dead twigs. The effects on our wildlife will take longer to assess, but in my own garden there have been far fewer small birds. I await the return of the swifts – always late-comers – with some anxiety. Last year the owner of the house, under whose eaves the local swifts used to nest, decided inexplicably to paint the eaves at the start of the breeding season.

While one expects bees to have had a bad time overwintering, they also have problems with woodpeckers and mice – when winter food is short, mice can easily sneak into the hive, but woodpeckers have to drill holes to enable them to steal a winter feast of brood and stores of pollen and honey. The Co-operative Society is rolling out a plan to encourage urban bee-keeping in an attempt to reverse the decline in honeybees. Plan Bee will fund a scheme giving out starter packs and plastic hives to gardeners and allotment-holders, as well as giving away hundreds of thousands of packets of wildflower seeds containing bee favourites such as poppies and cornflowers. The scheme is also funding research into the causes of bee declines.

It is not only the wildflowers that have been late to come into breeding condition. The local toad migration was almost a month later than usual. But the insects are awake. Suddenly the garden is teeming with ladybirds, and sleepy flies are moving out of the attic, seeking a way out into the fresh air. I've just seen the first brimstone butterfly of the year – very late, and an extremely small, but perfect, tortoiseshell butterfly. Small tortoiseshells are making a recovery after several years of decline, believed to be due to a parasitic fly that lays its eggs in the butterfly egg, so its grubs can consume the growing caterpillars from within. There were more small tortoiseshells last year than for many years, so perhaps the early appearance is a sign of still more to come this year. The very large black bumblebees have been out and about for some time, basking on the front step, and zooming clumsily into me as if drunk. They always seem to fly as if they have just had a large and well-lubricated dinner and are finding it hard to lift their bodies off the ground. Tell-tale holes in the ground suggest where they may be rearing their young.

The summer migrants are in full flow – chiffchaffs and other warblers have been heard locally, and the sand martins have arrived at local gravel pits, which also already have five pairs of little ringed plovers.

Our first walk of the autumn season was a sunny trip to Cranham, near Painswick. We enjoyed dramatic scenery, with steep wooded hillsides in a mixture of autumn colours, the occasional large Cotswold mansion, even a field full of llamas, and some very friendly black cattle. The great find of the day was belladonna, only a few yards from a proper loo in the middle of nowhere – wonderful (both)! Despite the dry autumn, more fungi were found on the fungus foray in Bernwood Forest than expected. The trip to Harcourt Arboretum for autumn colours was a day too late – a wild night of wind and rain – and a wild morning beforehand – had taken the best of the colours, but there were still great displays to be seen, chief among them the many-coloured starry leaves of liquidambar and the Japanese maples, with sombre

pillar of conifers to set them off. WOFC joined forces with Oxford RSPB for an enjoyable bird-watching trip to the Cotswold Water Park. In January our Adlestrop and Daylesford walk had to be cancelled due to the snowy conditions. Slimbridge, as always, was a good place to spend a winter's day with plenty to interest the naturalist. Even though the Sherborne walk was in March, the snowdrops and aconites were still looking good due to the cold winter. Our lectures were as varied as ever, but for the first time we had to cancel the first meeting of 2010 because of the heavy snow and impassable roads. The winter programme began with a talk on the eagles of Mull, followed by the ever-enthusiastic Brian Laney talking about hunting for British orchids. Mornee Button gave us an excellent talk on wild flowers of the Dolomites, and Ken Betteridge told us about the natural and local history of the western side of Wychwood Forest (he covered the eastern side last year), illustrated with some amusing anecdotes and a fascinating range of aerial photographs putting our countryside in perspective for us. So that we did not miss out on our Members' Night, Graham Wren, instead of giving us a talk on nest boxes after the AGM subjected us to another of his 'fiendish' quizzes and some members projected a selection of their photographs. Now the dawn chorus is not far off and we are looking forward to the Summer Programme and being out and about in the countryside.

Jill Bailey

YOUR COMMITTEE

We are pleased to welcome Gill Suida onto the committee to replace Avery Baines, who retired from the committee last year after many years service which was valued by us all, particularly in her role as Programme Secretary. Gill is now the Committee Secretary, taking the minutes at our thrice-yearly committee meetings, taking over from Jean Kenworthy, who filled that post admirably for many years.

