

KINGFISHER

Hampshire Ornithological Society Magazine

The magazine for Hampshire birders

Summer 2026 Issue 185



**House Martin
update**

**Outstanding
imagery**

**Young Member
projects**

Sand Martins

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Picture credits

Front cover

Blackcap by Rob Porter

Centre spread

Avocet by Rob Porter

Back cover

Spoonbill by Brian Fairbrother

From the Editor



Coal Tit

Welcome to this issue of Kingfisher

What a great time was had at this year's members day. Amazingly approximately 580 members attended, the highest number of attendees for some years, plus a large contingent watched proceedings via social media.

I have to say, if my experience was anything to go by, all of the management had an extremely busy day and from the conversations I had at the end everyone had a great day.

I would also like to thank all those people who approached me with ideas and articles they could supply which when received I can form into articles for future editions of Kingfisher.

I now have enough material for this edition of Kingfisher and perhaps two more, thank you to those who have come forward and supplied material.

I would also like to give a final thank you to all the volunteers who manned car parks, gave directions on arrivals and ran stalls in the exhibition areas, and then the organising committee who made everything tick over and run smoothly.

Kind regards,

Peter Little

HOS Members' Day 2026



Wow! What a day! An incredible 579 people attended this year to hear some great speakers, making it the largest-ever HOS event, and undoubtedly the biggest one-day birding event in the UK this year. It was a perfect opportunity to see what the Society has been doing while

hearing about other initiatives, meet fellow birders, choose your next pair of binoculars, plan a future holiday, or simply buy bird-themed items. After Chris Packham opened with an address, we heard from many different speakers. Nigel Matthews reported



on how HOS's House Martin project has located over 2000 nests, and how nest cups are now being distributed to willing homes. 13-year-old Sid Stannah impressed everyone with an account of his young birding life. Gill Perkins shared her enthusiasm for bumblebees as an enthusiastic vegetable gardener and amateur botanist – and, of course, former CEO of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Now we all know more about these wonderful creatures. As one of Hampshire's most successful wildlife

photographers, Steve Laycock shared his amazing images of nature from the county, explaining how many of these species have complex lifestyles. In the afternoon, we heard from the legend that is Roy Dennis. He has managed so many successful conservation projects, and at 85 he is still starting new initiatives around the UK. He and Chris then joined Gill Perkins and Debbie Tann (of HIWWT) to answer your questions on the state of nature in the county. This was superbly led by ex-BBC presenter, Guy Michelmore.

It was an epic day – thank you to everyone who made it happen.



Hampshire House Martin Project: the story so far

House Martins are thought to be declining in Hampshire; we need to know more about them and try to boost their breeding success. This project therefore aims to engage with the public to collect breeding records, do something to help by providing artificial nest cups and calculate the county population through a structured survey.



In 2025, an amazing 550 nest sites, with a total of 2,147 active nests, were reported by about 400 people. Follow-up visits by HOS volunteers and some homeowners found even more nests and generated some fascinating additional information. The largest colonies were at Compton Manor Estate, King's Somborne (95 mud nests), on Exbury Water Tower (83 mud nests) and at Sparsholt College (54 mud nests and 14 artificial nests).

Patterns in distribution

Whilst widely distributed across the county, House Martins were largely absent from the centre of larger built up

areas. Interestingly, they were reported in some relatively new housing estates, indicating that the necessary insect food, overhanging eaves and soft mud for their nests are all present in at least some such developments.

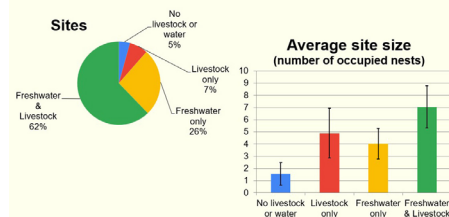
There seemed to be a preference for locations with wet habitats and livestock nearby and for buildings with wooden rather than plastic soffits (from which nests are known to fall more frequently). Such places had more, and larger, colonies.



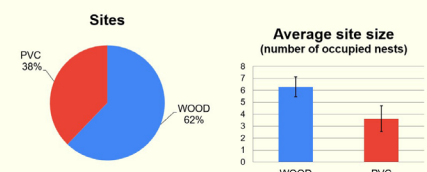
Artificial nest cups

With funding from South East Water we purchased 137 sets of nest cups from Nest Cup Box and allocated these to 79 properties in the north and east of the county. Hampshire Swifts fitted them all before House Martins returned from Africa this spring. Because they are all within 1km of known colonies (as reported by the public) we hope they will prove attractive. If successful, and if we can find sufficient funding, we hope to broaden the scheme to other parts of Hampshire.

Preference for livestock & water



Preference for wood > PVC soffits



How many are there?

To estimate the county population, we will need a team of volunteers to search for nesting House Martins in a representative sample of 1km squares. Our current

plan is to run this survey in 2027 (using data from 2025 and 2026 to inform the methodology).

Your help is needed this year

We are really grateful for the help of many HOS members during 2025. Although we won't be organising follow-up visits this year, please help us find nesting House Martins again this summer. We're hoping to beat last year's total and fill in some of the gaps. It's really easy to do – just zoom in on the map and click where you see active nests, fill in the details and submit the record.

Thank you!

Nigel Matthews & Helen Schneider

Email:

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Project Website:

www.hampshirehousemartins.org.uk



 **Cameron Bepolka**
TRUST
Connecting young people with nature

The Cameron Bepolka Trust was set up in memory of Cameron. He loved nature. We create and sponsor outdoor events for young people from every background to help them discover that same passion for all things wild and natural.

Cameron's Cottage in the New Forest has recently opened. It is our joint venture with the RSPB, providing a residential base from which young people can explore and connect with nature.

Please get in touch if you are an organisation that creates opportunities for groups of young people; we may be able to help with funding and provide access to Cameron's Cottage.

Visit our website to see the range of activities we engage in and the organisations we cooperate with to deliver our aims.

www.cameronbepolka.com info@cameronbepolka.com

Young Member News



I live near Highcliffe, a local area of Winchester consisting of 830 houses, with around 60 pairs of swifts. It's a real success story within Hampshire, and I feel privileged to live so close to them. The only problem is that on my road, swifts are nowhere to be seen... This isn't a surprise considering we don't have any boxes installed, but I thought I could change that. In 2023, I built two nesting sites together with local resident and good friend Justin Bates, which we then installed on my house. Despite waiting for two springs now, we've had no breeding interest from swifts. I imagined this was down to patience and the fact that there were no other suitable nest sites nearby, which would allow the swifts to breed in colonies.

Only now, however, has our project gained momentum, with many residents agreeing to have boxes put up on their homes and us having hand-built 8 swift homes in just over two weeks. I'm also thrilled to see my brother getting involved in assembly as well. We've also been visited and advised by Hampshire Swifts, and have been given contacts for installing specialists ready for late April. I hope to expand our project to many more residents and tell them of the massive part they would play in ensuring this brilliant bird's survival.

**Seby Delapierre, 13,
HOS Young Member**



Sand Martin Update

A new artificial sand martin nesting bank has been created at Testwood Lakes Nature Reserve near Totton, Southampton, protecting the only known breeding colony of sand Martins in the Test Valley.

Built by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, with funding from Hampshire Ornithological Society, the purpose-designed structure replaces a previous bank that had supported the colony for more than 20 years. The new design provides a secure, long-term nesting site for these migratory birds to breed and raise their young.

Sand Martins naturally nest in riverbanks, quarries and sandy cliffs. However, habitat loss caused by development, erosion and riverbank reinforcement has reduced suitable nesting sites, making artificial banks increasingly important. The new structure contains nearly 180 nesting chambers. Small entrance holes lead to upward-angled tunnels that protect nests from predators and poor weather. Each chamber can be accessed through individual wooden doors, allowing staff to monitor the colony with minimal disturbance.

Ben Pickup, Reserves Officer for the Lower Test Valley, said: "The new bank provides sand Martins with a safe, stable nesting space to use each year. We have carefully built every tunnel at an angle so that the nests are protected from predators and the weather. Here they will be able to carry out their natural behaviours safely, from flying in and out to laying their eggs and raising their chicks. With the potential to support nearly 180 pairs, the bank will help secure

Testwood Lakes' colony and boost Hampshire's sand martin population, giving these amazing little birds the best chance to thrive."

