



Cattle Egrets colonise Ham Wall

Julian Thomas reports

On 14 July the RSPB released the news which a few knew but many more had probably guessed - that Cattle Egrets are breeding this year at Ham Wall. What might have taken more people by surprise, though, is that there are five nests, from which nine young have now fledged.

Somerset was the venue for the first-ever British breeding records for Cattle Egret in 2008, when single pairs bred at two sites, each raising a single youngster to fledging. While breeding was strongly suspected at one of those sites in 2009, and possibly also again in 2010, two cold winters seemed to have put paid to any attempt at colonisation. Another large influx last autumn/winter, larger than that in 2007/08, and principally into the southwest, put that firmly back on the agenda, though. Expectations were raised when up to 17 were seen at Shapwick Heath and Ham Wall in the spring and early summer, and were met in full when the new colony was found on recently purchased land adjacent to the main Ham Wall reserve.

A confirmed breeding pair had already been announced at Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB reserve in Cheshire, and breeding has also since been confirmed in Dorset and Devon. Though it is purely speculation at this stage, it would not be surprising if other breeding attempts elsewhere were also to come to light. Time will tell, but it has the feel of a real colonisation this time.

Another feather in the cap for the Avalon Marshes, and for Ham Wall in particular, which already have a national reputation for being the heron capital of Britain. So, many thanks to the wardens and volunteers whose hard work and dedication in managing the reserve and discreetly monitoring these birds has borne fruit once more.

...and Night Herons breed at Westhay Moor!

News has just been released (1 August) that a pair of Night Herons has apparently bred within the Avalon Marshes: a pair and then two fledged juveniles have been seen on various dates during July at Westhay Moor NNR, managed by Somerset Wildlife Trust (see photos right, by Graham Hall). The exact breeding site is unknown, but assumed to be on the reserve or very close by. Westhay Moor attracts fewer visitors than the more high-profile reserves to the south, but nonetheless is watched very regularly by a few dedicated local birders, and it is them we need to thank for this exciting news.

It is exactly 20 years since it was strongly suspected that a pair, first seen at Shapwick Heath, had bred at Westhay Moor, but it was never proven. This, however, looks to be the real deal, and Mark Holling of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel has confirmed that this is indeed the first recorded breeding by Night Herons in Britain.



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Welcome

Hello again!

Like the new hat? These first appeared at the Members' Day (for more on that see page 4). See page 3 for more details about how to obtain one.

The big news in our cover story was to be another heron added to the roster of rare breeders in the Avalon Marshes, but that just got trumped by yet another one. Particular thanks go to Graham Conduit and Graham Hall for finding and documenting the Night Herons. For heron species that's three first British breeding records and a second-ever, no less, in Somerset (and mostly within the Avalon Marshes) in under a decade. With Great White Egrets having yet another record year too, we are ever more the envy of other areas of the country.



It's sometimes quite hard to tear yourself away, but at least two Somerset birders have done just that in recent years. As many will know, Bruce and Kathy Taylor now reside on the Hebridean island of Barra (following in the footsteps of former Recorder Brian Rabbitts, who upped sticks and moved to North Uist some years ago): Bruce's article (page 5) chronicles their new life on this most beautiful of islands, and some of the great birds they have seen (and found), as well as harking back to his Somerset days.

A perennial concern for all local ornithological societies is finding and engaging the next generation. We who slide with differing amounts of grace into middle age and beyond often bemoan the relative lack of keen young birders, so it is great to feature one such in Desert Island Birds: Oli Mockridge, who can already boast a decent list of finds near his Yeovil home (e.g. Yellow-browed Warbler and Ring Ouzel).

For us humans it's still summer, with school holidays upon us and the cricket season in full swing, but for the birds it is the beginning of autumn and the Swifts will go any day. But there are still passage waders to be found, there's seawatching to be done, and the wonders of passerine migration over the coming months, so it's an exciting time ahead. Enjoy!

