



Taunton Peregrine Project takes off

Julian Thomas reports

The phenomenon of pairs of Peregrines nesting in urban situations is well known, as are a number of projects where artificial nest sites are provided for them and cameras installed so that people can follow their progress via the internet. Now Taunton is joining in. Peregrines have regularly roosted on St Mary Magdalene church in Hammet Street for many years, so it was the obvious choice. Over the last few months a nest box has been put in place, and cameras and cables installed. Throughout this work the regular pair of Peregrines has remained in residence (see the great photo, right, taken by project coordinator Mike Leigh-Mallory), which hopefully is a good sign for the future.



The camera system installed to monitor the Peregrines consists of four cameras producing 4k resolution images. Initially in 2018 these images will be beamed to a 4k definition monitor positioned in the church, where members of the public will be able to watch the peregrines live. The project will be able to record archive footage in 4k with sound and use an infrared floodlight to monitor any nocturnal hunting activity, and they plan to post regular updates and 4k video clips of the birds' activities on their Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/TauntonPeregrines/>) and on Twitter (@TauntonPeregri).



If sufficient funds can be raised to cover capital and running costs, the project also hopes to be able to stream images live to the internet in 2019. SOS has already donated £1000 to the project (see photo (left) of SOS Vice-President Brian Hill handing the cheque to Rev Rod Corke in September), and several individual SOS members are also among the many contributors. Please also consider giving to this worthwhile project: their JustGiving page is at <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/tauntonperegrinesproject>.

Predictably, not everyone is happy, and pigeon fanciers have already voiced their concerns. In a poll in the *Somerset County Gazette*, however, 79% of people who voted supported the Taunton Peregrines.

The live screen is already in place in the church and the project will officially launch it at an open day on 24 March, starting at 11 am. Keep a watch on their social media for more details, which will also be posted on the SOS website when available - we'll be on hand on the day too. And all the best from SOS to the project and the Peregrines for 2018!

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Welcome

Hello again!

It was a rum old autumn, with little locally to excite the rarity hunter, and not that much either in the way of visible migration of commoner species, passerines in particular. Numbers of some wintering species seem to be lower than usual too - the relative paucity of overwintering Blackcaps compared to recent years has already attracted comment, and did it really take me until the last few days of the year to see Bewick's Swans in the county in 2017? See page 4 for more on this once far more regular visitor.



While the news in the lastr few months has once again been full of the contentious subject of Brexit, coverage has concentrated on the various claims about its impact on our society and economy, and it has not been at all clear until recently what implications it might have for UK wildlife (particularly birds) in the future. Given his previous statements on the environment, the appointment of Michael Gove MP as Secretary of State at Defra was greeted with almost universal despondency among conservationists, but, to his considerable credit, he has been making a number of encouraging speeches over recent months on issues that impact birds and other wildlife, such as marine plastic pollution and the agricultural subsidy system to replace the Common Agricultural Policy once we leave the EU. The plans for the latter, to be published in full this coming spring, would 'use public money for public goods' and are likely to see farmers rewarded for planting woodland, boosting wildlife, improving water quality, and recreating wildflower meadows. The new scheme is unlikely to be fully in place until 2024, but the forthcoming consultation on the plans offers hope that we as individuals can help shape a better future for our birds.

In the meantime, this month the Government has published its 25-year Environmental Plan, which seems to have been welcomed for its vision and criticised for not going far enough or setting stricter targets in roughly equal measure. A certain level of cynicism is warranted, and actions are needed to back up the fine words, but the right noises are now being made in the corridors of power and, given how little the environment has featured in mainstream political discussions in recent years, it is at least a start.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the fantastic winter birdwatching Somerset has to offer, including some fine examples on the Levels in particular of how partnerships and management agreements between farmers and conservationists can work to the benefit of all.

