



## Severn Barrage scheme 'dead in the water'

Julian Thomas looks back at recent developments in the course of this controversial scheme

Back in June this year, the House of Commons' Energy and Climate Change Committee reported that the plans for a £25bn barrage across the Severn Estuary from Brean Down to Lavernock Point in South Wales have 'yet to provide robust and independently verified evidence of the economic, environmental and technological viability of the project'.

In mid September, after consideration, ministers agreed, stating that the proposal from Hafren Power 'does not demonstrate that it could deliver the benefits it claims it would achieve', effectively halting any plans to build the barrage in the foreseeable future. In response, Peter Hain, MP for Neath and a key supporter of the scheme, admitted that the plan was 'dead in the water' in the current Parliament.



Environmental groups, including SOS, had opposed the barrage scheme on the grounds that the extraction of so much energy from the Severn Estuary was likely to have a profound effect on the hydrology of the estuary system, with unknown but potentially quite serious effects on the wildlife that uses it, including internationally important numbers of waders and wildfowl. The most serious consequences were feared upstream of the barrage (including the Axe Estuary), where tidal flows would have been reduced and the risk of silting-up increased, but it would also likely have had noticeable effects downstream, including in Bridgwater Bay. The construction phase, which would have taken several years, would also of course have had a serious effect on the Berrow/Brean area, including Brean Down itself just to the north of the proposed landfall for the barrage on the Somerset side.

The ministerial report said that the Government needed 'robust and credible evidence' for such an 'unprecedented and huge project' as the barrage proposed by Hafren Power. This would include, it continued, an in-depth study of the environmental impact, detailed environmental compensation and mitigation plans and evidence of the flood impact. Ministers also appeared to be unconvinced by Hafren's claims for the job creation and economic benefits of the scheme, calling for detailed, independently-verified evidence to back up those claims.

Kate Jennings, from the RSPB, welcomed the Government's announcement, saying: 'Once again, plans to build a Severn barrage have been effectively dismissed, described as "hypothetical" and failing to demonstrate either effective mitigation of environmental impacts or value for money. This is fantastic news for the wildlife of the Severn, and a welcome blast of common sense from the Government.'

'Conservationists have been warning for years that this poorly thought through project would devastate the ecosystem of this estuary, but it has somehow managed to stay on the table.'

'It's disappointing that Government has failed to more explicitly rule out any further consideration of damaging barrage technology, but let's hope this is the final nail in the coffin for this outdated and discredited technology which has held back the development of innovative, clean, green tidal power schemes. This barrage has been a diversion from the real task of finding innovative ways of generating clean electricity whilst safeguarding the precious wildlife of the estuary.'

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## Welcome

Apologies that this issue is a little later than usual - the result of being on my travels once again in late November. The new mugshot is of me over breakfast at the excellent Cassowary House in Queensland - a thoroughly recommended trip, and easy to do independently once you get past the long journey to get there. I even managed to get away without getting too much stick about the Brisbane Test Match result!

Back nearer home, the various developments at Steart and on the Levels reported in previous issues of *The Bittern* continue to move forward, though the weather and other difficulties have put some of them well behind schedule. They'll be great when they're eventually finished. Speaking of which, work on the county Atlas continues, and when

that is published in the spring then there may be more time available for updates to the SOS website, including the site guides which are very much in need of an overhaul. If you have any suggestions for sites which ought to be included but aren't currently, please let me know, or why not have a go at writing a guide to that site yourself? In the meantime I hope that the 'bluffer's guide' in this issue will help birdwatchers new to the Avalon Marshes make the most of their birding days.

Also in this issue is a thorough and informative piece on the Iberian Chiffchaff last year - James Packer is not only chair of the SOS Rarities Committee, but was also instrumental in gathering the evidence to nail the identification and add this species to the county list. The usual features are also here, and in this issue the castaway is one of the two women on the SOS Committee. Hopefully proof that we're not completely male-dominated, but more than that anyone who can casually drop in 'When I was living in Sumatra...' has led an interesting life!



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## Severn Barrage scheme ‘dead in the water’ continued....

The coalition of groups opposing the scheme has been a broad one, showing the extent of its feared impact, and included not only the RSPB, but also WWT, The Salmon and Trout Association, the Angling Trust, and The Wye and Usk Foundation, among others. Jonathan White, Chairman of Trustees, Severn Rivers Trust said: ‘The Severn Rivers Trust welcomes the Government’s rejection of Hafren Power’s proposal to build a barrage across the Severn Estuary.’

‘Wherever in the world tidal barrages have been tried, they have been associated with huge environmental damage and adverse impact on wildlife. We hope the Government’s condemnation of yet another barrage means that the Severn Estuary will now be spared this fate. This should open the way for consideration of alternative, less environmentally damaging approaches to harnessing the renewable energy potential of the Severn.’