Sand Martins (*Riparia riparia*) are among the earliest spring migrants to reach the UK, arriving from Africa in March. They begin nesting from April and often raise two broods before returning in August to wintering grounds in the Sahel region.

These sociable birds nest in colonies, digging burrows into steep sandy banks. Each pair creates a nesting chamber at the end of a tunnel, where four or five eggs are laid. The smallest member of the swallow family, sand Martins measure around 12cm in length with a wingspan of about 28cm. Brown above and white below with a distinctive brown breast band, they are agile flyers often seen skimming low over water in search of insects.

While UK populations remain broadly stable, droughts in African wintering grounds have affected numbers. In Hampshire, the species is now largely confined to sand and gravel pits, with 318 active nesting holes recorded. A 2021 survey found just three active colonies in the county, including one at Blashford Lakes Nature Reserve.

The Testwood Lakes bank was built with support from the Volunteer Task Force and the Friends of Testwood. The improved design offers better drainage, enhanced predator protection and easier maintenance, with a sand-coloured finish to blend into the landscape and discreet spikes along the top.

Visitors can view the bank from a nearby bird hide as breeding activity begins. With the new structure in place, the sand martin colony at Testwood Lakes is well positioned to thrive for years to come.



Snippets

Members Day 2027

Make a diary date now – Saturday 3 April 2027 at St Swithuns School near Winchester.

HOS donation of £3500 pays for projects at Fishlake Meadows

You may have seen the rafts used at this site for nesting gulls and terns. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust wanted a new tern raft, so we agreed to donate £1800 for this. Also, many of you will have heard a Bittern booming at Fishlake Meadows in March-May. The Trust wants to manage the water levels there to be perfect for Bitterns to breed, but that requires an understanding of the water levels each month so that this can be managed. They needed water monitoring equipment and asked HOS if we would help. We were delighted to donate £1673 for a water level monitor to be purchased.

Your next HOS membership payment

It really helps us if you can set up a Standing Order to pay us on 2 January every year. Some of you have Standing Orders that pay us in April or May, so we then may think you have left us! So please check when it is payable. Our bank to receive the £16 payment is **Lloyds Bank, Sort Code 30-92-02, Account number 01182908**. Please make sure your name is on the payment. Thank you.

130 new Members already in 2026!

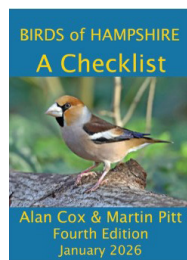
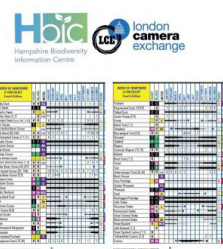
We are so pleased to see 130 new Members already in 2026. You are very welcome! HOS may be big, but it's friendly, so please encourage your birding friends to join us.

Congratulations to HOS Young Member Felix Hoskins

Well done Felix Hoskins in being a finalist in the photography awards at The Base, Greenham – near Newbury. Felix's shot of a very common subject, a Feral Pigeon, captured the simple beauty of even an everyday bird.

Birds of Hampshire Checklist

The new 4th edition of the Birds of Hampshire checklist is published by HOS on Saturday with support from HBIC and London Camera Exchange. It will go on sale (£2 from the HOS website fairly soon). Fully updated to the end of 2025.



UK Birding Holidays by Keith Betton

Many of us travel abroad to take holidays, but it is easy to forget that our own country has a lot to offer. Here are three great areas that I love to visit in case you have not yet booked a summer break.

Minsmere, Suffolk

I am always stunned by the range of birds within the RSPB Reserve, which includes habitats such as woodland, reed bed, heathland and brackish lagoons. The "Scrape", with its 18 hectares of islands and shallow water, was created to attract a wide range of breeding waders including the famous Avocet. A good time to visit is in July, when many other sites are surprisingly quiet, yet the reserve is heaving with waders returning from the Arctic Circle, while resident and visiting breeders are still rearing their young. The nearby Walberswick National Nature Reserve covers just over 600 hectares near to Southwold, including the Westwood Marshes which continue inland for about 4 kilometres. Accommodation can be found at Dunwich, Westleton, Blythburgh, Walberswick and Southwold.

Snowdonia, Dyfed/Gwynedd

The Snowdonia National Park covers several important National Nature Reserves and a number of challenging peaks ranging right up to the magnificent summit of Snowdon at 1068 metres. The whole area extends from the Conway Estuary in the north to the Berwyn Mountains in the east, Aberdovey in the south and then along the coast, including such well known destinations

as Harlech and Portmadoc. Now this is an area where a car is essential, unless you are content with concentrating on just a specific corner of the National Park. The good news is that there is plenty for your family to do, whether it is visiting the coastal resorts such as Barmouth or impressive monuments such as Harlech Castle. Birdwatching sites I would recommend in the area are Cwm Idwal, Lake Bala and Lake Vyrnwy (just outside the park), and the Dovey Estuary including the RSPB reserve at Ynys-hir. One of my favourite locations is Tal-y-llyn, which lies in the shadow of Cader Idris – one of the highest peaks in Wales.

Speyside, Highland

So much has been written about the birdlife of this area that it seems almost pointless recommending it in an article such as this, but I cannot think of a place in the United Kingdom that combines such great beauty and wonderful birds. You really need more than a long weekend to make the most of the sites, which are too numerous to mention in any detail. For most people the focus will fall on Loch Garten and the Abernethy Forest, and who can blame them? I would also strongly recommend visits to the Insh Marshes and Lochs Morlich and Aneilean. The Cairngorm Mountains are irresistible, and the areas of Ben Macdui and Carn Ban Mor are among the best for birdwatching. There is an abundance of accommodation in Aviemore with additional hotels at Boat of Garten and Nethy Bridge.

Ladybirders spread their wings



It was an early morning start for a group of Ladybirders from across Hampshire. We set out to spread our wings and travel to visit Elmley nature reserve in Kent. A big thank you goes out to Simon (our Elmley guide) for his fantastic knowledge and kindness throughout our safari tour. it was a first for all of us to Elmley and it didn't disappoint. On arrival we had a slow drive along the 2 mile drive in with excellent views of Marsh Harriers and many other birds. We then had a lovely stroll down past the school house looking out for Little Owls. We arrived at the estuary where we found a great variety of waders and stunning views of Bearded Tits. We arrived back at the main hub

ready for our packed lunch before meeting up with Simon and heading out on Safari where we had great views of a Short eared Owl and a little Owl. After a drive along the sea wall with eager eyes we managed to find the Shore Lark which turned out be be a UK lifer for half the group. Full of excitement it was time to turn back but as we did so we had a spectacular view of the largest group of Widgeon in the UK as they took to the sky, thousands and thousands the sky was full. We thanked Simon who had gone above and beyond and transferred into our car and headed back home to Hampshire full of story's of our day.

HOS Gilets!



HOS now has a new item of clothing, Gilets! I would like to thank Ester Stannah for obtaining these a most welcome addition to the range. Details below.

Unisex & lady fit (curved to back hem)
Contrast trim detail to pockets, arm holes, collar and zip
External zipped side pockets
2-way zipper

Sizes available

Unisex
S 34", M 38", L 42", XL 46", 2XL 52", 3XL 54"
Ladies
XS 8, S 10, M 12, L 14, XL 16, 3XL 20
Colours: Moss Green, Navy, Burgundy, Black

Price £25.00

You said and we listened!



Last November we sent out a questionnaire to find out what you think of HOS and how we can improve what we offer. There were questions on Members' Day, Kingfisher, HOS Clothing, Guided Walks, HOS social media and the Hampshire Bird Report, and some broader questions.

Firstly, may I say a big thankyou to all who responded. And a particular thankyou to the 114 Members who volunteered to help in various ways!

We asked what you like about HOS and this image was generated from the responses. We also asked how we can improve. Many said we couldn't, but we also had a lot of great ideas that we are following up to see what can be put into practice.

Kingfisher remains popular and is considered a good read by most and we've had some great ideas for the

future. Don't forget, you can still get a hardcopy version for a small voluntary donation.

Those that have HOS bought branded clothing, are generally very happy with their items and we are considering some new additions, like the gilets seen at Members' Day.

Only a small number of responders had been on our guided walks. We have some good ideas that would help boost attendance and are following these up.

The Bird Report remains highly rated, with most describing it as "excellent"! Again, we've also had some great ideas for future inclusions.