Following the death of Ray Edwards last year there was another vacancy on the committee and we are pleased to welcome Mary Elford as a new committee member.

Sue Morton

YOUR NEWSLETTER

Thanks to Jill, who has come up with another interesting editorial, and all the other contributors we once again have a newsletter.

The deadline for the next newsletter is the end of August 2010 but if you write up your report soon after the event, when the information is still fresh in your mind, please send it in straightaway either by e-mail as an attachment (Word is preferred) or written clearly on paper by snail-mail to the address given on the programme.

Brenda Betteridge (Newsletter Editor)
E-mail: bbetteridge@phonecoop.coop

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 5 March 2010

The 46th Annual General Meeting of the West Oxon Field Club was held on 5 March 2010 at the Methodist Church Hall, High Street, Witney.

The meeting was opened by our President Graham Wren. Apologies were received from Yvonne and Roger Townsend who are on a world tour. Minutes of the 46th AGM were accepted as a true record and signed by Graham Wren.

The Treasure's report was presented by Tony Florey. As the accounts are in credit there is no need to increase the subscriptions this year. The report was accepted (proposed by Jill Bailey and seconded by Alan Cole). It was proposed by Tony Mattingley and seconded by Gill Oldfield that Mrs Cornick continue as auditor which she is willing to do.

Sue Morton then gave the Chairman's Report, summarising the walks and trips over the past year. She thanked David Roberts and Tony Mattingley for planning the walks and both of them and others for leading them. Once again she asked for suggestions for further walks and trips, and volunteers to lead them would be welcome. She also thanked Yvonne Townsend for arranging the trips away and our summer and Christmas parties.

As all members are willing to stand again the Committee was elected en block. This was proposed by Anne Dossett-Davies and seconded by Margaret Edwards.

Under AOB, Anita Evans thanked Jean Kenworthy for taking the minutes for 26 years. The AGM ended with Graham Wren thanking all the committee members for their contributions to the Club.

Instead of the advertised talk about bird nests by Graham Wren, the AGM was followed by Members Night. It took the usual form, with a quiz devised by Graham in two parts – a number of wildlife objects to identify and a series of questions based on slides. We were given the answers after coffee had been served. The evening ended with some interested power-point and slide presentations by club members.

Gill Suida

OBITUARY

Marion Warland 1926–2010

We were very sad to learn of the sudden death of Marion in February. She had a long association with WOFC, having joined in 1972 with her husband, who died in December 2006.

Marion married Arthur in 1949 and set up home in Thame. While living in this area they were much involved with folk dancing and ran several folk dance clubs. Marion was working in the Botany (now Plant Sciences) Department of Oxford University when Arthur, having retired early from teaching, took up an admin post in the Zoology Department. In 1987 Marion and Arthur were instrumental in forming the Oxfordshire Fungus Group. They became the County Recorders for fungi, feeding many recordings into the County Records Office. They also deposited many fungus specimens there, having prepared them for storage by freeze-drying. Together they led many fungus forays not only for the WOFC and the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire Group but also for other societies such as BBOWT. Until recently, Marion kept a database of all their fungus foray finds which are shared with Kew.

After her funeral at St Kenelm's Church, Minster Lovell, the congregation was invited to join her family at the Sports Pavilion in Wash Meadow. There they had put on display some examples of her lace work and water-colour paintings of fungi, together with a few photographs. She will be much missed by all who knew her and especially by mycologists. Marion (on the right) with other mycologists on a foray in 2008

Gillian Oldfield and Brenda Betteridge

REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS

Sydlings Copse 26 April 2009

On a bright spring afternoon, 11 Field Club members gathered for a walk round part of Sydlings Copse, a BBONT reserve near Headington. The whole reserve comprises a variety of habitats, including fen, grassland and woodland, covering about 40 acres.

We found over 40 different flowering plants, mostly familiar ones – Cow Parsley, Ground Ivy, Lesser Celandine, Dog's Mercury, Dog Violet, Hairy Bittercress, Garlic Mustard and White Deadnettle. However, we did come across some less-common plants such as Early Purple Orchids, Goldilocks, Moschatel, Archangel, Barren Strawberry, Broomrape and Woodrush. There were various sedges and rushes growing in the boggy areas.