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News

More rare breeding bird news

As the breeding season draws to a close, the fortunes of various other rare breeding birds, particularly within the Avalon Marshes, have become clearer. Five years on from the first-ever British nest, Great White Egrets continue to increase, with 10 nests this year. Two failed, sadly, but up to 15 young have fledged from the other eight. Though attempts to colour ring the young have largely been frustrated (in one case due to proximity to a Cattle Egret nest!), two from one nest were (AAH and AAJ), and both of those have already dispersed to Kent, of all places.

The news on Little Bitterns is less good, with the one publicised male barking for a prolonged period, suggesting he was unpaired, and no feeding flights noted at another site where both a male and a female were reported during the season. They are particularly elusive birds, though, and difficult to monitor, so the most that can be said is that there is no conclusive evidence that breeding has occurred this year. We still await a full report on Bitterns, after a record-breaking count of booming males in early spring, but Marsh Harriers also seem to have done well this year. Two male Savi's Warblers were also heard reeling in the spring, though the locations of those remain under wraps at the request of the wardens concerned, in line with long-standing SOS policy (frustrating though that may be at times).

At Steart Marshes, the colonisation by Avocets continues to go well, with record totals of 21 young fledged from seven nests this year. Little Ringed Plovers had a successful year there too (eight young fledged from three nests). Elsewhere in the county we have also had confirmation of breeding by Goshawk and Long-eared Owl, both of which presumably breed annually but are not always proven to do so. So, while we still await the full picture of how our commoner birds have got on this year (and indications so far have been mixed, though Yellow Wagtails have done well at Steart Marshes), it seems that, at least as far as rarer species go, it has generally been a successful season.

New SOS caps

As mentioned on page 2, we now have a supply of peaked caps featuring the SOS logo (see photo, right), which first made an appearance at the Members' Day. If you would like one, please send a cheque for £10 made payable to Somerset Ornithological Society to Roche Bridge Cottage, Sutton Road, Somerton, TA11 6QP.

Fully adjustable, one size fits all. First come, first served, as the current supply is quite small, but we can always get more made if there is sufficient demand. They are only currently available in one colour, but again we may consider other colours if there is enough demand.



IOC taxonomy update

Since the article in the last issue of *The Bittern* detailing the effects of the BOU adopting International Ornithological Congress (IOC) taxonomy from 1 January 2018, it now appears that the IOC have decided to split the redpolls after all. It is a decision that is not without controversy: the evidence which led to the original split by European taxonomic authorities (including the BOU), a single study which claimed that Lesser and Mealy Redpolls were breeding alongside each other without hybridising in southern Norway, has been repeatedly criticised as being flawed. Be that as it may, the upshot is that, until we hear otherwise, both Lesser Redpoll (*Acanthis cabaret*) and Common (Mealy) Redpoll (*A. flammea*) should remain on the Somerset list.

SOS Members' Day 2017

Julian Thomas reports

As advertised in the last issue of *The Bittern*, our inaugural Members' Day took place on 8 April at Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall. Around 30 members attended (a decent enough turnout, though we hope for more in future years).

Doors opened at 1pm, and proceedings opened fairly promptly at just after 1.30pm with a keynote address from our president, Stephen Moss – a pre-recorded video as filming commitments unfortunately precluded him being there on the day. After a brief AGM (mercifully brief, some might say, and with no major issues or decisions to report), Brian Gibbs then gave us an interesting and wide-ranging overview of the status of birds in Somerset, building on some of the themes expounded by Stephen in his opening address – the wonderful and high-profile gains in terms of wetland species in the Avalon Marshes and elsewhere, but also the declines and losses of some other rather more unsung species in farmland and urban habitats. Perhaps the most telling comment was that now almost 80% of records submitted are from the Avalon Marshes – it is natural that such a brilliant area should act as a honeypot for birders, but clearly we as a group need to spread out a bit more!

