



NORTH SOMERSET AND BRISTOL GROUP **NEWSLETTER – November 2016**

Dear Member

At October's talk Tom Walmsley lulled us into a false sense of security with some wonderful footage of his marine experiences before shattering our complacency with accounts of modern industrial scale fishing techniques, fish farming practice and frightening low levels of fish stocks. By the end of the talk, we realised that what fish we eat is something to consider carefully! The Marine Conservation Society produces a guide to sustainable seafood for all consumers who want to make the right choice when purchasing. (<http://www.goodfishguide.org/>, also available as an App). Their logo denotes sustainably sourced fish.



On Monday 21st November, Roger White will be sharing his extensive experiences of bird life of the old DDR - now North East Germany. There are large forests, and extensive wetlands both inland and along the Baltic coast, leading to a rich and diverse bird life. Raptors include White-tailed Eagles, Lesser Spotted Eagles and Rough-legged Buzzards. Cranes breed and huge numbers are seen in autumn. Some of the breeding birds are right at the western edge of their European range. The talk will start at 7.45pm.

Members Weekend and AGM

On the Saturday there were some excellent speakers. Ed Drewitt spoke on 'Urban Peregrines and other things', our speaker for March '17, Richard Sale spoke on 'The breeding Falcons of the UK', and Trustee Jemima Parry-Jones from the International Centre for Birds of Prey spoke about their work in India, on many different levels, to try to reverse the catastrophic fall in the numbers of vultures due to the use of the drug, Diclofenac. This decline has extensive knock-on effects throughout Indian society and is costing the Government millions. Incidentally, since 2013, the EU has licensed the use of this drug in Spain and Italy, who also have a vulture population. Chairman Phillip Merricks also gave a Hen Harrier update.

The AGM on Sunday provoked a lot of critical and frank discussion, much of which related to the need for better communication, a more professional approach and the need to keep members informed about the Trust's position on topical issues, (currently hen harriers and applications to cull buzzards), while not becoming a single issue organisation. There were comments on the parlous state of the website and we were assured that once the new COO was in post full time, this would be addressed. There were positive contributions also, and since the AGM, a statement has been posted on the website about Hen Harriers which clearly sets out the Trust's position regarding the controversial Raptor Recovery Plan.

All those standing for election or re-election as Trustees were elected. The most contentious was the Chairman, Philip Merricks, who was re-elected by a two thirds majority though with a significant number of abstentions. The transparency of the process to notify of trustee vacancies was questioned, and a view expressed that there were too many landowners on the Board.

Whilst the finances were considered to be on a sound footing and overheads deemed slim, the new Treasurer acknowledged that the format of the presentation of accounts would benefit from a review. The relocation of the Head Office to Sculthorpe has been successful and should result in significant reduction of costs.

It was good to meet the new COO, Adrian Blumfield, at present only part-time but who will be full time in January. We wish him well and offer him our full support.

Further to Phillip Merricks' encouraging report that two young hen harriers had been fitted with satellite tags, a joint statement by the Trust and Natural England was issued on 28th October with the sad news that:

The body of a juvenile, male hen harrier – named Rowan – was recovered in Cumbria on 22nd October. He was satellite tagged at the Langholm project in the Scottish borders, as part of a joint venture between Natural England and the Hawk and Owl Trust. Following an autopsy, Natural England has passed details to the police for investigation.”

We are unable to make further comments or enter into discussion at this time as this may be prejudicial to ongoing investigations.

Kestrel Highways Project

A cool, damp spring (following a rough winter which took a toll on our boxes) meant that once again our kestrels dithered in the courtship phase and were late laying. Research has shown that when kestrels lay late (usually due to poor food supply) they produce smaller broods and this was generally the case this year.

Kestrels attempted to breed in seven of our 33 actively monitored boxes. In a box near Bristol Airport four eggs were laid but then deserted. At Langford there were three small young but only two survived for ringing. Kestrels bred for the first time in our Pawlett box and at Congresbury the female sat tight in spite of lots of close attention from the public and produced four young. At Highbridge we had our first ever brood of 6! Finally, having decided that the Sidcot birds weren't going to breed, we were surprised to find they had three young, too big to ring!

In summary, it was not as successful a year as 2015, but a little better than 2014. We look forward to seeing what 2017 brings. We have been given a few new boxes by Sculthorpe, so at least the standard of accommodation offered should be cosy!

For more information or to report kestrel sightings - Barry: baz.gray@btinternet.com

News from Shapwick Reserve:

Simon and Phil are doing a fantastic job project managing the new building, sourcing materials and turning their hand to anything and everything. Dedicated volunteers have now clad the two long sides of the new building and are champing at the bit to complete the task but have to wait for the doors to arrive. Inside, the walls and floor have been painted and fitting out will be the next job, before transferring all the tools from the container. The BH hide has had its annual coat of preservative, the Sett hide is still to be done.



The next volunteers day will be Saturday 26th November. We have had a further donation from the Woodland Trust, so the task will be to fill in the gaps in our hedge planting. We may be joined

by some Avalon Marshes Young Wardens. For more information on volunteering, please contact : simon.beard@hawkandowl.org Tel 01300 320008 or Barry: baz.gray@btinternet.com

Other dates and items which may be of interest:

Driven Grouse Shooting Debate On 1st November the petition to ban DGS was debated in Parliament. Mark Avery attended and has commented fully on the debate in his blog and there are comments from many others. It was not deemed to be an informed or courteous debate and there was a strong representation from the pro-shooting and Countryside Alliance lobby but little support for the motion.

British Wildlife Photography Awards 2016 On 12th November the world renowned wildlife photography exhibition from the Natural History Museum returns to M Shed in Bristol with 100 stunning images of astonishing natural sights. Special congratulations to the Documentary Series winner, Nick Upton - our speaker for January 2017.

Tuesday 8th November – the speaker for the South Glos Group will be Ed Drewitt. Iron Acton Parish Hall at 7.30 pm.

Tuesday 8th November -- Neil Aldridge, a local wildlife photographer, will give an illustrated talk on British Wildlife for YACWAG's next talk 7.30PM at Kenn Village Hall - all welcome. This is a free talk but donations to YACWAG would be welcome. Light refreshments will be available.

If you enjoy surveys, the Mammal Society is asking people to complete a **Hedgehog Survey** (whether or not they have seen a hedgehog) using this link <http://survey.ex.ac.uk/index.php/833213?lang=en> The Society now has a mobile phone App called Mammal Tracker that lets the user immediately record the sighting of any mammal that they see.

We look forward to seeing you at our forthcoming talk.

Best wishes

Carrie Riches

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This newsletter is intended to keep you up to date with this group's activities and other events which may be of interest. If you do not wish to receive this, please let me know.