The full details of the responses we've received are being put on our website.

Dave Palmer
HOS Secretary



Bearded Reedling by Andy Moody

Walk the Walk

If you want to come on a HOS walk you generally don't need to book. However, there are some exceptions, so please check on the HOS website at hos.org.uk.

If booking is required please call or text HOS Walks Co-ordinator Di Warner on 07883 344724 or email warner@btinternet.com. Please don't just turn up where a booking is required as you will not be able to join the walk. We have only put the dates and times of the walks here. There is more detailed information on the HOS website and do please check to make sure there have been no changes since Kingfisher was published, or to see if any new walks have been added. If you can't get to the website please contact Di.

Walks are for HOS members but non-members are welcome. For general queries about HOS walks contact Di. Contact the walk leader (details on website) for specific walk information.

July 2026

Saturday 4 July

Tidgrove Warren Farm, near Kingsclere
Leaders: Keith Betton (07809 671468) & Janice Beck, Barry Stalker, Shane King, Steve Harley
9.30 am to 1.00 pm (1-2 miles)

Sunday 5 July

Keyhaven
Leader: Ian Packer (07505 084123)
9.30 am to 2.00 pm (5 miles)

Saturday 25 July

Farmland around the Rivers Lyde & Loddon, Hook, Hants
Leader: Simon Stacey (07720 467678) & Helen Wood (07884 202328)
9.00 am to 12.30 pm (3.5 miles).

August 2026

Sunday 9 August

Normandy Lagoon & Oxey Marshes
Leader: Ian Packer (07505 084123)
9.30 am to 2.00 pm (3 miles)

Friday 14 August

Silchester Common and Pamber Forest
Leader: Martin Pitt (07926 841139)
9.00 am to 3.00 pm (5 miles)

August 30

Beacon Hill
Leader: George Baker (07952 926004)
9.30 am to 1.30 pm (5 miles)

September 2026

Sun 6th September

Farlington Marshes
Leader: Kevin Stouse (07510 600808)
9.30 am to 2.00 pm (5 miles)

Saturday 12 September

Loddon Valley and Wildmoor
Leader: Martin Pitt (07926 841139)
9.00 am to 3.30 pm (6 miles)

Sunday 13 September

Blashford Lakes HIIWT Reserve
Leader: Ian Packer (07505 084123)
09.30 am to 2.00 pm (2 miles)

Sunday 27 September

Lordswood, Chilworth and Southampton Sports Centre.
Leader: Phil Budd (07849 185896)
10:30 am to 15:00 pm (4.5 miles)

October 2026

Saturday 3 October

Edenbrook Country Park, Fleet
Leader: John Blithe (07966 391297)
10:00 am to 12:30 pm (3 miles)

Saturday 17 October

Longparish
Leader: Geoff Sharp (01256 470286)
9.30 am to 1.00 pm (3-4 miles)



Stone Curlew

Sunday 18 October

Keyhaven
Leader: Ian Packer (07505 084123)
9.30 am to 2.00 pm (5 miles)

Saturday 31 October

Lepe Country Park
Leader: Joost Brandsma (07401 568130)
09.00 am to 12.30 pm (2 miles)

Sunday 25 October

Farlington Marshes
Leader: Kevin Stouse (07510 600808)
9.30 am to 2.00 pm (6 miles)



Ruff

New Officers!

HOS would like to welcome the following new trustees who will help the Society going forwards . They have already settled into their roles admirably, Graham Bishop as Treasurer and Esther Stannah as sales officer Colin Prescott working on the Hampshire Bird Report.

As trustees Ale Oliveto and Felicia Green will provide support to the committee on various fronts including media and future development.

Treasurer: Graham Bishop
Sales Officer: Esther Stannah
Hampshire Bird Report Editor: Colin Prescott
Trustee: Ale Oliveto
Trustee: Felicia Green
Kingfisher Editor: Peter Little



Trustee Felicia Green



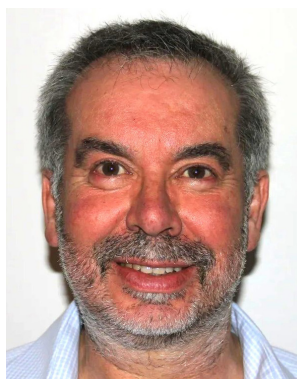
Sales Officer Esther Stannah



Trustee Ale Oliveto



Treasurer Graham Bishop



Bird Report Editor Colin Prescott



Editor Peter Little

HOS Walk at Acres Down 22 March 2026

A beautifully sunny day set the scene for a very successful HOS walk near Minstead in the New Forest, with 14 attendees enjoying an excellent variety of species. Unfortunately no Lesser Spotted Woodpecker were seen, either on "the tree" or in the surrounding area. However a number of rarely seen birds compensated.

A number of trees had been felled recently which will create a good habitat for Nightjar in the future. The Crossbill in the area use the mud from the machinery tracks and puddles nearby to grind down the tough seeds they eat.

From the car park:

- Goldcrest
- Song Thrush (heard)
- Wren
- Robin

Along the track and through the woods:

- Blackbird
- Blue Tit
- Firecrest
- Lively Treecreepers playing hide and seek around tree trunks
- Stock Dove calling and perched at the top of a dead tree
- Long tailed Tit
- Chaffinch
- Coal Tit
- Great Tit
- Buzzards overhead and calling

On the open plain:

- Stonechats flycatching
- Pied Wagtail
- Crow

Around the Conifer trees

- A flock of Goldfinches
- Marsh Tit (heard)
- Numerous Siskins in the canopy of Scots Pines
- Great Spotted Woodpecker (heard)
- A pair of Crossbills flew overhead and dropped into the pines to feed

Out on the heath:

- Skylark
- A pair of Crossbills flew over
- Chiffchaff (heard)
- Blackcap (heard)
- A Goshawk seen moving through the trees
- Meadow Pipit
- A pair of Dartford Warblers flitting between gorse bushes
- Mistle Thrush perched high in a tree

Returning to the car park:

- Strong thermals producing excellent raptor activity
- Five Buzzards soaring and a few more Goshawk were spotted

As an aside, Comma, Peacock, Brimstone and Red Admiral butterfly were spotted, on the fuzzy catkins of Goat Willow and amongst the dead Bracken fronds.

Overall:

A warm, sunny day with superb visibility and a rich list of species (29) made this a thoroughly enjoyable and highly successful walk.

We would especially like to thank Ian Packer for his remarkable expertise and his generous help in identifying the various bird species, as well as for explaining the subtle differences between them. His knowledge added so much depth to our experience.

Brian and Tina Vaughan

Would you like your photos published ?

We are always delighted to receive members' photographs and welcome contributions for possible publication in **Kingfisher**.

If you would like your photographs to be considered, please send them to:

HOSKingfisher@outlook.com

As a general guide, less is more, so we suggest sending no more than six of your very best images each month.

To ensure suitable print quality, please send photographs as attachments rather than embedding them within your email.



Excessive cropping reduces our opportunity to use the image



We can crop your image at Kingfisher to suit the layout

Submitting your photographs

Subjects should be in focus and reasonably sharp. Although subjects will often be looking towards the camera, rules are sometimes meant to be broken.

Please avoid excessive cropping and keep composition in mind, whether using the rule of thirds, the golden ratio, or another effective approach.

Please remove any watermarks before submitting images as they may interfere with the crop we may choose to use.

Wherever possible, name each photograph with the species and your name. If this isn't possible, please include the species name in your email subject line.

Each issue we select photographs for a variety of features within **Kingfisher**, including **Photo Finish**, **What's Been Spotted** (highlighting notable species recorded during the previous three months), as well as the **front cover**, **centre spread** and **rear cover**. Please note that front and rear cover images should suit the usual portrait format.

Ethical photography

The welfare of birds always comes first.

We take an ethical approach to the photographs we publish and will not include images taken contrary to the HOS Birders' Code of Conduct, which can be found on the HOS website.

We look forward to seeing your photographs!



Reed Warbler by Claire Melville

Did you know? Feeding garden birds could cause harm

Keith Betton explains

You probably saw that recently the RSPB has suggested that we should think about not feeding our garden birds, particularly in the summer. Chris Packham also spoke about this at our Members Day. It's a tricky issue, because for many people their main connection with birds is through their garden, but for some species, us providing food is causing their populations to decline, and here I want to explain how this is the case.