BTO representative (and new SOS Treasurer) Eve Tigwell gave us a review of what the most recent surveys have revealed for Somerset. Breeding Waders of English Uplands, not surprisingly, showed that there are no breeding waders on the in-bye land that was surveyed! However, the habitat data that were gathered indicated clear reasons for the lack of (almost any) birds. The ongoing House Martin breeding survey revealed another poor year for this species, with numbers coming to the UK to breed continuing to decline. The Heronries Census now includes data for Little Egret, but reports of any other breeding species of heron are also useful in monitoring the spread of these genera. Eve also urged us to take part in the other annual surveys (Breeding Bird Survey, Waterways Breeding Bird Survey, Wetlands Bird Survey, Nest Records Scheme, and Garden BirdWatch) or, at the very least, store our records on BirdTrack. She then reminded us of the SOS surveys for Kingfisher and Little Owl.

After the tea break, which involved a rather delicious and varied buffet, Jane Brookhouse gave us an interesting overview of the RSPB's Somerset reserves and how they are managed to benefit not just birds but all other manner of wildlife. There are, of course, the challenges of keeping some wildlife out of an area in order to benefit other wildlife; in particular, Jane referred to the fox-proof fence at Greylake as a key example of the success of this technique in improving breeding success for nesting waders.

Technical problems then unfortunately marred a much-anticipated illustrated talk by Liam Marsh on the Dippers he has spent many hours watching and filming on the Blackdown Hills. Happily we were still able to enjoy at least a few of the stunning images he has managed to take, and got a flavour of the dedication and self-inflicted hardships, such as several hours at a time spent lying prone under a camouflage net, required to study these great birds at such close quarters without disturbing them.

After an opportunity for members to peruse the small number of stalls, the day closed a little after 5pm. Overall we thought it was a success, particularly for a first effort, and are looking forward to making it bigger and better for next year. Keep an eye on the website and *The Bittern* for details nearer the time.

Inland to island: Bruton to Barra

Bruce Taylor talks about taking a leap of faith and moving to the remote Outer Hebrides



The township of Brevig, Barra

I became a birder at 9 years old. Something about going out and looking for these amazing feathered creatures just clicked with me. Initially my family thought it was a phase I'd grow out of, but nearly 40 years later it's safe to say they were wrong! In my early teens I'd rush home from school, grab my bins and go straight out again into the Nettlebridge Valley. Occasionally scarce migrants like Pied Flycatchers, Redstarts, and Tree Pipits would pass through and I'd feel rather pleased with myself for finding them. Then one fine evening in September 1985 a Great Skua flew over my house. For a 15-year-old birding east Somerset this was nothing short of a miracle! In that instant, a whole new range of possibilities opened up before me: if such a bird could turn up here, so could a host of similarly unexpected species. I redoubled my efforts. As soon as I passed my driving test, I expanded my search area. I frequented the lakes at Orchardleigh, Emborough, Berkeley, Vobster, and Elliot's Green and spent vast amounts of time in the woods on the Selwood Ridge along the Somerset/Wiltshire border. Here I found good numbers of Firecrests, Wood Warblers, Tree Pipits, Woodcock, and Grasshopper Warblers, though the latter three all but vanished as the years passed. The area previously received little coverage, so it was a revelation to discover such a population tucked away in the Far East!

In the late eighties, the President of the SOS wrote to tell me I was to receive the George Young Award for outstanding contributions to ornithology in the county. I proudly collected the trophy at that year's AGM. I've always been grateful to the Society for this early recognition; it meant a huge amount and helped to spur me on.

After a few years away, I returned to east Somerset. Again I flogged the Selwood Ridge but also found new areas including the Blackmoor Vale and Carymoor. The one thing that was really missing though was a decent reservoir. This gap was filled around the turn of the millennium when Torr Reservoir was constructed. This site would become my second home for the next 15 years and I spent hundreds of hours every year studying the gull roost and recording migrant waders, terns, and wildfowl. At the same time I became closely involved with the establishment and management of the brilliant wetland reserve at Carymarsh; this site would eventually yield sightings of Purple Heron and Bearded Tit, neither of which had previously been seen in the east.