## News in brief

### Crane safaris!

The RSPB are offering opportunities to join their crane monitors as they radio-track cranes across the Somerset Levels and Moors (including in areas not accessible to the general public) and observe their behaviour. The ‘crane safaris’ run once a day on Mondays to Saturdays until mid March 2014, for two people at a time at a cost of £25 per person. This includes up to two hours of monitoring activity, followed by a short film about the project and lunch at the Lemon Tree Café at the Willows & Wetland Centre. Full details are under Seeing Cranes and Events on the Crane Project’s website, [www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk](http://www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk), and advance bookings (essential) are through the Willows & Wetlands Centre on 01823 490249.

### Stearth Marshes update

Handover, and opening of part of the area of the new reserve as outlined in the last issue of *The Bittern*, was due to take place in early December, but has been delayed and may not now happen until early in the New Year. Updates should appear on the website for the Stearth Marshes Project, [stearth.wwt.org.uk](http://stearth.wwt.org.uk), or on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/WWTStearth>).

### New hide at Greylake

The new hide at Greylake RSPB reserve is now complete and open to visitors. It is right next to the original hide, which is slightly disappointing, but it is raised several feet above the ground, so it gives a different perspective and does allow better and further viewing of birds at ground level. It is a bit of a hybrid between a hide and a screen, roofed but open at the back with camouflage netting to hide the observers within - those there when I visited commented that it could be quite exposed on a windy day. Not perfect, then, but still another welcome addition to the viewing facilities for birders on the Levels reserves. And for a different view of the area, there is always the viewing screen about 500m west from the Reedbed Loop trail.



## Ham Wall car park update

It has long been recognised that the existing car park at Ashcott Corner cannot cope with the number of visitors (birders and non-birders alike) who now want to visit Shapwick Heath and Ham Wall. As mentioned in issue 5 of *The Bittern*, the RSPB obtained planning permission for a new car park and associated facilities, and work is now underway, as visitors to Ashcott Corner will have seen. Winter weather will no doubt play its part in delaying progress here as it has done elsewhere, and it now looks like it will be well into 2014 before the car park and the associated infrastructure (including toilets) are completed and ready to open. Still very much a positive move, though, and one to be applauded. Watch this space for updates on progress.

## National Atlas published

The BTO National Atlas was published on 21 November in London, at a launch attended by, among many others, SOS Committee members Stephen Moss and Eve Tigwell. I've not had much time since my return from holiday to look through it, but it looks a quality product, and plenty of food for thought in terms of changes to bird distributions since the last national breeding Atlas 20 years ago. I hope to have a full review in the next issue of *The Bittern*, but for now I'd just say go and buy a copy if you haven't already.

## County Atlas on the way

A small band of Committee Members continues to work hard on producing our own county Atlas. All data is now in and the maps have been generated. All of the species texts have been written, in draft form at least, as has most of the rest of the text. It's now a question of editing it to fit the space allowed and to ensure it's fit for purpose. We've set publication now for early May, and are confident that we can work to that. Full details of the launch event will follow in due course.

One thing we do still need is more photos of the range of habitats across Somerset, in both summer and winter. In particular we need more good-quality shots of the less fashionable habitats in which to go birding - lowland farmland and urban situations, for instance. We will also need high-quality photos of some birds to help illustrate the book and fill in some gaps where the text does not fall neatly into the pages available - we don't know yet which species, but I hope we will be able to call on the numerous good photographers we have in the county to help out with any requests nearer to the publication date.

## A new record

Red-throated Divers always turn up in numbers off the west coast at this time of year, and Hurlstone Point is probably the best place to see them from, but on 1 December Brian Gibbs and Dave Dawe set a new day record for the county, counting no fewer than 185 Red-throated Divers passing the point. Five Black-throated Divers also that morning made it an excellent watch, and just reward for the observers' dedication.

# The Iberian Chiffchaff at Porlock: a County First

James Packer



Iberian Chiffchaff, Porlock

I'm always hoping for a telephone call informing me that there's a major County rarity somewhere. I'm also always hoping I'll find one myself, but that's perhaps one hope too many! On 5 June 2012 I was therefore quite excited to receive a telephone call from a friend, Andy Pym, who was sure he had just heard a singing Iberian Chiffchaff along the Porlock toll road. Normally, I might be a bit sceptical about this sort of claim, but Andy has excellent form with this species, having been one of the finders of the Wentwood, Gwent bird back in 2010. Knowing that a sound recording was critical to the identity process of this species, I encouraged Andy to go back the next day and try and record the bird singing on his mobile phone. Without this, there would be virtually no way of having his record accepted. Most people don't realise that they carry a perfectly acceptable recording device around with them the whole time - whilst not exactly producing fantastic recordings, a mobile phone is perfectly usable for making bird song recording, especially where there's no other option available and a recording is as critical as it was here! Thankfully, the bird stayed quite a long time - at least eight weeks - and therefore getting further sound recordings was quite easy.