We were too early for the particular species, such as Rock-rose, Field Scabious, Hardheads, Herb Paris, Wild Liquorice, Nettle-leaved Bellflower, Woolly Thistle, Bog Pimpernel and Viper's Bugloss, for which the reserve is noted. Maybe the next visit to the reserve should be in June when these flowers are in bloom.

Birds were singing around us – Blackbird, Blackcap, Robin, Wren and Song Thrush, while the calls of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Cuckoo and Pheasant were heard. Several butterflies were also flitting around – Orange Tip, Peacock, Large White and Brimstone.

Jean Kenworthy

Otmoor 27 September 2009

Twenty-one of us rendezvoused at the RSPB Reserve car park on a sunny and warm afternoon.

Our number included one who had travelled over from Essex to join us. He was David

Bloomfield, a farmer, and also a member of The Essex Field Club, which was founded in 1880! He'd learned about our walk back in May, but couldn't remember how he'd come across it. His interests, as well as natural history, include the history of the countryside. So, having heard about the moor, our walk provided him with an opportunity to learn more about it, both by seeing it and by talking with local people. Before he left he said that it had been a very enjoyable and worthwhile visit.

We walked at a leisurely pace up the access track and then along the southern bridleway admiring the hips, haws, sloes, blackberries and other drupes and berries on the hedgerow shrubs. When we reached the turn-off to the footpath which leads to the two viewing screens we paused for 10 minutes or so to watch a pair of Stonechats perched on top of a high bush about 50 m from us. At the first screen, several duck species, partly in eclipse plumage, including two Pintail, dabbled, but two Common Snipe, one in shallow water just in front of the screen, held our attention for some time. Everyone made it to the second screen where the highlight was a display by a Hobby, swooping and jinking sharply above us to catch aerial insect prey such as dragonflies

.
Birds seen or heard (H):

Cormorant
Grey Heron
Mute Swan
Teal
Mallard
Pintail
Tufted Duck
Kestrel
Hobby
Moorhen
Coot
Common Snipe
Black-headed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Woodpigeon
Kingfisher
Wren (H)
Stonechat
Cetti's Warbler (H)
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Rook
Carrion Crow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch

Butterflies seen:

Small Copper
Painted Lady
Peacock
Large White
Comma
Small Tortoiseshell

David Rolfe

Cranham 10 October 2009

Cranham village is situated 6 miles south-east of Gloucester and lies in a deep hollow of the Cotswold Hills. The village is somewhat scattered and the village school, our starting point for this delightful walk through ancient woodland, is some distance from the village on the edge of Cranham Common.

It was a day of glorious autumn sunshine when we commenced the walk and leaving the school we passed the common and descended a fairly steep hill to a valley where we stopped to admire a pretty spring-fed lake, which was a trout farm. From here we ascended a steep track which led to Saltridge Common Wood Nature Reserve which, in turn, led to an escarpment where there were a number of holly trees, and beech trees which were changing

to their autumn colours.

We continued along the steep slopes on a bridle path into an area known as Lords and Ladies Wood, National Trust. This eventually led to a clearing with spectacular views over the village of Sheepscombe and the South Cotswolds.

After a short break for refreshments, and an interaction with a small group of inquisitive Welsh Black cows, we continued along a path which took us to Workmans Wood and into the Ebworth Estate and farm buildings which were gifted to the National Trust in 1989.

The house, Tudor in origin, was possibly a hunting lodge. By 1966 the house had become derelict and was gutted by fire to provide practice for the South-west Gloucestershire Fire Brigade. The service buildings (outbuildings) are still standing and are used by the National Trust as their office for SW Gloucestershire.

Leaving the farm, and its herd of Belted Galloway cattle, we climbed a fairly steep hill into another wooded area, and after crossing several fields we came upon an interesting tree with Beech and Ash fused together at the same common base – an unusual find, originally spotted by David Roberts when he and I did a 'pre-amble' of this walk.

A final descent to the spring-fed lake led to the trout farm and a steep climb through more woodland brought us back to Cranham Common (with fine views over the Severn Valley) and our starting point.