Birding east Somerset could be hard work, but there were certainly rewards to be had for any birder prepared to put in the time and effort. Looking back now, I'm filled with fond memories of summer evenings surrounded by singing Firecrests in the woods, mixed flocks of hundreds of finches, buntings and Tree Sparrows at Carymoor on crisp winter mornings, and thousands of gulls dropping in to roost at Torr Res at dusk. There were rarities too: I managed to find my fair share including Bonaparte's, Franklin's, 2 Kumlien's, plus a handful of Ring-billed and Caspian Gulls, Alpine Swift, Bee-eater, Lesser Scaup, several



The 'castle in the bay', Castlebay, Barra

Yellow-browed Warblers and Siberian Chiffchaffs, 3 White Storks and dozens of Waxwings and Hawfinches. All this and I saw barely another birder along the way!

On our longest ever trip out of the county, Kathy and I first visited the Isle of Barra, towards the southern end of the Outer Hebrides chain, in autumn 2010 and spent 6 magical weeks here. It was so good that we

returned for extended stays in subsequent autumns and each time it became harder to return to

Somerset. Birding back on my patch, while still good, was becoming predictable. For instance, I knew that if I flogged the gull roost at Torr I'd find Caspian, Ring-billed and a few white-winged gulls over the winter but the chances of anything really rare were small. Being a gull fanatic, I realised it would probably take another 30 years to find an American Herring Gull there! When we saw a house for sale on Barra we decided to go for it: a life change, a new challenge, and a new patch beckoned. We moved here in August 2015.

Our new home is small and basic and overlooks the sea on the east side of the island. From our lounge window we can see the mainland on a clear day and Sooty Shearwaters on a windy one! Great Skuas are constantly visible through the summer, though none are as good as the one I saw as a 15-year-old while hanging out of my bedroom window. Meanwhile we frequently see both species of eagles from the kitchen, while the feeders in the back garden have attracted migrant Turtle Dove, Tree Sparrow, and Hawfinch. Corncrakes, Grasshopper Warblers, and drumming Snipe are audible from our bed through the short summer nights.

Barra is home to about 1000 people; some are very eccentric and daily life can bear uncanny similarities to scenes from Father Ted, so we fit right in! We've found them the friendliest, most welcoming bunch you could ever meet and what's more, they have a surprisingly good knowledge of birds. The island landscape is a mixture of rolling machair, moorland, craggy hills, white sandy beaches, rugged headlands, and sheltered bays, with scattered clumps of bushes and small copses scattered around its edges: all great birding habitat.

The winters here can be tough. By November the clouds of midges that have bothered us all summer are gone but the storms are beginning. We used to think there were windy days in Somerset, but believe me, those breezes are nothing compared to the storms that batter the Hebrides in winter. We regularly endure days of hurricane-force winds that threaten to tear off our roof. It's unnerving to watch your reflection in the window shift sideways as the glass bends in the strongest gusts! It's not unusual for the island to be cut off for a week and the shelves to be empty in the



A flock of Barnacle Geese on a stormy day on Barra

shop when storms hit. During the worst of the weather, all you can do is stay in: venturing outside when the wind is screaming at 90mph is likely to end very badly. Once the wind drops to a more sedate Force 10, though, you'll find us heading out to see what has been blown in.



These days, work fits around birding rather than vice versa. Barra is one of those places that feels rare, as if anything could turn up at any time, and although it can be hard work sometimes, birding is far from predictable. Over the years this has been proven again and again. Last September, for instance, Britain's first Eastern Kingbird appeared out of the blue and previous North American megas have included Scarlet Tanager, Yellow Warbler, Ovenbird, and Hermit Thrush.