Julian Thomas, Editor Email: julian.thomas@somersetbirding.org.uk Phone/text: 07764165417

News

More new hides on the Levels

The old hide at Noah's Lake, Shapwick Heath was much-loved (perhaps), but cramped and showing its age (certainly), so Natural England announced early in 2017 that they were replacing it. The new Noah's Hide (shown here when it had just been set in place and before screens were added at ground level to hide observers' approach to it) was built during the autumn and opened in October. As many members may

have already discovered, it is much larger and roomier than the one it replaced, and its shallow 'V' shape gives a range of angles of view across the lake that the old one could not. There have been some understandable gripes about the design: inevitably, being a raised hide, it remains inaccessible to wheelchair users, and several people have mentioned the wide pillars between the windows, which restrict and interrupt the view by



small but annoying amounts. Though the latter do also give some protection from the prevailing wind, it does seem like a trick missed, but overall the new hide is a considerable improvement. Already it has coped well with the number of observers wanting to watch the duck spectacular there this winter, and hopefully will do so when the next rarity turns up too. The dilapidated screen hide opposite it, overlooking the south-west corner of 70 Acre, has also been replaced with a small, neat enclosed hide of similar design to the new Noah's Hide. Again this is a considerable improvement on what was there before.

At Westhay Moor, the old North Hide off London Drove disappeared many years ago now, burned down by vandals (local youths, it seems, and not, as was first supposed, the travellers camping along the drove at the time). Earlier this year SWT replaced it with a new, two-level hide (left), which was available for use during the summer, but not formally opened until the autumn. While relatively small, the design is



attractive and practical, and the top deck gives an elevated view over the northern portion of the reedbed, so should be in prime position to give good views of Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Bearded Tit, etc. Some even saw the famous Night Herons from it before it was officially open!

Members' social evening

Our indoor meeting on Thursday 22 February takes the form of a social evening. It will begin with a Question and Answer session with Stephen Moss, well-known television and radio wildlife personality, prolific natural history author, tour guide, and SOS President. We follow this with a finger buffet with wine and soft drinks, giving members the opportunity to meet and mix with each other, and with members of the committee. Please do join us at Ruishton Village Hall at 7.30 pm. We look forward to seeing you!

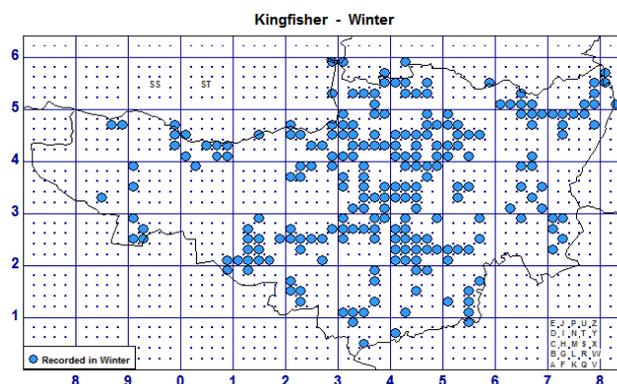
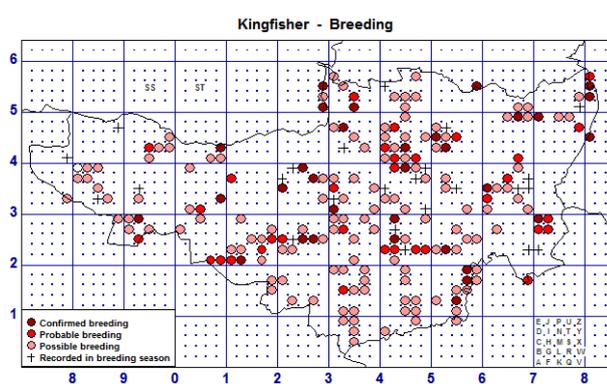
SOS Kingfisher and Little Owl survey continues

We are now into the second year of this countywide survey of these two well-known but declining birds.