Plants noted:

Knapweed
Mallow
Marjoram
Horse-tail
Pendulous Sedge
Herb Robert
Wood Avens
Woodruff
Nipplewort
St John's-wort
Red Deadnettle
Sow-thistle
Bryony (berries)
Woody Nightshade
Hart's-tongue Fern
Harebell
Selfheal
Milkwort
Rosehips
Field Scabious
Chervil
Hogweed
Rock Rose
Betany
Yellow-wort
Raspberries (in fruit)
Rosebay Willowherb
Monkey Musk
Red Clover
White Clover
Vetch
Guelder Rose
Sheep's-bit Scabious
Pignut

Miscellaneous:

Beefsteak fungus
Marbled white butterfly
Birds seen/heard (H):
Wren (H)
Rooks

Crows
Jackdaw (H)
Great Tit
Blue Tit
Robin
Wood Pigeons

Tony Mattingley

Fungus foray at Bernwood Forest 17 October 2009

Bernwood Forest is situated approx. 7 miles north-east of Oxford and is considered to be one of the top fungus sites in Britain. Eleven Field Club members were joined by four guests and were led by Peter Creed, who took us to the best places where he felt that fungi could be found. Despite the dry weather prevailing at the time we found more than expected.

Common name Latin name Status Edibility

Russet tough shank *Collybia dryophila* Very common Edible but worthless; said to be poisonous when eaten raw

Blackening brittlegill *Russula nigricans* Common Edible when young

Sulphur tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare* Very common Inedible

Powdercap *Nyetans asterophora* Common Inedible

Conifer blueing bracket *Postia caesia* Common Inedible

Mycena metal Common ?

Greasy tough shank *Collybia butyracea* Very common Edible

Small stag horn *Xylaria hypoxylon* Common Inedible

Common puffball *Lycoperdon perlatum* Very common Edible when young

Club-footed clytocybe *Clytocybe claviceps* Common Not recommended

Aniseed funnel cap *Clytocybe odora* Common Edible

Blushing bracket *Daedaleopsis confragosa* Very common Inedible

Tony Mattingley

Norfolk 20-23 October 2009

The Club went on its annual birding trip to Norfolk in October, staying at the very comfortable Caley Hall in Old Hunstanton. On the way there we stopped off at Welney Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust on the Ouse washes near Ely for lunch. There you have the luxury of a large hide with chairs and a wall-to-wall glass viewing area. We particularly enjoyed watching the Whooper Swans, which were arriving for the winter from Iceland, having flown some 800 miles non-stop across the Atlantic.

Some of the party got up early the following morning to catch the 'big tide' at Snettisham, for a guided walk to watch the great wildlife spectacle of waders on the mudflats, as they become concentrated by the advancing tide. Walking below the shingle bank that defends the land from the North Sea, the tide floods over vast mudflats, sending tens of thousands of wading birds off their feeding grounds and on to roost on banks and islands in front of three hides, a spectacle that happens only on the highest tides of the year (and was this year filmed by the BBC for their Autumnwatch programme). We were unlucky with a gloomy morning and lashing rain, but the vast flocks were impressive nonetheless, wheeling and swirling around as they moved from one place to another. Easiest to spot was a large flock of several hundred Oystercatchers, flashing their black-and-white plumage. Hundreds of small Golden Plovers swirled in the air just ahead of the incoming tide almost like a shimmering veil, and flocks of larger Black-tailed Godwits wheeled up the shore. Vast flocks of Knots twisted and turned in incredible formations, catching the light as they turned to land and began feeding again. By the water's edge Dunlins and Sanderlings scuttled, almost as if on wheels, moving very fast as the water encroached. Chunky Turnstones waddled between them, and despite the gloom we could pick out the larger Redshanks and even larger Curlews, whose calls echoed across the mudflats. Smaller flocks of Lapwings, Greylag Geese, Pink-footed Geese and the smaller dark-headed Brent Geese were also taking off in small formations. Scattered across the mudflats were many Shelduck, with their gleaming white feathers, handsome chestnut breast bands, green heads and black wing patches. Later all the Club members joined up at a very soggy Titchwell. Some contented themselves with staying in the cosy cafe drinking tea and eating large slices of cake, watching the video

of the reserve on the large flat-screen. The rest of us paddled out to the main hide. There were plenty of birds showing, including a Marsh Harrier and a lone Egret. Some of the hides were closed, as a lot of reconstruction work was in progress.