Feeding birds is a popular activity in Britain, with two-thirds of households participating, spending £250 million annually on bird food. On average, there are 100 bird feeders per square kilometre, providing enough food to sustain populations of common species like Blue Tits, Great Tits, House Sparrows, and Greenfinches year-round. While bird feeding benefits certain species, such as increasing survival and breeding success, it has also raised concerns about its negative effects. Disease transmission is a major issue, with epidemics like the Greenfinch collapse, linked to trichomonosis, becoming more common at feeders.

Avian trichomonosis has long been known to affect pigeons, doves and birds of prey. Its emergence in finches in 2005 led to a major population decline in Greenfinch and Chaffinch. Quite why Greenfinch is so susceptible to the disease is unclear. It is likely that the disease spilled over into finches following the increase in use of garden feeding stations by Woodpigeon.

Avian poxvirus has been documented in several garden bird species and is most often seen in House Sparrow, Starling, Woodpigeon and Dunnock. Its emergence in UK tits saw a more severe form of the disease, resulting in pronounced skin lesions, some of which were likely to have hampered the bird's ability to feed and to avoid predators. Because UK tits are relatively sedentary in their habits, it is likely that the disease reached the UK via a biting insect, such as a mosquito, crossing the English Channel in a warm plume of air.

Salmonellosis has been reported in wild birds since at least the 1950s, with the bacterium responsible known to be capable of persisting in the environment for many months. Greenfinch and House Sparrow are the two species in which the disease is most often seen. Incidents of infection peak in January. Occurrence of the disease in UK passerines has dropped sharply over recent years and may reflect increased immunity or reduced transmission following the sharp decline in Greenfinch populations.

The sad fact for us is that some birds coming to our feeders are getting diseases as a direct result. Many people clean their feeders regularly to stop infection, but clearly this initiative is not enough. The RSPB has not asked people to stop feeding birds, but it has strongly recommended people to stop using flat surfaces to place food because diseases spread more quickly in such circumstances.

Additionally, there are worries about the broader ecological impacts of bird feeding, particularly its role in altering competition between species. Birds such as Blue Tits and Great Tits have thrived due to abundant food from feeders, resulting in increased populations and



densities. However, this has caused declines in woodland specialists like Marsh Tits and Willow Tits. These species face increased competition from the more dominant, generalist tits. Blue Tits and Great Tits have benefited from bird feeding. This has likely contributed to the decline of Marsh Tits and Willow Tits.

The growing presence of bird feeding stations in nature reserves and public woodlands raises the question of whether bird feeding is indirectly harming specialist species. Though there is no definitive proof that competition is the primary cause of population declines, it is a contributing factor.

A precautionary approach is needed. Reducing or discouraging bird feeding in sensitive habitats could help protect declining species like Marsh Tits and Willow Tits. Adjusting the types of food provided may also reduce the pressure on dominant species.

Ultimately, bird feeding could be rethought to balance human enjoyment of wildlife with the conservation needs of vulnerable species. Reducing food subsidies for generalist species might give declining birds a better chance of survival in the face of ongoing biodiversity challenges.

The average winter temperature trends in the UK have shifted over several decades, with a general warming trend observed in recent years, largely influenced by climate change. However, winters are still subject to short-term variability, and occasional cold snaps still occur. 2010, 2013 and 2018 were all colder than average, and on occasions snow covered the ground for several days. In these situations, please do put out food for birds. Also always put out water to help the birds. Our warmer summers are now often very dry, and birds need help in such situations, just as we do!



What's been spotted January to April 2026

by Tom Jordan

Around 220 species were seen during the period. This summary focuses on larger counts, scarcer species and unexpected localities reported throughout the period. Most records are from Birdguides and Goingbirding websites: a much more complete picture will eventually appear in the Hampshire Bird Report. Regular site summaries appear monthly in Birdwatching magazine and on the HOS website. Sightings refer to single birds unless otherwise stated. Inclusion in this list does not indicate that sightings of rarities have been considered by the appropriate records committee.



Ring-necked Duck by Simon King

BLACK BRANT: Northney, Hayling Island 12/1 - 5/2; Farlington Marshes 14/2
SCAUP: Langstone Harbour 1/1 - 4/4
WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE: Keyhaven/ Pennington Marshes max. 32 1/1 - 18/3; Overton 6 1/1; Titchfield Haven max. 45 1/1 - 4/1; Farlington Marshes max. 25 1/1 - 20/2; Bisterne max. 11 1/1 - 4/1; Avon Causeway 11 2/1; Chilling 45 3/1, 35 4/1; Southmoor 14 4/1; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes max. 12 4/1 - 31/1; Hill Head 44 28/1
TUNDRA BEAN GOOSE: Pennington Marshes 4 1/1 - 28/1; Milford on Sea 10/1; Avon Causeway 2 10/1; Beaulieu

Estuary 22 14/1; Fleet Pond 17/1; Exbury 4 17/1; The Vyne Watermeadows 2 20/1
GARGANEY: Farlington Marshes 22/4 - 26/4



Garganey by Andy Tew

RED-CRESTED POCHARD: Blashford Lakes 4/1 - 24/3; Wellington Country Park 2 24/3

FERRUGINOUS DUCK: Titchfield Haven 6/1; Brownwich Pond 30/1; Posbrook Floods 21/2, 22/2

RING-NECKED DUCK: Fleet Pond 25/2 - 27/2

VELVET SCOTER: Weston Shore 11/2; Hill Head 8/4 - 25/4; Hurst Beach 8/4

LONG-TAILED DUCK: Budds Farm Sewage Farm 1/1 - 11/2

RUDDY DUCK: Ranvilles Lane 29/3
 Red-necked Grebe: Langstone Harbour 1-2 5/1 - 8/2; Brownwich/Chilling 19/1 - 17/2

SLAVONIAN GREBE: Pennington Marsh 1-3 1/1 - 17/3; Langstone Harbour max. 5 5/1 - 7/4; Gunner Point, Hayling Island 18/1; Brownwich/Chilling 1-2 22/1 - 22/2; Calshot Spit 1-2 4/2 - 18/3

BLACK-NECKED GREBE: Langstone Harbour max. 4 3/1 - 7/3; Rockford Lake,



American Golden Plover by Simon King

Blashford Lakes 3/1, 4/1; Keyhaven/ Pennington Marshes 1-2 5/1 - 19/1; Lepe 16/1; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 25/1 - 31/1; Weston Shore 5/2 - 3/3; Hill Head 2 5/3; Sandy Point, Hayling Island 2 27/3; Netley 4 7/4, Paulsgrove 3 2/3

AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER: Bunny Meadows, Warsash 30/3 - 15/4

KILLDEER: Ripley Farm Reservoir 21/1 - 28/1
 Ruff: Pennington Marshes 5/1; Titchfield Canal Path 10/1; Ibsley Water, Blashford



Curlew Sandpiper

Lakes 2-6 19/3 - 21/3; Farlington Marshes 7/4, 17/4, 22/4, 3 26/4, 27/4

CURLEW SANDPIPER: Lymington-Keyhaven 12/4 - 18/4, 30/4; Hayling Oyster Beds 25/4

WOOD SANDPIPER: Testwood Lakes 20/4 - 22/4; Farlington Marshes 25/4; Titchfield Canal Path 27/4, 6 30/4; Pennington Marshes 2 29/4

SPOTTED REDSHANK: Lymington-Keyhaven 1-3 1/1 - 25/4; Bunny Meadows, Warsash 5/1 - 5/4; Southmoor 7/4



Little Gull by Kathryn Crouch

KITTIWAKE: Hill Head 9/1, 23/4; Gosport 9/1; Barton on Sea 11/1; Calshot Spit 10/2; Titchfield Haven 27/2; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 27/3 - 29/3; Lee-on-the-Solent 2 23/4

LITTLE GULL: Sandy Point, Hayling Island NR 9 13/1, 4 14/1, 4 16/1, 20/1, 9/2, 13 24/4; Milford on Sea 17/1, 13/3; Langstone Harbour 4 18/1; Hill Head 21/1, 25/1, 9/3; Ripley Farm Reservoir 23/1 - 28/1; Calshot 1-3 24/1 - 31/1; Hook-with-Warsash 25/1, 28/1; Lepe 26/1; Lepe 29/1; Southsea Castle 2/2; Weston Shore 3 4/2; Keyhaven/ Pennington Marshes 1-3 14/2 - 19/2; Titchfield Canal Path 22/2 - 25/2; Fleet Pond 4 17/3, 29/4; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 1-4 18/3 - 17/4; Titchfield Haven 18/4