I've always preferred to find birds rather than twitch other people's and since moving here my self-found list has grown considerably. My decision not to spend the next 30 years waiting for an American Herring Gull to arrive at Torr was clearly a sound one, as I found a smart first-winter bird (above left) six months after moving here! Now I'm looking forward to finding my first Ivory Gull. My best find so far though was a White-throated Needletail (above centre) hurtling around the hillsides recently near Castlebay. It's one of those legendary rarities I've always dreamed of finding but never for a moment expected to. The memory of watching one of the best birds on the planet nearly take Kathy's head off on a close pass will live with me for the rest of my days, as will the moment later the same day when Kathy found her first Rose-coloured Starling (above right)!

Barra birding isn't just about the big rarities though. It's an unspoilt place where farming is done in a traditional, non-intensive way. There's a single cut of hay late in summer, not three or four cuts of silage. It's a bit like going back to a better time. There are loads of breeding Skylarks, Lapwings, Corncrakes, and Cuckoos; all of these would have been widespread in east Somerset in the not so distant past, but are now either long gone or in big trouble. As I sit writing this, there are around 100 House Sparrows in my back garden; I've not seen and heard numbers like that since my childhood. This is how the countryside should be, teeming with life. Kathy and I both love our piece of paradise here on Barra, but at the same time we can now see more clearly than ever what's been lost from Somerset's countryside.

Family and friends often ask if one day we'll move back to civilisation. Civilisation? That's where we live now! Beautiful scenery and a landscape that hasn't been sterilised by modern farming, a friendly community where people have time to talk, no traffic jams, next to no crime, the Northern lights, and four species of diver from my armchair. All this leaves us eagerly anticipating every new day and the birds it will bring. I think we'll stay just where we are thanks!



Corncrake - a garden bird on Barra!

Spotlight on...Dunnock

The Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), the humble Hedge Sparrow, as some still call it - an unobtrusive, small brown and grey denizen of hedgerows, thickets, gardens, and scrub, seen here (right) in another great photograph by Gary Thoburn. The ultimate LBJ (little brown job, in case you didn't know), even its name comes from the Middle English word 'dun', meaning a dull grey-brown colour. So, the Dunnock - common, dull, boring. Not a bit of it.



Firstly, it is not a sparrow, of course. It is instead an accentor, Hedge Accentor to give it its official, 'international' name, one of only thirteen species in the family Prunellidae, and the only member of the family to regularly occur in Britain and most of northern Europe (though Alpine and Siberian Accentors have occurred in the UK as vagrants, including one old Somerset record of the former). Most of the other members of the family occur only in Asia, and often in remote places and/or at high altitude. As such, the Dunnock is by far the easiest member of the family to see, and it is gently amusing to find first-time visitors to our shores from America or Australia, for example, so keen to see a bird so commonplace to us to get the 'family tick'.

Not that seeing Dunnocks is always easy. We take them for granted, perhaps, but I may only see or even hear them on about 50% of visits to the Avalon Marshes, for instance, despite knowing the location of several territories, and the pair that breeds in my garden every year is similarly elusive. During Atlas fieldwork they were found to be as widespread as expected, but still there were some gaps; given their unobtrusive nature and wide habitat choice, it is perhaps more likely that they were missed rather than truly absent. The percentage of confirmed breeding was also remarkably low for such a common bird. Their pleasant little song is easily recognised, and often given from a prominent perch, and the display of the males, flicking one wing at a time to impress females, is also well-known and often eye-catching. Nests, however, are well hidden in thick tangles and difficult to find even if searched for. The differences between juveniles and adults are also rather slighter and less generally known than for many other familiar birds, so recently fledged young might well have been overlooked as such.