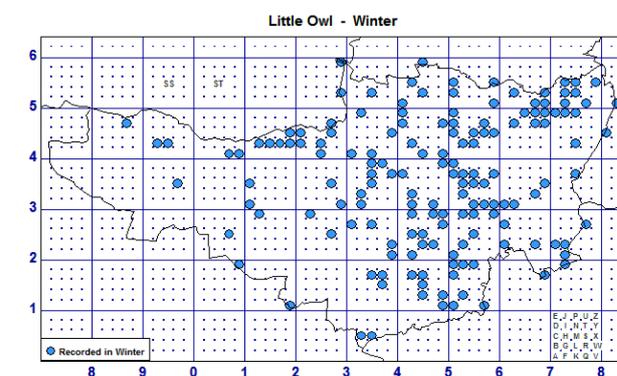
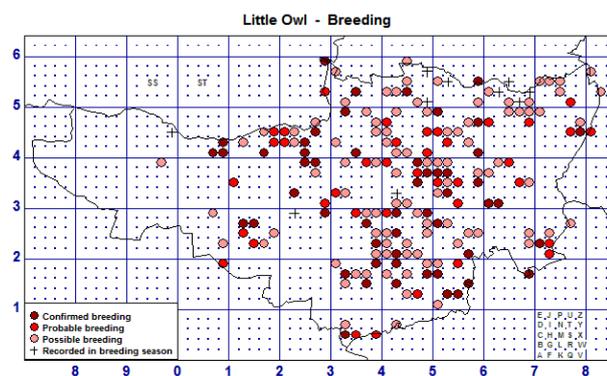
Following on from the findings of the Somerset Atlas, this survey, which will run through to winter 2019, aims to build a detailed picture from targeted and casual observational records of the distribution and population trend for both species, and enable us to look into possible causes for decline, including climatic effects, habitat degradation, and food resource depletion. Full details are given on our website, but the simple message is that every record will assist us in achieving these aims.

The map reproduced below are from the *Somerset Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds 2007-2012* (maps produced by DMAP software © Dr. Alan Morton). Records confirming continued presence or filling in blanks are equally welcome, and even evidence of absence from previously occupied tetrads is useful data.

Kingfisher



Little Owl



Survey forms can be downloaded from our website, and completed forms emailed to sos.surveys@somersetbirding.org.uk. Paper forms are also available at a number of participating nature reserves around the county including visitor centres and hides, and completed forms can be posted in collection boxes placed within hides or handed in to participating visitor centres. Casual observations of either species are also encouraged - please try and include details of location, date, number, habitat, weather conditions and if possible, notes of any behaviour observed and any obvious habitat management and changes in the immediate surroundings.

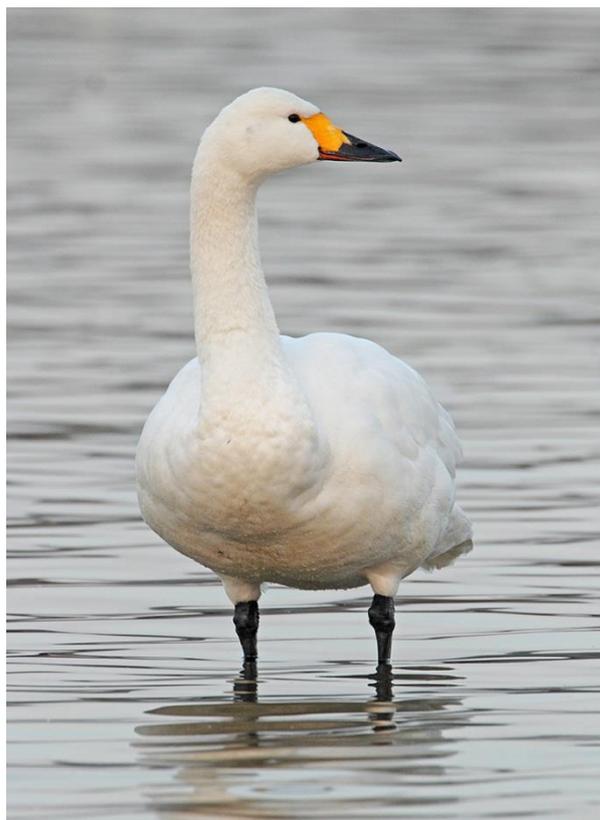
We also continue particularly to want records of four other Somerset species of conservation concern: Yellowhammer, Spotted Flycatcher, Cuckoo, and Wood Warbler.

Spotlight on... Bewick's Swan

It wasn't until 1830 that it was realised that two different species of 'wild swan' occurred in Britain in winter. The eminent ornithologist William Yarrell described Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus bewickii*) as being separate from the larger Whooper Swan (*C. cygnus*), and named the species after Northumberland naturalist and engraver Thomas Bewick, to whom Yarrell sent many specimens. Nowadays, Bewick's Swan is usually considered as a subspecies of Tundra Swan (*C. columbianus*), the nominate North American race of which is often called Whistling Swan.