On return journey, some of us stopped at Brancaster Staithe as the weather brightened and the sun shone brilliantly from a bright-blue rain-washed sky. This was a great place for 'armchair bird-watching'. Without leaving the cars, Turnstones and Ringed Plovers scuttled around us, Brent Geese and pairs of Mallards ambled lazily across the mudflats and Shelduck were scattered across the distant mud. Herons and a range of gulls, Redshanks and several Curlews also came close enough for a good view without even using the binoculars.

On the Sunday morning, those of us who had not already been to Snettisham went off after breakfast, for the later tide. It was another bright sunny morning, and we had splendid views of the wheeling flocks of birds, and other good birding in the pools among the shingle ridges. After lunch we moved on to Holcombe for tea in the small tea-rooms there, then walked through Holcombe Woods to the tide. Here we saw various water birds, including snipe; also an amazing bird was calling (sorry its name evades me at the moment!)

After watching the sun set from the hide, we ambled back to the cars, and were lucky to watch a Barn Owl hunting along the hedgerows. To our surprise it was soon joined by a second Barn Owl, this one more dusky grey than white – perhaps a visitor from the continent? They hunted separate routes until darkness fell.

Jill Bailey and David Roberts

Birds recorded:

Barn Owl
Black Headed Gull
Black Tailed Godwit
Blackbird
Black-headed Gull
Blue Tit
Brent Goose
Canada Goose
Carrion Crow
Chaffinch
Chiffchaff
Common Eider
Common Gull
Coot
Cormorant
Curlew
Dunlin
Duncock
Fulmar
Gadwall
Gold Crest
Gold Finch
Golden Plover
Great Crested Grebe
Great Tit
Greater Black-Backed Gull
Green Finch
Green Woodpecker
Greenshank
Grey Plover
Greylag
Herring Gull
House Sparrow
Jackdaw
Jay
Kestrel
Knot
Lapwing

Lesser Black-Backed Gull
Linnet
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Long Tailed Tit
Magpie
Mallard
Marsh Harrier
Moorhen
Mute Swan
Oyster Catcher
Pheasant
Pied Wagtail
Pink-footed Goose
Pintail
Redshank
Reed Bunting
Ringed Plover
Robin
Robin
Rook
Sanderling
Shelduck
Shoveler
Skylark
Snipe
Sparrowhawk
Spotted Redshank
Starling
Tawny Owl (heard)
Teal
Turnstone
Whooper Swan
Wigeon
Wood Pigeon
Wren

Harcourt Arboretum 1 November 2009

After an inauspicious start, with driving rain and wind, the weather cleared up by the time we arrived at the arboretum, and we enjoyed a couple of hours of sunshine before returning home as storm clouds gathered once again. After a wild night of wind and rain, the arboretum was somewhat soggy underfoot, and the peak of the autumn colours, which I had enjoyed on my recce the previous weekend, had passed. But there were still plenty of colourful displays to be seen. The champion of the autumn trees was the Liquidambar, its starry leaves turning from green to gold, brown, red and orange on the same tree. The Japanese Maples nearby had a more layered appearance, as their leaves were held almost horizontal, but the Liquidambar leaves hang almost vertically, looking rather like starry baubles on a Christmas-decorated tree. Glorious Peacocks strutted disdainfully around among the trees, and Robins and Wrens were out enjoying the sunshine.

There were dramatic contrasts between the trees in the stark shadows of a storm-swept day. Each turn off the path revealed new vistas, new alluring shapes and colours framing twisting paths and glades, dark brooding columns and spires of conifers mingling with the dashing colours of the broadleaves. Some very young visitors were running happily in and out of trees, watched not-too-happily by the Peacocks. In the damp undergrowth we found a number of colourful clumps of toadstools and wished for Peter Creed to help us identify them. Altogether, we were well rewarded for stoically deciding to come on the walk despite the weather.