BONAPARTE'S GULL: Fishlake Meadows 12/4

CASPIAN GULL: Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 18/1; Farlington Marshes 2 2/2; Hayling Bay 5/2; Hill Head 13/2

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL: Lower Test Marshes 6/1; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 10/1, 3 17/1, 2 18/1, 24/1, 9/4; Rockford Lake, Blashford Lakes 18/1; Ivy Lake, Blashford Lakes 3/2; Ibsley 7/2; Hythe 9/2; Stokes Bay 11/2, 20/2, 23/2; Weston Shore 20/2, 18/4; Hamble Estuary 23/2 - 23/4; Winchester Sewage Farm 12/3; Mercury Marshes 2/4; Ashlett Mill Pond 4/4

ROSEATE TERN: Titchfield Haven 3 29/4

ARCTIC TERN: Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 2 5/4; Hill Head 3 14/4; Brownwich 21/4; Pennington Marsh 25/4; Weston Shore 8 28/4

BLACK TERN: Hurst Beach 7 23/4, 24/4, 26/4; Lee-on-the-Solent 23/4; Brownwich 3 24/4; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 6 25/4
GREAT SKUA: Hill Head 17/4; Hurst Beach 26/4

POMARINE SKUA: Hurst Beach 23/4, 6 30/4; Lee-on-the-Solent 23/4

ARCTIC SKUA: Hill Head 2 7/4, 8/4, 15/4, 16/4; Southsea 2 7/4; Stokes Bay 2

7/4; Hurst Beach 23/4, 24/4; Brownwich 24/4; Sandy Point, Hayling Island 24/4
RED-THROATED DIVER: Taddiford 2 4/1; Hill Head 3 8/1, 18/1, 11 19/1, 1/2; Gosport 9/1 Sandy Point, Hayling Island 8 16/1, 5 20/1; Lee-on-the-Solent 22/1 2 25/1

BLACK-THROATED DIVER: Chichester Harbour 18/1, 20/1, 25/2, 10/3; Langstone Harbour 2/2

FULMAR: Black Point, Hayling Island 23/2

GLOSSY IBIS: Titchfield Canal Path 1-6 1/1 - 9/4; Titchfield Haven 4/1, 5 31/1, 6 5/2

SPOONBILL: Lymington-Keyhaven max. 22 1/1 - 25/4; Calshot 2 14/1; Milford on Sea 2 28/1, 25/4; Farlington Marshes 7/2, 8/2, 27/3, 20/4, 2 29/4; Lepe 4 14/2, 10/4; Pylewell 18 14/2, 25/2; Chichester Harbour 24/2; Titchfield Haven 3 26/2, 3 10/3; Langstone Harbour 3 10/3; Skidmore 9/4; Weston Shore 2 17/4; Fishlake Meadows 2 23/4

BITTERN: Titchfield Haven 4/1, 30/1, 7/3; Ivy Lake, Blashford Lakes 2 8/2 - 5/3; Straight Mile, Romsey 15/2

CATTLE EGRET: Northney, Hayling Island 6 3/1; Brownwich 6/1, 10/1; Bickerley Common 16/2; Warblington 21 8/3; Testwood Lakes 12 3/4, 6/4; Titchfield Haven 3/4, 7/4, 8 15/4 32 27/4; Nursling Church 12 4/4; Keyhaven 4 19/4; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 22/4; Fishlake Meadows 2 25/4; Bickton 20 26/4; Burgate Manor Farm 14 30/4

OSPREY: Timsbury 15/3; Mottisfont 16/3; Lower Test Marshes 18/3, 18/4; Riverside Park, Southampton 26/3; Posbrook Floods 27/3, 4/4; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 28/3; Bedhampton 30/3; Bassett, Southampton 3/4; Havant 4/4; Farlington Marshes 4/4, 13/4; Calshot 5/4; Normandy Marsh 6/4; Titchfield Haven 6/4; Fawley Refinery 6/4, 13/4; Fareham 7/4; Bickerley Common 7/4; Nursling Mill 7/4; Skidmore 9/4; Langstone Harbour 10/4; Dunbridge 18/4; Keyhaven Marsh 18/4; Fishlake Meadows 29/4; Burgate Manor Farm 30/4



Short-eared Owl by Andy Moody

HEN HARRIER: [Excluding roost sites] Eyeworth Pond 1/1; Shatterford Bottom, NF 14/1; Beaulieu Heath 19/1; Whitsbury Down 2 24/2; Old Alresford Down 24/3; Canadian War Memorial 20/4

BLACK KITE: Hook-with-Warsash 20/4

SHORT-EARED OWL: Hayling Oyster Beds 17/1; North Binness Island 13/3

HOOPOE: Martin Down 6/4; Fritham 10/4; Basingstoke 19/4, 21/4; Newtown Common 29/4



Hoopoe by Simon King

MERLIN: Swanmore 4/1; Hayling Oyster Beds 5/1; Ocknell Plain 6/1; Beaulieu Heath 7/1; Fishlake Meadows 7/1; Farlington Marshes 10/1, 16/1, 4/4; North Binness Island 10/1; Milford on Sea 10/1; Hill Head 14/1, 12/2; Winchester Sewage Farm 17/1, 20/1, 26/1, 24/2; Lymington-Keyhaven 20/1, 25/1, 28/3, 12/4; Shatterford 24/1; Burgate Manor Farm 7/2; Posbrook Floods



Snow Bunting by Simon King

17/2; The Butts, NF 8/3; Ranvilles Lane 23/3; Straight Mile, Romsey 5/4; Millersford Bottom 8/4; Pennington Marsh 12/4; Ibsley Common 19/4

GREAT GREY SHRIKE: Shatterford/Pig Bush, NF 1/1 -17/3; Bratley Plain, NF 4/1, 14/3, 25/3; Holm Hill, NF 18/1; Winding Stonard 20/1; Withybed Bottom/Stoney Cross, NF 30/1 - 30/3; Vales Moor 14/3

GOLDEN ORIOLE: Everton 18/4

WOOD WARBLER: [Non-breeding sites] The Kench, Hayling Island 18/4

SIBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF: Oxleys Coppice, Fareham 24/1

NIGHTINGALE: [Non-breeding sites] Taddiford 6/4; Old Winchester Hill 9/4; Bedhampton Mill Pond 18/4; West Wood, Southampton 18/4; Langstone Bridge/ Northney Marina 24/4

PIED FLYCATCHER: Lepe 16/4; Northney, Hayling Island 18/4

BLACK REDSTART: Lee-on-the-Solent 1-2 1/1 - 29/3; Lymington Marina 1/1; Southsea 2/1 - 20/2; Eastoke, Hayling



Water Pipit



Cirl Bunting by Andy Tew

Island 8/1; Eling 13/1 - 20/3; Warsash 24/1, 8/2, 14/2, 31/3; Sandy Point, Hayling Island 25/2; Fratton, Portsmouth 3/3; Becton Bunny, Barton on Sea 7/3; Totton 20/3

WATER PIPIT: Titchfield Canal Path 1/1 - 9/1, 8/2, 5 1/4, 4 5/4; Drayton Farm WCB 5/1, 4/2, 15/3, 3 21/3, 2 22/3; Lower Test Marshes 10/1, 2 16/1; Ibsley Water, Blashford Lakes 6/3; Farlington Marshes 18/3; Pennington Marshes 18/4, 25/4

SERIN: Needs Ore 27/3 - 2/4; Southsea 9/4
SNOW BUNTING: Black Point, Hayling Island 2/2 - 17/2

CIRL BUNTING: Portchester 29/1-31/1
GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE: Holbury 1/1 - 12/4; North Baddesley 5/3; Littleton 15/3 - 17/3; Brownwich 26/3; Bedhampton 9/4; Millbrook, Southampton 1/4, 10/4 - 12/4; Broughton 14/4

Please send records to the County Recorder so they can be included in the HOS Database and Hampshire Bird Report.