Members with longer memories will recall fondly one of the few British records of Whistling Swan, a bird which spent parts of four consecutive winters (1986-1990) in Somerset, most frequently in the Hay/Curry Moor area. But that was in the days when we saw good numbers of Bewick's Swans - as David Ballance notes in *A History of the Birds of Somerset*, numbers increased in the latter half of the 20th century, the record county total was 385 in 1974, and up to 285 were still regular in the mid 1990s. The southern Levels have always been the most favoured areas, and birds used to regularly roost on Durleigh Reservoir. In early 2000 there was a single herd of around 120 birds on what is now Greylake RSPB, one of which bore a neck-collar which had been fitted to it in the Pechora Delta in northern Russia. However, numbers have fallen considerably year by year since then, so that in the last few years only a handful or two of birds have been recorded annually. Numbers at WWT Slimbridge also continue to fall, only nudging over 100 there this winter after the turn of the year.

For a long time it has been a common assumption (or perhaps, hope) that climate change and milder winters mean that the swans are not reaching us in the southwest because they don't feel the need to escape colder weather elsewhere, for example in East Anglia or the Netherlands, where much larger numbers regularly winter. However, sadly this is not the case, or only part of it. According to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, which has been studying the species for over 50 years, numbers of wintering Bewick's Swans are falling across northern Europe, from 29,000 in 1995 to just 18,100 in 2010, and perhaps even fewer now. They list a number of threats to the species, notably climate change and losses of wetland habitat for both breeding and wintering, but also illegal hunting and mortality due to collisions with wind turbines and power pylons, particularly on migration.



So what can be done? WWT's 2016 'Flight of the Swans' expedition, where their head of media Sacha Dench flew a paramotor along the birds' migration path has raised awareness of the issues, and their conservation work continues in a number of countries. In Somerset the best part that we can play in practical terms is to continue to ensure that our eminently suitable winter wetlands remain, in the hope that we might see an upturn in fortunes for this graceful small swan.

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 East Somerset birder and former SOS committee member **John Hansford**.



How and when did you get into birdwatching?

A case of evolution rather than revolution. Living in the countryside all my life and having spent a couple of decades watching deer and badgers I was always aware of birds from a young age. A memory of so many Cuckoos as a child and now it's a red letter day if I hear one at home.

The defining moment to move 'full time' into birdwatching was probably in 2004 when I developed chronic back problems. I went from being able to hike 30 miles on Exmoor to just about managing a gentle few hundred yards. Being able to reach the hides at Shapwick, I soon found myself spending many hours over a few months sitting quietly, if uncomfortably, and enjoying the birds on offer. Seeing a White Stork at Stileway near Meare was also a defining moment. I was captivated by it. Now I have turned 50 I appreciate nature more than ever.

What is your favourite birding memory?



'Twas a cold but sunny March afternoon around 12 years ago and I stumbled across someone sat quietly in Harridge Wood East watching 'my' Firecrests. That someone was Bruce Taylor. It was the start of a friendship which continues strongly today despite the obvious distance. Birding with Bruce for a decade in the field was fun and educational at all times. Just don't mention the Egyptian Goose episode!

My best bird sighting would probably be spending an hour with a Siberian Crane (left) in Hong Kong. If it hadn't flown off I might still be there!

Where was your favourite birding trip?

Minerve in France is quite spectacular for birds; however, it has to be Hong Kong in 2016. Perfect December sunshine, 20°C for 3 days, birding with my great friend and Hong Kong bird guide Matt Kwan: 140 species seen, with the quality probably exceeding my 2014 visit. Excellent food, wonderful countryside, along with staying a hotel next to a park and overlooking a river. Wonderfully friendly people and with confiding birds everywhere. I also simply adore birding at Long Valley. Oriental Honey Buzzard, Imperial Eagle, Great Spotted Eagle, Siberian Crane, Chinese Grosbeak, Red-throated Flycatchers, and so much more.

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

I work at Clarks HQ in Street, close to the Levels, and this has been very convenient for catching up with the odd rarity here and there. I am married to Sappho with 2 children, Phoebe (9) and Jacob (8). Phoebe has Spotted Crake and Caspian Gull on her 'Somerset List'! I am Secretary of Coleford Athletic FC and a Somerset football historian and have a study room of Somerset football memorabilia.

Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

This used to be Nettlebridge, but since children came along now it is Mells Down. A great habitat, especially in spring when the warblers arrive and take their place alongside the farmland birds and the many species of birds of prey. It's also a fabulous place for butterflies and lizards/grass snakes/deer/badgers.

What are your five desert island birds, and why?