Jill Bailey

Cotswold Water Park 6 December 2009

This was a joint meeting of the Oxford RSPB and West Oxon Field Club. Ten of us, including

three WOFC members, met at the Neigh Bridge car park after a night of continuous heavy rain. However, the cloudy sky soon cleared and remained bright until we left as the sky darkened again in the mid-afternoon. As we donned our Wellington boots in the car park a solitary Siskin and two Redwings were spotted in nearby trees. Among the Coots, Mallards and other dabbling duck species on the first lake we saw nine male and three female Goosanders. The next lake was very choppy, and most of the several duck species here were sheltering from the wind in the lee of the far bank and were difficult to see clearly, even with 'scopes. The third lake was sheltered on all sides by trees and shrubs and, although most of the hundreds of wildfowl here were again near the far side, no doubt due to disturbance by people, some with dogs, walking the footpath, we had good views of both male and female Wigeons, Gadwalls, Teals, Mallards, Pintails, Shovelers, Pochards, Tufted Ducks and Goldeneyes. We then moved on to three other more open lakes, where we saw around 30 Red-crested Pochards, both male and female, a couple of Little Grebes and a few more Goosanders. After lunch we travelled to the western end of the Cleveland Lakes area of the Water Park to see the hundreds of Lapwings and Golden Plovers roosting on a gravelly spit. A fitting end to an enjoyable day's birding.

Bird species seen:

Little Grebe
Great-crested Grebe
Cormorant
Grey Heron
Mute Swan
Wigeon
Gadwall
Teal
Mallard
Pintail
Shoveler
Red-crested Pochard
Pochard
Tufted Duck
Goldeneye
Goosander
Buzzard
Kestrel
Moorhen
Coot
Golden Plover
Lapwing
Black-headed Gull
Woodpigeon
Green Woodpecker
Grey Wagtail
Pied Wagtail
Robin
Blackbird
Fieldfare
Song Thrush
Redwing
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Magpie
Carrion Crow
Starling
Chaffinch
Goldfinch
Siskin
Bullfinch

David Rolfe

Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetland Trust 7 February 2010

A cold cloudy day saw 15 of us at Slimbridge, always a good place to spend a winter's day. Slimbridge has come a long way since the start in 1946 by Sir Peter Scott and now gets involved in all sorts of projects. The latest one which opened in July last year is 'Back from the Brink' and features Beavers, North American River Otters and Water Voles. Of course these are all animals associated with wetlands. I must say the four Otters were star performers and are housed in a very natural enclosure with plenty of water to swim in and a waterfall to slide down and plenty of mud.

Another ongoing project is an attempt to re-establish a breeding population of the elegant beautiful Common Crane in the South West of England, on and around the Somerset Levels. A release from birds being bred at Slimbridge will take place in the autumn of this year.

Having been absent as a breeding species from the United Kingdom for nearly 400 years a small population re-colonised the Norfolk Broads – a former breeding site in 1979. While successful breeding has taken place and there are now about 15 pairs, the small Norfolk population remains isolated and vulnerable to predation, disturbance and climate change. So it will be exciting to watch how this new project on the Somerset Levels progresses.

We all had a great time watching the wild birds from the hides looking out onto Rushy Pen, Tackpiece and the Dumbles. Large numbers were present on the day we visited: 160 Bewick Swans, 163 Canada geese, 500 Dunlin, 1800 Lapwing and 2,800 Wigeon to name but a few wheeling and filling the sky at frequent intervals during the day. The Peregrine which seems to be resident in the trees seen from the Peng Observatory gave us good views through the telescope.

The duck decoy was used while we were there. Four Mallard had swum into the wide end of the mesh tunnel and when so far along were 'encouraged' by two chaps sporting a fox head on the end of a pole and poking it through various apertures in the decoy to continue up into the narrowing funnel end where they were caught and placed in a mesh container for ringing and testing for the possibilities of avian flu before being released. I must say I haven't heard any recent reports of avian flu in this country but I suppose they have to keep monitoring for it.

At the 5 pm feed viewed from the Peng Observatory we were able to watch many species of wildfowl like a vast ever-moving canvas through the large picture windows.