Send to: Martin Pitt, 35 Clere Gardens, Chineham, Basingstoke, Hants, RG24 8LZ
 mjpitt35clere@hotmail.com

Records can be submitted as an email attachment using the Recording Form available from the home page of the HOS website: <http://www.hos.org.uk>

Thankyou
Tom Jordan

Martin Down National Nature Reserve



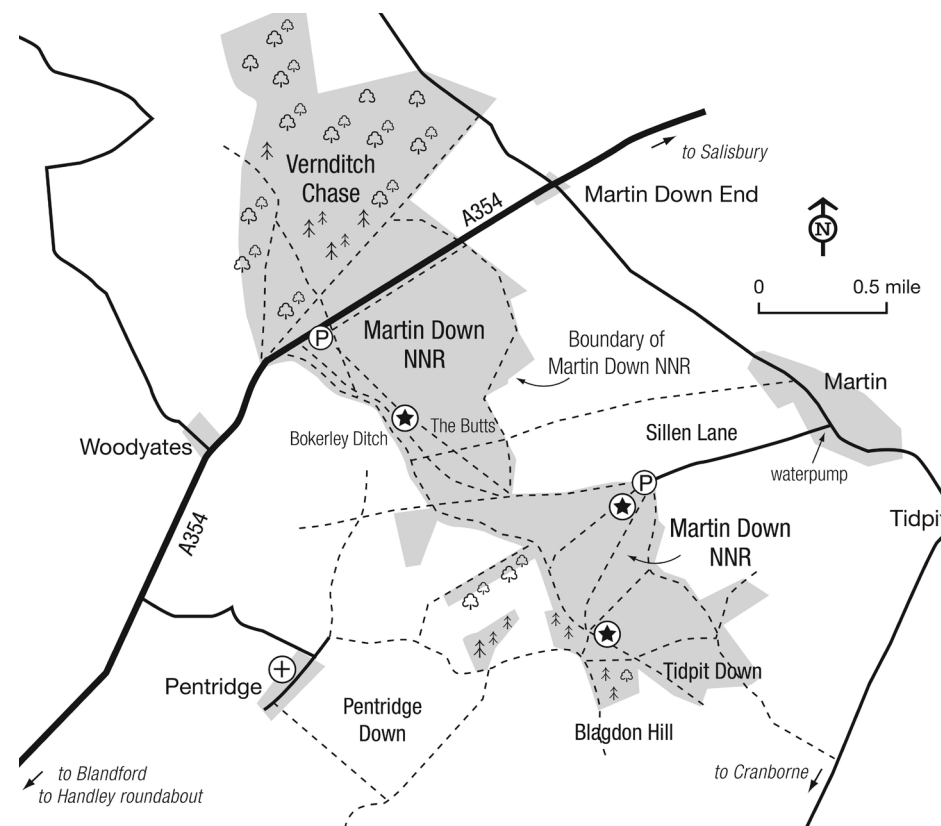
Martin Down is a rare example of relatively flat and gently sloping downland comprising mostly chalk grassland with important areas of scrub, including gorse, and deciduous woodland. To the south and west, the reserve is overlooked by a prominent ridge extending from Tidpit Common Down to Pentridge Hill. Much of the surrounding land consists of arable farmland with scattered forestry plantations and more extensive areas of mixed and deciduous woodland. The reserve, which is jointly managed by Natural England and Hampshire County Council, supports an outstanding chalk downland flora and fauna including several noteworthy species of orchid and butterfly.

Species

The days when this was a key site for seeing Stone-curlew and Nightingale are now a distant memory, nevertheless the area still supports an interesting

selection of breeding birds typical of chalk scrub and open downland. These include several declining species, most notably the Turtle Dove, which favours the thickets of dense scrub and the hedgerows bordering the reserve. In 2025 birds were heard (and occasionally seen) from mid-May to early July from several areas of thick scrub. Numbers here have declined steeply and there may only be one or two pairs on the site.

Small numbers of Grey Partridge occur now and are best detected at dusk, but this is the Corn Bunting capital of Hampshire, with many singing from the extensive areas of open downland with widely scattered bushes. Quail are heard in most years, making this the most reliable site in Hampshire for this species. Rather surprisingly the gorse scrub in the centre of the down attracts several pairs of Nightjars most summers,



while up to four pairs of Tree Pipits hold territory. Woodlarks are occasionally present in spring and summer. Other breeding birds of the reserve include Skylark and Yellowhammer which are very common, along with Red-legged Partridge, Green Woodpecker, Stonechat, Garden Warbler, Lesser and Common Whitethroats and Linnet. Among the raptors Common Buzzards, Red Kites and Kestrels are frequently observed, and it is well worth keeping an eye open for a Hobby. Ravens have increased greatly and it is not unusual to see congregations of 20-30 nearby in late summer. Perhaps the best chance of seeing Barn Owls, which breed in the general vicinity, is at dusk when travelling back from the reserve along the nearby

country lanes.

This is also a good area for the scarcer winter raptors, which may occur more frequently than records suggest, and it is well worth looking out for Hen Harriers, Merlins and Short-eared Owls in winter, when Redwing and Fieldfare are also much in evidence.

Landbird migrants mainly pass through in autumn and regularly include Whinchats and Wheatears, while scarcer species such as Ring Ouzels are occasionally reported. There have also been sightings of such uncommon and rare birds as Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Red-footed Falcon, Hoopoe, Golden Oriole and Red-backed, Woodchat and Great Grey Shrikes.



Timing

Turtle Doves can be heard purring from May until July, with males setting up territories in several parts of the reserve's thicker scrub vegetation. Quails are most likely to be heard on fine, warm, still days (and evenings) from mid-June to early August anywhere across the grassy fields. Barn and Little Owls are best seen at dusk.

Access

There are two main access points to Martin Down NNR. The first access point is situated on the A354 Blandford to Salisbury road 2.8 miles north-east from the Handley roundabout travelling from the Blandford direction and 1.2 miles south-west of the junction with the minor road to Martin at Martin Drove End travelling from the Salisbury direction. The turning to the car park (free) is well signposted and lies to the south of the road. The second

access point is reached from the small triangular green with the old water pump in Martin village by taking Sillens Lane south-west for 0.7 miles to the parking area (free) at the base of the down.

The north and west parts of the reserve are best explored from the A354 car park. This includes the small area of reserve to the north of the A354 road which is accessed by a track immediately opposite the entrance to the car park.

The main part of the reserve is reached by following the track south-east from the west end of the car park. This leads to the Butts at the end of the Second World War firing range and the open down beyond. The east and south parts of the reserve are best accessed from the Sillens Lane parking area. A network of footpaths, some permissive, provide access to much of the reserve.



Facilities

Car parks (donation suggested).

Calendar

All year

Red-legged and Grey Partridges, Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Barn Owl, Green Woodpecker, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Raven, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting.

April–July

Quail, Hobby, Turtle Dove, Woodlark, Garden Warbler, Lesser and Common Whitethroats, common landbird migrants including Wheatear.

August–October

Common landbird migrants including Common Redstart, Whinchat and Wheatear.

November–March

Hen Harrier, Merlin, Short-eared Owl, winter thrushes.

Text based on *Where to Watch Birds in Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* edited by Keith Betton, published by Bloomsbury Press at £25.

Scanning early Kingfisher editions by Peter Little

Keith Betton asked me last year would I scan all the early Kingfisher editions as an electronic library for future use to the society. I started the project by scanning

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(no. 1042309)
President Chris Packham Chairman John Eyre

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at various DPI (dots per inch) and various document types such as black and white, colour and plain document due to early Kingfishers having front covers and internal pages printed on various colours of paper. I eventually settled on 600dpi and document, these gave the best all round results and made batch scanning easier.

Issues 83 to 98 of the material I have were typewritten or produced using an early word processing programme

quarterly not the three times a year we have now. Colour and high quality paper appears mixed in with printer paper from issue 99. Full colour throughout starts a bit later. I suppose the biggest standout is the fact that when HOS eventually got a website and the internet reached a certain stage of maturity some of the articles began to be less frequent as people chose to review or inform from various websites.

KING ISHER

Hampshire Ornithological Society Newsletter
No 99 Summer 2003



Supported by Hampshire County Council & BTO Bird Clubs Partnership

Some of the articles have stood the test of time, "What's been spotted" was originally called "Recent Reports", "Walk the Walk" was just the "Walks Programme". Those that have not appeared with such frequency are book and technical / equipment reviews, but the colour reproduction of images now is second to none as digital camera sensors and the files emanating from them have increased in quality beyond all expectations. You only need to see the

quality of the images in this edition to notice how far we have come from 400ASA film and cameras with slow shutter speeds.