But the most fascinating thing about Dunnocks is their breeding behaviour. Judging animals by human standards and social norms is always risky (and usually best avoided), but such a 'homely' bird, dressed in drab hues, might be expected to have an equally sedate lifestyle? Not so. Some pairs are truly monogamous, but many Dunnocks have a highly complex and promiscuous social life. A female will mate with a male, then hold his sperm in a 'plug', and if a better male comes along she will allow him to remove the plug and replace it with his own sperm; this could happen more than once before fertilisation. Males are no different, and will happily mate with several females, also deceiving or attempting to deceive each of their partners. Group nesting has even been recorded. Their sex life is so complex and fascinating that it has been the subject of much research, and there is even an academic monograph devoted to it (*Dunnock Behaviour and Social Evolution* by Nick Davies, 1992).

It's always the quiet ones, isn't it?

Desert Island Birds

Based loosely on the famous radio show, each issue we will feature a prominent (or not so prominent) Somerset birder. This issue's castaway is Yeovil birder **Oli Mockridge**.

How and when did you get into birdwatching?

I was introduced to birding by my grandfather. He bought me my first book of garden birds and showed me my first Pied Wagtails. However, my interest wasn't sparked until I was nine, when I refound the book. I realised that I hadn't ticked Pied Wagtail, and looking through pictures of the other species led me to want to see more of them.



What is your favourite birding memory?

Finding my first Long-eared Owl at Loch of Strathbeg certainly sticks out for me. It was sat on a wooden fence, in broad daylight less than 10 metres away. It stared at me in an upright 'alert pose' completely frozen; I had to wait for it to move to convince myself it wasn't just a cleverly placed cardboard cut-out!

Where was your favourite birding trip?

I haven't been on many birding trips yet, and have never really birded abroad. I suppose the first trip to Scotland is always an exciting one, and I've had plenty of unforgettable trips to Norfolk. However, I look forward to great birding trips in the future: Shetland and the Azores are certainly on my radar!

What do you do when you're not watching birds?

In the little time when I'm not at work, at university, or out birding, I enjoy computer programming. I'm still far from perfecting my listing application!

Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

Yeovil Openspace is my local patch. Although I don't visit it as much as I'd like, it's still my favourite birding site as it provides me with an opportunity to find migrants on my doorstep. I discovered the site when I saw my first Bullfinches there in 2007, and it's given me a number of lifers since.

What are your five desert island birds, and why?

1. **Pied Wagtail:** The one that sparked it all. I still consider it one of the most attractive passerines in the UK.
2. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** I love wading birds, and this is definitely my favourite species. A moulting adult's frosty white underparts, fine streaking and long wings certainly add a bit of class to a Dunlin flock.
3. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** They may be becoming a more regular sight, but I could never tire of these little Siberian gems!
4. **Mandarin:** A bit of a local speciality in my area, so I'm a bit partial to it, but I always look forward to the extra colour it adds to a winter morning.
5. **Snowy Owl:** The number one bird on my wish list!

Choose a book and luxury item, and explain why.

A good field guide for which ever part of the world I'd be in, particularly on seabirds. And, of course, my luxury item has to be a scope!

Walks and talks

Here are details of all SOS indoor and field meetings and a selection of events organised by the RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust in August-December 2017.

All SOS events are free to members and non-members alike, but there is a charge for some provided by other conservation organisations. We try to include either a grid reference or a postcode (for satnav users) for the meeting points. Charges and booking details are given where known for non-SOS events, but please check with the organisers.