Some of the wild birds and ducks seen during the day:

Mute Swan
Bewick's Swan
White-fronted Goose
Greylag
Canada Goose
Barnacle Goose
Shelduck
Wigeon
Pintail
Teal
Gadwall
Mallard
Shoveler
Pochard
Tufted Duck
Buzzard
Kestrel
Moorhen
Coot
Peregrine
Pheasant
Oystercatcher
Lapwing
Dunlin
Curlew
Redshank
Black-headed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Wood pigeon
Collared Dove

Pied Wagtail
Wren
Dunnock
Blackbird
Blue tit
Great tit
Magpie
Jackdaw
Crow
Starling
Sparrow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch

David Roberts

Sherborne 7 March 2010

A perfect blue sky day with a cold north-east breeze was just right for fourteen of us who met at the Ewpen Barn car park for a circular walk around part of Sherborne Park. The cold weather this winter had acted in our favour enabling us to see the wonderful drifts of snowdrops at their best and these were complimented by the good displays of winter aconites in and around the churchyard and also the crocuses. They were really very colourful. Down in the valley below the road we had a good view of up to 200 Wigeon looking resplendent in the sunshine and making that classic melodious whistling call. It won't be long before they head north for their summer breeding grounds possibly in central and northern Scotland and northern England. Every winter this group comes to the meadows here at Sherborne Brook. Other Wigeon breed in Iceland, Scandinavia and northern Russia. In the UK in winter there are over 416,000 birds. Records show that at least one Wigeon survived for more than 33 years.

At the end of the walk and back on the top of the hill in the fields was a group of five Fallow Deer grazing.

David Roberts

MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Unusual bird behaviour

In Burford car park we were having a picnic cup of coffee and watching over 100 ducks being fed by visitors. When most of the bread had been eaten, jackdaws flew down for the remaining pickings. One had with a noticeably drooping wing (possibly a previous breakage), although it had flown over from the opposite river bank. When the crumbs had gone the birds flew back over into the trees. The damaged-wing jackdaw then literally, almost vertically, ran very fast up the trunk of a large tree using its feet and wings for purchase. Then having gained sufficient height to take off, it flew off to join the others. This strongly reminded me of Malaysian gliding squirrels I had seen on a TV programme. They, of course, have skin flaps which allow them to glide when they have gained height by running up tree trunks.

A cheeky theft

Last autumn when I was on the river bank feeding the ducks at Langel Common, Witney, I put the bread bag, with the few remaining crumbs in it, on the ground touching my feet. Watching the turmoil of the ducks I suddenly heard the rustling of a plastic bag and looked down to see my bag fast disappearing up the path and into some sparse undergrowth. I couldn't understand the reason as there was no wind at all. Then the bag came to an abrupt halt as it snagged on some brambles. In slight trepidation I went to investigate. Then a largish rat ran out of the hole, grabbed the bag off the brambles and took it back down its burrow.

Alison Weaver (via Tony Florey)

A visitor's appreciation of West Oxfordshire

The following appeared in the October/November issue of The Wychwood. It was in an article written by Richard Hubbard, who with his wife, house-sits for friends, who live in Shipton under Wychwood, while they are on holiday. While Richard and his wife were visiting Chipping Norton they came across a magazine called Family Focus in a café, in which they read that there was going to be a circular walk run by the West Oxfordshire Field Club from the village green at Fifield across the fields to Idbury. They went along 'and had one of the finest days out all the holiday! My wife and I had never been to Fifield before. As we arrived, having parked down at the village green, I said "Listen to that." And my wife, and another friend, both said "Listen to what?", so I replied; "Exactly! The sound of silence." In Milton Keynes [their home town], no matter where you live, there's always the constant sound of traffic, but here, in this idyllic village, there was just silence. Folks would pay good money for that kind of peace. The walkers were a great bunch, but the greatest pleasure was to be out in real countryside, where only the sounds of birdsong, buzzing bees and clicking grasshoppers could be heard.'

Reproduced courtesy of Doreen Barnes via Diana Johnson

Other newsletters - [94](#) [93](#) [92](#) [91](#) [90](#) [89](#) [88](#) [87](#) [86](#)

(c) West Oxfordshire Field Club 2010

[Terms and conditions](#)