Initially in 1999 the editor was Peter Morrison and with all the input required via early MS Word or Lotus Notes it must have taken an age to put it together and get printed, we now a image team of Claire Melville and Steve Laycock, myself and then Rob Farnworth who puts it together digitally and gets it published so much smarter and less consuming of time.

REMINDER
Next Newsletter deadline is 1st September 1999. Please post, telephone or email Recent Reports to Keith Betton, the Assistant County Recorder, throughout the period.

ADVERTISING
All personal advertisements from members are free, as - at the Editor's discretion - are advertisements for "good causes".
Commercial rates are £25 for a half page and £12 for a quarter page. Camera ready copy would be appreciated. Alternatively, we are glad to enter into any other arrangement by agreement.

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President James Hancock OBE
Chairman John Eyre

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Before my last sentence on this subject please note that in 1999 the membership fee was £9 nearly 27 years later it has not even doubled at £16 that is remarkable in this day and age!

At the moment as we put this article together I would like to thank Keith Betton for giving me the chance to be Editor and Collator of this other project plus thanks to all those of years gone by who worked on this exceptional publication.

KINGFISHER
The Newsletter of the
Hampshire
Ornithological
Society

No. 83 Summer 1999



EDITORIAL

When I said that the competition in the last Newsletter was more difficult than those that preceded it I was understating the case. It was extremely difficult because there were a number of mistakes. Despite this four members persevered and one got to the answer! Begin reading at the back, as I'm told most men do, and see what the 19th bird was (and try your hand at the new, original competition).

This issue contains two particularly noteworthy contributions. That from Mike Moody - reproduced in its original form and No. 18 in the series *Where to Watch Birds in Hampshire*, written by Colin Bates. If you have a favourite birdwatching location within the County why not share your knowledge.

Please note that the next Newsletter, number 84, will be published at the beginning of October and, consequently, the various deadlines have all been brought forward.

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Take 5

Our focus on local photographer: Helen Wood



Male Kingfisher

First and foremost, I'd describe myself as a birder rather than a photographer. I've always been interested in Nature but as time has gone on, I've become more focused on our feathered friends. I'd say that being out in nature has become an essential antidote to a busy, and at times stressful work life. I use a bridge camera, currently the Nikon Coolpix P950. I like to walk and there is a trade-off between the quality of the equipment and its weight. I like the flexibility that a bridge camera offers, with no need to carry additional lenses but you must accept the limitations of the kit. Poor light and movement create challenges and I do very little post-shot focusing so what you see through the lens is typically what you get, with the exception of a bit of cropping. There is no doubt that you'll see plenty of higher quality images from

better photographers than me, but if the light is good and a bird sits still for long enough, a bridge camera can give some quality images. An upgrade might be a possibility in the future but for now at least, capturing an image of a bird that I've seen helps to create a visual record that I can look back on and enjoy. I'm based in Basingstoke and am keen to share the habitat and diversity that the North of the County has to offer. Whilst I love the New Forest and the Coast, there are some hidden gems to be found across the county including the Thames Basin heaths and Loddon and Lyde rivers which form my local patch.

Kingfisher (Lakenheath Fen, Suffolk)

Previous experience has taught me that hides on nature reserves that are



Dartford Warbler

called 'kingfisher hide' rarely turn up the turquoise goods! This was the exception. I had the absolute pleasure of watching a kingfisher family learn the art of fishing at Lakenheath Fen in Suffolk a few summers ago. Watching through that hide window was like watching a nature documentary and I couldn't believe my luck, it was very much a "wow" moment and one that will last in the memory for a very long time. I think I was shaking so much with excitement I am surprised I managed any clear shots. This photo shows the iridescence but also illustrates the water potency... this male dived multiple times but still looks dry. The size of some of the fish that it tried to feed its young was extraordinary and watching him "prepare supper" by first stunning the fish then orientating it headfirst for delivery was fascinating.

Dartford Warbler (Silchester Common)

These smart little birds are amongst my favourites and the northern heaths in the county are home to a small population. This female gave me the beady eye on a bright January morning on Silchester Common. For a shy bird, she was bold as brass, and I was definitely getting the side eye! There is something about these little punk rockers of the bird world that really appeals. Another survivor, Dartford Warblers are vulnerable to harsh winters as well as excessive heat which kills off their heathland habitat and reduces their insect food source. I've always hoped to get a close up of a perched bird rather than the more typical glimpse of russet disappear into the gorse. This little bird made my morning.



Male Crossbill

Crossbill (Eversley Forest)

I hadn't seen a crossbill until this year despite much looking and thought that the New Forest was my only option. I then heard (thanks to another Ladybird) of a place in Eversley Forest that was relatively local to me and initially saw several on a cold and damp day mid-winter day high up in the canopy. When the sun was shining the following morning, a return trip was clearly in order, and I caught up with this very obliging male who was close to the ground having had to break the ice in the puddles to drink.

Spotted Flycatcher (Wildmoor, Sherfield on Loddon)

Whilst spotted flycatchers might fit the 'little brown job' category, there is something about these charismatic little birds that I really like. I could watch them for hours arc off their perch and snatch a fly out of the air before returning to the same branch. I first saw one in Dorset, and it was the behaviour that allowed an ID - I've been hooked ever since, and it always makes my heart sing when I catch

a glimpse of one. These little wonders are late spring arrivals but have the furthest migration of the warblers travelling up to 7000 kilometres from sub-Saharan Africa. They are in rapid decline (a 90% reduction since the 1960s due to a lack of insects) yet a small number are hanging on in the North of the county, and I've spent the last few years watching their progress on my local patch. As I write this, they are due back any day and I am nervously optimistic about their return.

Bearded Reedling (Farlington Marshes)

For many years, 'beardies' eluded me. Being of the 'heard but rarely seen' variety, a distant 'chew' call was as much as I'd managed despite various trips to Suffolk and the Somerset Levels. This particular morning at Farlington Marshes they bucked the trend and treated those present to brilliant views for several hours. Their constant movement in the reeds challenged the limits of my small-sensored camera but I managed a few focused shots and was delighted to have spent some time in their company.



Adult Spotted Flycatcher with Juvenile



Male Bearded Reedling

Avocets

by Brian Thorpe Tracy
and illustrated by
Amanda Cameron



Avocets by Amanda Cameron

Present all year with numbers increasing since 2002 to over 100 breeding pairs in Hampshire. Numbers bolstered by approximately 200 passage migrants. Suffers greatly from predation with only a small percentage of chicks surviving with less young produced than number of pairs breeding; with the exception of Normandy Marsh, where the protected area recently generated 60-80 young from 40 pairs.

Facts: Became extinct as a UK breeding species around 1840 due to drainage of wetland habitat, hunting, the taking of eggs by collectors and the Georgian 'past time' for placing stuffed versions in a glass case to adorn society living rooms! Recovery triggered by the flooding of the East Anglian coastal marshes during the Second World War to act as a defensive barrier to potential invaders, which provided an ideal habitat for breeding Avocets. RSPB interventions led to the gradual expansion of the species north and westwards. Avocet breed in small colonies, forming large flocks outside the breeding season, often in areas away from the breeding sites. Recently established an inland colony at the disused Droitwich salt workings.

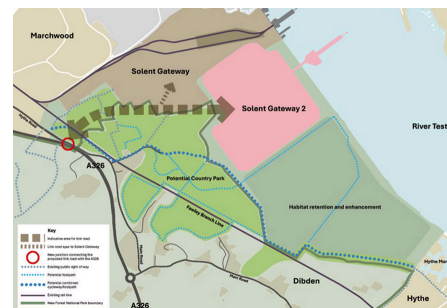
Generally unafraid and will be seen challenging potential predators, often seeking them out from above and 'dive bombing', earning the 'nick name' of 'Exocet' avocet, (after the French missile).

Folklore: Common name derived from the Italian 'avosetta', which in turn derives from the Latin Avis, meaning bird. In 1678, Francis Willughby, an early English ornithologist, made reference to the "avosetta of the Italians". The genus name 'recurvirostra', introduced in 1758 by the Swedish naturalist, Carl Linnaeus, in his 'Systema Naturae' comes from the Latin 'recurvus', which means curved backwards, and 'rostrum', meaning bill - the same avian family as the 'stilts'. The genus contains four species of avocet throughout the world, (others being the American, Andean and Red necked varieties); the UK representative is sometimes known as the 'pied' avocet, black capped avocet or Eurasian avocet, but just avocet is the most common. In Sussex often referred to as the 'cobblers awl', the awl sharing a similarity with the upturned beak.