August

5	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. One-hour group tours between 10 am and 4 pm. Price: £15 adult non-RSPB member/£13 adult RSPB member/£10 child non-RSPB member/£8 child RSPB member (child age 6+). Join a qualified instructor and an expert wildlife guide on this unique opportunity to experience this amazing nature reserve by canoe! No experience needed. Book online at https://hamwall-naturebycanoe.eventbrite.co.uk . Booking essential. Meet at Ham Wall RSPB car park, Ashcott Road, Meare (BA6 9SX, ST449397). A car park charge (£3) will apply to non-members; this charge will be refunded if you join the RSPB on the day.
6	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. Same as 5th.
10	Walk/ family event	RSPB	RSPB Summer Holiday Club - Nature by night at Ham Wall. 2000-2200. Come and explore the reedbeds as it starts to get dark and look out for the creatures that wake up as we are going to bed - Iberian water frogs, bats, moths and even owls. Insect repellent, long-sleeved shirts and trousers and a torch are recommended. Price: £6 adult non-RSPB member/£4 adult RSPB member/£3 child non-RSPB member/£2 child RSPB member. Booking essential. Meet at Ham Wall RSPB car park, Ashcott Road, Meare (BA6 9SX, ST449397). A car park charge (£3) will apply to non-members; this charge will be refunded if you join the RSPB on the day.
12	Walk	SWT	Porpoise Watch. 1030-1330. Spend a morning on the cliffs of Hurlstone Point with experts from SWT, watching out for porpoises and seabirds, and learn more about our wonderful coast and its wildlife. Bring warm clothes, and binoculars if you have them. Meet at Bossington National Trust car park (TA24 8HQ, SS898479). Places are limited, so please book by emailing events@somersetwildlife.org . Free.
26	Event	RSPB	Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. Time for a new pair of binoculars? Drop in to Ham Wall reserve car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397) to meet experts for advice and information. You are welcome to try before you buy.

September

2	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. Same as 5 August.
3	Walk	SWT	Merehead Quarry, Wildlife Perimeter Walk. 1030-1230. A walk with Tony House and Simon Wiltshire round the largest working man-made hole in Europe - also a wildlife haven, home to Peregrines, Ravens, Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and many other birds, butterflies, Otters and wildflowers. Meet in Slait Hill Lane, Downhead (BA4 4LQ, ST690457), 1.5 miles north of East Cranmore, off A361 (look for SWT signs). Cost: adults £2.50; children and students £1.00. No dogs on walk, to protect the wildlife. Stout shoes or walking boots advised, wellies if wet!

3	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. Same as 5 August.
9	Walk	SOS	Avalon Marshes. 0930. Leader: Alison Everett. A walk around Shapwick Heath and/or Ham Wall, depending on what birds are about. New members are especially welcome. Meet at Natural England car park, Ashcott Corner, between Ashcott and Meare (BA6 9SX, ST449395). Parking fee: £1.50 for 2 hours, £3 for the day (or RSPB members can park in their car park opposite for free).
16	Event	RSPB	Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall. As 26 August.
26	Talk	SWT	Keward Brook; Its History, Wildlife And Potential. 1930-2100. Ecologist Shaun Plenty will give a talk on his work with students from Bridgwater College in clearing this waterway, where Kingfishers and Dippers are still to be seen. Meet at Wells Museum (enter via side entrance) off Cathedral Green, Wells, BA5 2UE. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00. For more information contact Jean at jaye.mantle@btinternet.com

October

7	Walk	SOS	Stearth. 0930. Leaders: Brian Gibbs and Brian Hill. A walk visiting the hides and fields at Stearth Point, part of Bridgwater Bay NNR, looking for waders and passerine migrants. Meet at Natural England car park (ST275459, TA5 2PX). Free. Could be combined with visit to nearby Stearth Marshes reserve.
17	Talk	SWT	Somerset's Brilliant Coast. 1930-2130. Rebecca MacDonald is Somerset Wildlife Trust's Coastal Survey Officer. She will talk about the work being done to survey Somerset's varied and beautiful coastline. Meet at Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar (off Upper North St beyond church), BS27 3HU. Cost: adults £2.50, children and students Free. For more information contact Ged Keele: gerard.keele@btinternet.com.
19	Talk	SOS	Around the World with the BBC Natural History Unit. 1930. A talk that is not to be missed! The speaker is the Society's President Stephen Moss, author and natural history producer, who will tell us about some of his experiences. Ruishton Village Hall, Cheats Road, Ruishton, TA3 5JD (ST268250). All are welcome. Refreshments available. Free.
19	Talk	RSPB	Better Birding. 1930. How to improve your birdwatching - a fun evening with Mike Langman, a very popular speaker. There will be tips to help you identify trickier confusion species - both common and unusual. Why are some birds easier to remember than others? We'll have some fun trying to improve our estimation of counting flocks. Also just how good are our senses and can we remember a bird call from one year to the next? Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster, TA19 0QH (ST407147). Cost: RSPB South Somerset Group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free.
27	Talk	SWT	Some of the world's 52 pheasant species and their conservation. 1930. For much of his life, local conservationist John Corder has been involved in reintroduction programmes for endangered species in Asia. This illustrated talk will discuss some of these programmes, particularly those of the world's most threatened pheasant species, and will also touch on reintroductions for Tigers, Orangutans and Pandas. Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster, TA19 0DG. Parking at roadside or town car parks. Tea & coffee available. Cost: SWT members £2.00, non-members £3.00, children free. Subject to availability of speaker. For more information call Valerie 01460 234551.
28	Event	RSPB	Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall. As 26 August.