1. **Dipper:** A choice made without hesitation. I have no idea how many hours I have spent watching these remarkable birds on the Mells Stream. I was quite proud to hear them featured on BBC Radio a few years ago.
2. **Long-tailed Shrike:** If there is one bird I look forward to seeing in Hong Kong then it's a Long-tailed Shrike (right). Beautiful rufous flanks and rump, striking black mask and forehead and tail.
3. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** I spent many years enjoying woodland birding, this being to East Somerset what seawatching is to West Somerset! I have been fortunate to encounter LSW in many places local to Coleford, as well as slightly further away in the county, such as Orchardleigh. Always a privilege to watch these fabulous little birds.
4. **Hobby:** I am fortunate to be spoilt with a great many different raptor species at home. My favourite though is the Hobby. I have enjoyed many hours watching these fabulous falcons, from seeing them hawking for moths at daybreak to watching food passes. Typically there are 5-6 pairs each year which breed near to Coleford. I could watch Hobbies all day every day.
5. **Black-capped Kingfisher:** On my third visit to Hong Kong I finally managed to have prolonged scope views of one of my main target birds (right). It was worth the wait.



Choose a book and luxury item, and explain why.

Birds of Somerset would be the book of my choice. It's a book that I would love to have written and the Bible of Somerset birds.

Luxury item? Binoculars - it's not I often that I go anywhere without them!

Walks and talks

Over the following pages are details of all SOS indoor and field meetings and a selection of events organised by the RSPB, WWT, and Somerset Wildlife Trust in February-March 2018.

Nearly 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.



February

2	Walk	RSPB	Starling Spectacular at Ham Wall. 1400-1600. Join RSPB leaders on World Wetlands Day in search of some fantastic wildlife that makes Ham Wall its winter home, finishing with watching thousands of starlings going to roost in the reedbeds. Meet in the Ham Wall car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Booking essential: contact 01458 860494 or ham.wall@rspb.org.uk. Cost: £4 RSPB member / £6 non-member / £2 child RSPB member / £3 child non-member.
2	Walk	WWT	Stearth Marshes: Night walk. 1930. New for 2018, unique night time walks around the wetlands. A local expert will be on hand to tell you all about the sights and sounds you can experience after dark. Meet in main car park (ST252442, TA5 2PU). Suggested donation: £3 WWT members / £5 non-members (cash on day). For further information (or to book your place) please call 01278 651090. Suitable for any age (under 16s must be accompanied by an adult). Remember to wrap up warm and bring a torch. Hot drinks will be provided. No dogs permitted.
3	Walk	RSPB	Big Wetland Duck Watch. 1000-1200. In the winter tens of thousands of ducks and waders visit the fields of West Sedgemoor. Join RSPB guides for a rare opportunity to witness this wildlife spectacle. Adults: £6 (£4 for RSPB members); children £3 (£2 for Wildlife Explorer members). Payable on the day, but booking essential. Directions will be provided on booking. Contact RSPB West Sedgemoor office: 07774 620879 or west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
4	Walk	WWT	Stearth Marshes: High tide birdwatching walk. 0830-1030. See the spectacle of the high tide as it fills the largest area of the reserve and witness hundreds of birds feeding. Meet in main car park (ST252442, TA5 2PU). Suggested donation: £3 WWT members / £5 non-members. For further information (or to book your place) please call 01278 651090. Suitable for any age (under 16s must be accompanied by an adult). No dogs permitted. Dress suitably for the weather.
4	Walk	SWT	Stearth Marshes. 0930-1130. Don Hurrell leads a walk via the Mendip Hide, along the bank of the Parrett towards the breach itself, and return via the Quantock Hide. Meet in main car park (ST252442, TA5 2PU). Booking essential: contact Dr Ged Keele, 01278 769010 or gerard.keele@btinternet.com. Free.
6	Talk	SWT	Somerset's Coast and the South West. 1930-2130. Nigel Phillips, SWT's Coastal Ambassador, will present this talk primarily about the wonderful wildlife on Somerset's coast but will also share his knowledge of other great coastal places close by. St. George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton TA1 3NR. Contact: Simon Briggs, 01823 270529 or simon.briggs@somersetwildlife.org. Cost: members £2.50/non-members £3/children & students £1.