Current logo of the RSPB: The original 1970 square logo design updated in 2013 by removing the border and in 2022 'morphed' into the current circular logo - the RSPB state that it demonstrates 'an enduring symbol of hope for nature'. The collective noun is either a 'Colony of Avocets' or more romantically an 'Orchestra of Avocets'. Simon Barnes, the former 'Times' naturalist, suggested that the avocet could be a better symbol of peace than the dove.

Hampshire highlights: Seen on most of Hampshire's coastal reserves, including: Farlington Marshes, Keyhaven/ Normandy and Titchfield Haven (which has the advantage of viewing hides). (Data from HOS Hampshire Bird Report 2024)

Solent Gateway 2 Development Proposals for Dibden Bay



In September 2025, Associated British Ports (ABP) published plans to expand the existing Solent Gateway terminal complex southwards onto the remaining section of reclaimed land at Dibden Bay. To offset the environmental impacts of the terminal extension, second jetty and new access road, ABP is proposing a new country park and a habitat retention and enhancement area. This is a scaled-down version of the project rejected in 2002. The proposals will be subject to a statutory public consultation in 2026. ABP will then apply for a Development Consent Order in 2027 and expects UK Government approval in 2028. The majority of the proposed development falls within the Dibden Bay SSSI, while the coastal and foreshore sections lie within Solent SPA and Ramsar designated areas. Bird surveys commissioned by ABP indicate the largest numbers of waterbirds use the site during winter and passage months, with Teal and Dark-bellied Brent Geese being the most numerous. Lapwing and Curlew are the most recorded wading bird species. Wigeon and Teal use the site overnight, with up to 86% of the estuary-wide Wigeon population and 28% of the Teal population recorded.



The attached project outline plan and artist's impression of the completed project have been extracted from ABP's initial public consultation.

ABP's analysis of bird data provided by HBIC and the BTO's breeding bird surveys suggests there are 56 breeding bird species, including Lapwing, using the Dibden Bay area. HOS has signed a Letter of Agreement with ABP allowing members to conduct bird surveys at Dibden Bay for a three-month period, subject to compliance with the site safety risk assessment and ABP advance notification procedure. Following an appeal from the Chair at the HOS Members Day, we recruited a team of 20 HOS members and started surveys in early April 2026.

George Baker
HOS Conservation Liaison Officer

Blackbird

by Brian Thorpe Tracy
and illustrated by
Amanda Cameron



Turdus Merula

Appearance:

A medium sized bird the male having jet black plumage with yellow legs and a dramatic yellow eye ring, the first year male retains the brownish tinge similar to the female who is generally chocolate brown often with a faint speckled chest. The young have more defined speckled underparts; highlighting relationship with the other members of the thrush or 'Turdus' family (mistle and song thrush, redwing, fieldfare and ring ouzel). Winter migrants generally have less bright bills and legs.

Stats:

Slowly increasing population from sub 5 million pairs in 2010 to 5 to 6 million pairs in 2025, green listed. 15% decrease in population in the 35 years preceding 2010; and the impact of the mosquito borne Usutu virus, first identified in 2020, has decimated some southern populations by 40%. Remains most abundant in the the south, avoiding the moors and mountains of the north.

One of the earliest residents to commence nesting, sometimes as early as February. The nest comprises a framework of straw,

grass and twigs lined with a solid half globe of mud lined with softer material. 2/3 broods per year with 3/5 eggs in each brood generally laid between March and July, therefore potentially producing 6 to 15 young per year.

The pale blue medium sized eggs with reddish-brown spots are incubated almost exclusively by the female for about 14 days and the young fledge in a similar period. Young are fed by both parents, but when leaving the nest the fledglings are split between each parent, with the male tending his group for longer than the female who starts a new brood at the earliest opportunity. Oldest recorded is 21 years but the average age is 3.

Facts:

Generally territorial throughout the year, with migrants from northeastern Europe sometimes encroaching on territory during the winter. Some British birds will migrate southwards within the UK or to Europe. Prefers a woodland habitat, but also common in gardens, parks and farmland.

Often seen in undergrowth flicking and turning leaves in search of insects, worms, invertebrates and berries, depending on time of year. A flexible feeder, frequently seen on or below feeding tables feeding predominantly on the scraps discarded by others. Commonly raises its tail on landing and wings adopt a drooping posture. In hot weather often seen 'sunbathing' on the ground with wings spread, feathers apart, bill open and eyes closed - probably in an attempt to moderate body temperature. Distinctive and recognisable 'loud' voice, melodious song almost rivalling that of the nightingale, a very distinctive loud single note 'chuck, chuck' alarm call, and a similar but faster slightly more pleasing habitual call at sundown as they each re-establish their territory for the night.

Folklore:

Greek mythology suggests that the blackbird would die if it ate the seeds of the pomegranate; thought to be a link with Persephone, wife of Hades the God of the Underworld, who was lured to the underworld by eating the pomegranate and thus had to live between two worlds..... reflecting the times of the day when the blackbird is most active. In 1903, Saint Kevin the first Abbot of Glengalough, Ireland who lived around 498 was canonised in recognition of his love for nature portrayed by him holding his hand out to feed the blackbird, who built his nest in his palm, holding it still until the chicks had fledged.

Shakespeare mentions the black ouzel twice in his plays; in mid summer Nights dream and Henry IV Part 2, - in the former 'Bottom' uses the blackbird as reassurance to maintain his courage whilst lost. In the latter, the blackbird used as a reference to 'Ellen's' dark complexion and hair, thought to be less attractive than a fair complexion.

In their 1951 Oxford dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, Iona and Peter Opie write that the nursery rhyme which begins: "Sing a song of sixpence a pocket full of rye, four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie" has been linked to a number of different historical events, the most plausible seeming to link the Queen with the moon, the King with the sun and the blackbirds with the number of hours in the day - reflecting the constancy of the blackbird. This rhyme inspired the Agatha Christie short story "Four and Twenty Blackbirds". Features in the hymn 'Morning has broken', first published in 1931 with words provided by the author Eleanor Farjeon inspired by the South Downs village of Alfriston, set to the Scottish Gaelic tune "Bunnessan". Hymn often sung at funerals, the first verse thought to depict renewal.

In 1957 song became a chart success with Cat Steven's version entitled 'A Morning Song', subsequently covered by many artists including: New Seekers, Dana, Neil Diamond, Art Garfunkel, Nana Mouskouri, Kenny Rogers.

Features in works by poets: John Drinkwater (Blackbird); Alfred Lord Tennyson (The Blackbird); Seamus Heaney (Saint Kevin and the Blackbird); Wallace Stevens (Thirteen Ways of looking at a Blackbird); R.S. Thomas (A Blackbird singing) and many more. Collective noun for a group of Blackbirds is 'a cloud or grind of blackbirds'.

Number 3 in 'Guardian' poll to find Britain's national bird in 2015, (won by the Robin); fifth most common garden bird according to the RSPB garden bird watch, appearing in 82% of gardens surveyed.

Hampshire highlights:

Data from HOS Hampshire Bird Report-2023 With the Woodpigeon and the Robin the blackbird is one of the most widespread species. The BTO Garden Birdwatch recorded 98% presence in all of Hampshire gardens surveyed.

Although abundant, overall numbers suggest a decline, thought to be driven by a reduction in winter migrants under less pressure to escape from 'the cold'.

Early winter counts in 2023 of greater than 10 birds recorded at Cheesefoot Head(50); Selbourne Common(37); and Petersfield(31); overall numbers showed a reduction on the 5 year average of about 25%.

Significant breeding season counts in 2023 were recorded at Upper Slackstead(34); Mark Ash Wood(55); Beaulieu Heath(50); Fritham Plain(42); and Martin Down(40).



Wheatear by Mike Caponi



Oystercatcher by Di Steadman



Redstart by Rob Porter



Chiffchaff by Brian Fairbrother



Little Gull by Steve Payce



Cetti's Warbler by Rob Porter



Mute Swan by Brian Cartwright



Ruddy Shelduck by Simon King



Sanderling by Chris Rose



Woodpigeon by Niall Bowcock



Willow Warbler by Di Steadman



Wren by Steve Grundy