- 31 Talk SWT **The Wildlife on Somerset's Coast. 1930-2100.** A talk by Somerset Wildlife Trust Coastal Ambassador Nigel Phillips. We have wonderful marine life, if you know where to look and Somerset's coast is also one of the best places in the UK to watch wintering birds. All on your doorstep! Wells Museum (enter via side entrance), off Cathedral Green, Wells, BA5 2UE. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00. For more information contact jaye.mantle@btinternet.com

November

- 2 Event SWT **A Wild Night Out with Chris Packham.** Doors open 1800, main event 1930-2200. Chris Packham has gained recognition as a naturalist, TV presenter, writer, photographer, conservationist, campaigner and filmmaker. Join Chris for an evening of spectacular images and lively debate, raising funds for SWT. He'll explain the fascinating ecologies and behaviours of a range of creatures from Leopards to Barn Owls, from Cheetahs to Pond Skaters, from Polar Bears to Peregrines. His conversational style, irreverent humour and sometimes controversial opinions make for a hugely rewarding evening's entertainment. Westlands Main Hall, Westlands, Yeovil. To book go to Westlands website or call 01935 422 884. Cost: Premium Tickets: £50.00*; Band A: £25.00; Band B: £23.00; plus £1.50 booking fee. *(includes pre-event reception with Chris at 6.30pm)
- 11 Event RSPB **Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall.** As 26 August.
- 16 Talk SOS **Birds of Berry Head.** 1930. Our speaker is Mike Langman, a well-known Devon birder and artist, who produced the artwork for the Somerset Bird Atlas. Mike is a regular visitor to Berry Head, finding many land migrants and seabirds, including the first British record of Yelkouan Shearwater. Ruishton Village Hall, Cheats Road, Ruishton (TA3 5JD, ST268250). All welcome. Refreshments available. Free.
- 16 Talk RSPB **Birds of South India.** 1930. An illustrated talk by Kiran Sahi, who will take you on a journey through the varied landscapes and habitats of South India. You will be introduced to a spectacular range of Indian birds and get to know something about Karnataka's rich traditional cultural heritage. Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster, TA19 0QH (ST407147). Cost: RSPB South Somerset Group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free.
- 18 Walk SOS **Greylake RSPB.** 0930. Leader: Stephen Moss. A walk looking for reedbed birds and birds of prey. Meet at reserve car park (TA7 9BP, ST399346). Free.

December

- 2 Event SOS **Seawatch at Minehead West Quay.** 0930. Leaders: Brian Gibbs and Dave Dawe. Ever thought about seawatching but never tried it? Here's your chance. What is seen will be dependent on weather on the day, but two of our seabird experts will be on hand to give hints and tips and help identify the birds. Meet at Minehead West Quay (TA24 5UL, SS973471). Free, but parking fee may apply.
- 2 Event RSPB **Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall.** As 26 August.
- 9 Event RSPB **Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall.** As 26 August.

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