6	Walk	SWT	Hummingbirds. 2000-2115. Dr Rob Williams talks about the stunning variety of hummingbirds in the Americas, and examines their evolution, ecology, and diversity. Caryford Hall, Ansford, Castle Cary, BA7 7JJ. Contact: Caroline Rathbone, 01749 812127 or carolinerathbone@btinternet.com. Cost: SWT members £2.50/non-members £3/children & students £1.
10	Walk	SOS	West Sedgemoor. 1000. Leaders: Nigel and Elaine Smith. Focus: winter wildfowl and waders. Meet at RSPB base at Dewlands Farm (ST381265, TA10 0PH). A small charge applies for this walk. Places are limited, so booking is essential: please email alison.everett@somersetbirding.org.uk.
18	Walk	RSPB	Dawn Explosion at Ham Wall. 0700-0900. Have you ever wondered what over half a million Starlings looks like when they wake up? Come along on an early morning stroll to the roost site and watch as the whole flock takes to the air. A truly unmissable sight! Meet in the Ham Wall car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Booking essential: contact 01458 860494 or ham.wall@rspb.org.uk. Cost: £4 RSPB member / £6 non-member / £2 child RSPB member / £3 child non-member.
15	Talk	RSPB	Patagonia: A South American Wilderness. 1930. An illustrated talk by Lynn and Steve Osborne on their trip to Patagonia, a wilderness of glaciers, mountains, and spectacular coastlines in the southern part of Argentina and Chile. An amazing place with a vast range of wildlife from southern right whales, elephant seals, and penguin colonies to guanaco, mountain lions, and parakeets, to name but a few! Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster (TA19 0QH). Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net. Cost: South Somerset RSPB group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free.
17	Walk	RSPB	Arne RSPB Reserve, near Wareham. 1000. A day walking around the reserve looking for winter waders and raptors. Café on site. Meet at the RSPB car park (SY972878, BH20 5BJ). Contact: 07803 928717 or birders@csndesk.plus.com. Cost: free for RSPB members and under 18s, £4 for adult non-members.
17	Walk	SWT	Westhay Moor National Nature Reserve. 1030-1230. Leader: Mick Ridgard. Meet in reserve car park at start of Daggs Lane Drove (ST457437, BA6 9TX). Contact: Mick Ridgard, 01373 463875 or mridgard@sky.com. Cost: £2.50/children & students £1.
17	Walk	RSPB	Big Wetland Duck Watch. 1000-1200. In the winter tens of thousands of ducks and waders visit the fields of West Sedgemoor. Join RSPB guides for a rare opportunity to witness this wildlife spectacle. Adults: £6 (£4 for RSPB members); children £3 (£2 for Wildlife Explorer members). Payable on the day, but booking essential. Directions will be provided on booking. Contact RSPB West Sedgemoor office: 07774 620879 or west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
18	Walk	WWT	Birdwatching for Beginners. 0830-1030. Join a local expert and learn to identify some of the birds which visit the wetlands of Steart Marshes. Meet in main car park (ST252442, TA5 2PU). Suggested donation: £3 WWT members / £5 non-members. For further information (or to book your place) please call 01278 651090. Suitable for any age (under 16s must be accompanied by an adult). Bring your own binoculars if you have a pair. No dogs permitted.
20	Talk	SWT	Marine Life: Surveying the Seas and Coastal Waters. 1930-2130. MARINELife is a UK-based charity established to coordinate and develop a growing portfolio of global cetacean and seabird research and monitoring projects. Rick Morris, the current chair of the organisation, will talk about its work. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar BS27 3HU. Contact: Dr Ged Keele, 01278 769010 or gerard.keele@btinternet.com. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.

22	Event	SOS	Members' social evening. 1930. See p.3. A question and answer session with our President, wildlife broadcaster and author Stephen Moss, followed by a free buffet and a chance to meet and chat with other members and your committee. Ruishton Village Hall, Cheats Road, Ruishton, TA3 5JD (ST268250).
22	Talk	SWT	The Fight Against Illegal Trafficking in Wildlife. 1930-2100. Charles MacKay MBE works with the UK Border Agency in combating the illegal trade in wildlife. He will talk about graphic examples of some smuggling cases in which he has been involved. St Catherine's Church Hall, Park Road, Frome, BA11 1EU. Contact: Mick Ridgard, 01373 463875 or mridgard@sky.com. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
23	Talk	SWT	The Wildlife of Devon from Shore to Moor. 1930. John Walters, ecologist, wildlife illustrator, and film-maker, will present an exploration of the wonderful variety of wildlife in Devon (fish, bees, slugs, and birds). Tea & coffee available. St George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton, TA1 3NR. Contact: Simon Briggs, 01823 270529, or simon.briggs@somersetwildlife.org Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
24	Walk	RSPB	Big Wetland Duck Watch. 1000-1200. Join RSPB guides for a rare opportunity to witness the spectacle of thousands of ducks and waders on West Sedgemoor. Adults: £6 (£4 for RSPB members); children £3 (£2 for Wildlife Explorer members). Payable on the day, but booking essential. Directions provided on booking. Contact RSPB West Sedgemoor: 07774 620879 or west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
24	Event	RSPB	Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. As 27 January.

March

3	Walk	WWT	Stearth Marshes: Night walk. 1930. A night time wildlife walk around the wetlands with a local expert. Meet in main car park (ST252442, TA5 2PU). Suggested donation: £3 WWT members, £5 non-members (cash on day). For further information/booking call 01278 651090. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult). Wrap up warm and bring a torch. Hot drinks provided. No dogs permitted.
4	Walk	SWT	Edford Woods in Spring. 1030-1230. Get to know this lovely SWT Reserve better and see what's about with Mick Ridgard. Meet at the entrance to the reserve (ST663483). Contact: Mick Ridgard, 01373 463875 or mridgard@sky.com. Cost: £2.50, children & students £1.
6	Talk	SWT	Stourhead's Tree Sparrow Project. 2000-2115. Tamsin Holmes of the National Trust will talk about this project at Stourhead, just over the border in Wiltshire, which aims to encourage the revival of this endangered species, which declined in the UK by 95% between 1970 and 2000. Caryford Hall, Ansford, Castle Cary, BA7 7JJ. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
7	Talk	SWT	Climate Change in Somerset. 1930-2130. Come and hear the latest thinking on climate change, how it is affecting Somerset and its nature, and what is being done about it locally, with Steve Mewes, SWT Policy and Campaigns Manager. Plenty of time after the talk for lively Q&A and discussion. Shapwick Village Hall, Station Road, Shapwick TA7 9NJ. Contact: Philip Bruss poldenbruss@outlook.com. Cost SW members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
13	Talk	SWT	The Role of a Wildlife Crime Officer. 1930-2130. PC David Pepper will explain his role of Wildlife Crime Officer within Avon and Somerset Police, the law involved, and how the public can report incidents. St George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton, TA1 3NR. Contact: Simon Briggs, simon.briggs@somersetwildlife.org or 01823 270529. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children/students £1.

13	Talk	SWT	Hérons and Swell Wood's Heronry. 1930-2130. The RSPB Swell Wood reserve is home to the largest heronry in SW England. With up to 150 heron nests in some years. Learn more about the heronry and the wider reserve from the RSPB Warden, Steve Ross. The Parish Rooms, Market Square, Somerton, TA11 7NB. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
15	Talk	RSPB	English Wildlife: Autumn and Winter. 1930. An illustrated talk by David Kjaer, covering many of the species of birds and mammals, and a few fungi, one might expect to see (with a little effort) during a typical autumn and winter. Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster (TA19 0QH). Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net. Cost: South Somerset RSPB group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free.
22	Talk	SOS	The Andean Condor: the demise and fall of a deity. 1930. Dr Rob Williams is a conservationist with a particular connection to Peru, and in this talk he details the changing fortunes of this majestic raptor, an icon of the Andes it calls home. Ruishton Village Hall, Cheats Road, Ruishton, TA3 5JD (ST268250). All welcome. Refreshments available. Free.
23	Talk	SWT	Manu: Where the Andes Meet the Amazon. 1930-2100. Dr Rob Williams has spent a decade working for the conservation of Manu National Park, encompassing the humid montane forests of the eastern Andes and the adjacent Amazon lowlands. The most biodiverse protected area on Earth, it is home to over 1000 bird species and 300 mammals, Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster TA19 0DG. Contact: Valerie Godsmark, 01460 234551 or johngodsmark123@btinternet.com. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
24	Walk	RSPB	Mr Boombastic at Ham Wall. 0600-0900. With over forty male booming bitterns recorded last year, the Avalon Marshes is one of the best places in the country to find this shy and elusive bird. Join RSPB wardens on an early morning walk to listen to the eerie booming of the bitterns as they look for a mate. Meet at the Welcome Building at Ham Wall car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Stout footwear or wellingtons recommended. Toilets on site. Booking essential. Price: £6 non-RSPB member, £4 member, £3 child non-RSPB member, £2 child member.
24	Walk	SOS	Westhay Moor. 0930. Leaders: Alison Everett and Eve Tigwell. Focus: reedbed birds, wildfowl, raptors. Meet in reserve car park at start of Daggs Lane Drove (ST457437, BA6 9TX). Free.
24	Event	TPP	Taunton Peregrine Project open day. See p.1. Starts at 1100. Come along to find out more about the project and be among the first to see live images of the Peregrines on the screen in the church. St Mary Magdalene Church, Church Square (off Hammet Street), Taunton. Park in Canon Street pay and display car park, which is next to the church (TA1 1SW).
29	Talk	SWT	Birds, Bears, and Botany: An Arctic Adventure. 1930-2100. Malcolm Taylor, an accomplished wildlife photographer, will talk about the wildlife (including breeding birds, flowering plants, prowling bears, and whales) of the glaciers and deserts, and seas of the Svalbard Archipelago in high summer. St Catherine's Church Hall, Park Road, Frome, BA11 1EU. Contact: Mick Ridgard, 01373 463875 or mridgard@sky.com. Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1.
30	Event	RSPB	Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. As 27 January.

April

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| 7 | Walk | RSPB | Mr Boombastic at Ham Wall. 0600-0900. With over forty male booming bitterns recorded last year, the Avalon Marshes is one of the best places in the country to find this shy and elusive bird. Join RSPB wardens on an early morning walk to listen to the eerie booming of the bitterns as they look for a mate. Meet at the Welcome Building at Ham Wall car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Stout footwear or wellingtons recommended. Toilets on site. Booking essential. Price: £6 non-RSPB member, £4 member, £3 child non-RSPB member, £2 child member. |
| 17 | Talk | SWT | Diurnal Raptors in Somerset. 1930-2130. Trevor Riddle is an experienced Somerset birdwatcher and he will talk about his experiences watching birds of prey in Somerset. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar, BS27 3HU. Contact: Dr Ged Keele, 01278 769010 or 12erard.keele@btinternet.com Cost: SWT members £2.50, non-members £3, children & students £1. |
| 19 | Talk | SOS | Remote Himalayan birding and expedition medicine. 1930. Gus Robin, a local birder and GP, describes the birds, wildlife, and sticky moments of a remote Nepalese bird research expedition. Ruishton Village Hall, Cheats Road, Ruishton (TA3 5JD, ST268250). All are welcome. Refreshments available. Free. |
| 19 | Talk | RSPB | Bats, Water Voles, and Dormice. 1930. An illustrated talk presented by Devon ecologist Louise Woolley, who will take us on a whistle stop tour of these protected species, their ecology, population distribution and future in Devon. Louise will explain about the current monitoring programme and legislation covering these species. Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster (TA19 0QH). Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net. Cost: South Somerset RSPB group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free. |
| 21 | Walk | RSPB | Mr Boombastic at Ham Wall. 0600-0900. With over forty male booming bitterns recorded last year, the Avalon Marshes is one of the best places in the country to find this shy and elusive bird. Join RSPB wardens on an early morning walk to listen to the eerie booming of the bitterns as they look for a mate. Meet at the Welcome Building at Ham Wall car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Stout footwear or wellingtons recommended. Toilets on site. Booking essential. Price: £6 non-RSPB member, £4 member, £3 child non-RSPB member, £2 child member. |
| 28 | Walk | SOS | Brean Down. 0815. Leaders: Julian Thomas and Brian Hill. Focus: spring migrants. Meet at bird garden car park (fee payable: £4 all day) (ST297587, TA8 2RS). Note early start. NT car park free to NT members if open early (may not be). Duration probably c.4 hours: bring a drink/snack. |
| 28 | Event | RSPB | Binocular and Telescope Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. As 27 January. |

Photo credits:

Mike Leigh-Mallory/Taunton Peregrine Project (p.1), Julian Thomas (p.2, p.3 bottom), John Tolfree (p.3 top), Gary Thoburn (both on p.5), John Hansford (all on pp.6 and 7), and Brian Hill (p.8).



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