Unfortunately, it was a couple of days before I could get down to Porlock to see the bird, although several local birders had visited the site and listened to, photographed and videoed the bird before I could do so. This is where it all got a little confusing, as some people had reported that whilst the bird was certainly

singing like a classic Iberian Chiffchaff much of the time, it also spent quite some time apparently singing like a normal *collybita* Chiffchaff. I'm fairly sure that no-one was expecting this 'song swapping' and doubts began to be expressed over the bird's identify.

I am self confessed as being fairly poor at being able to describe and remember bird songs and calls, and therefore to help me improve this, I've recently got hold of a Remembird recording device. It's a little better than recording the bird with a mobile phone, and coupled with an external shotgun microphone, recordings start approaching the quality that you can use to analyse calls in a bit more detail. I went to the site as soon as I was able, and recorded lots of song, several calls, and took lots of photos. The bird was very showy and sang virtually constantly, so this wasn't exactly a challenging prospect. Having got all the evidence I needed, I then started the process of working out what this all meant. The bird was definitely singing like an Iberian Chiffchaff - sometimes! At other times it appeared to be singing like a *collybita* Chiffchaff.

A bit of research was needed, and two bits of information were to prove invaluable. Firstly, a paper in *British Birds*, 'Identification of vagrant Iberian Chiffchaffs - pointers, pitfalls and problem birds' by J. Martin Collinson and Tim Melling, and secondly, a note by the Spanish birder Daniel López-Velasco on a Surfbirds forum post, where they both clearly acknowledge that Iberian Chiffchaffs have two different types of song. Collinson and Melling (2008) characterise the Chiffchaff sounding song as a conflict song, which is usually used during antagonistic interactions with other males. It was starting to all make sense. During my observations of the Iberian Chiffchaff it became clear that the bird was trying to establish a territory right next to a pair of Chiffchaffs that were feeding young in a nest that was about three metres away from its favourite Holly tree song post. The Iberian Chiffchaff even visited the nest on a number of occasions but was usually chased away by one of the Chiffchaffs - often aggressively. It's therefore hardly surprising that it should give a fair amount of conflict song.

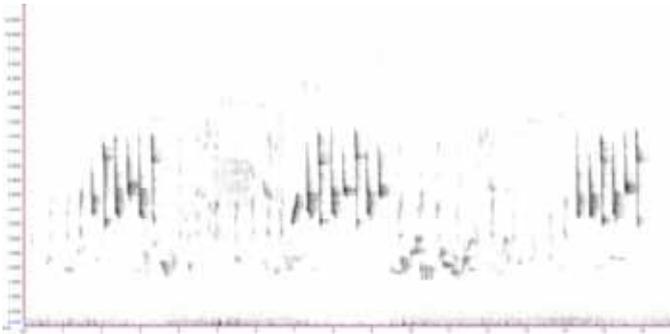


Figure 1

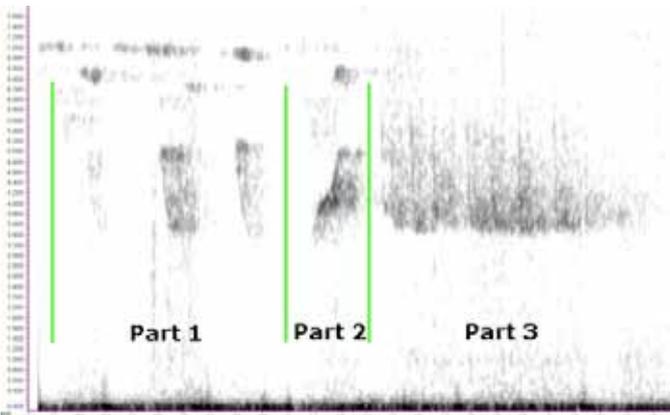


Figure 2



Figure 3

The best way to analyse a bird recording is to produce a sonogram (or sonagram, or spectrogram - same thing), which is a simple graph of sound frequency over time. Figure 1 is the Iberian Chiffchaff giving a Chiffchaff sounding song (conflict song), though notice that the song is in short bursts of about 2-3 seconds, and at a frequency of 3-6.7 kHz. Normal Chiffchaffs usually sing in much longer bursts, and at a frequency reaching 6 or 7 kHz.

The classic Iberian Chiffchaff advertising song is usually a short Chiffchaff type burst followed by an upwards 'wheet' and a short trill. Figure 2 shows just this classic three part advertising song given by the Porlock bird on my first visit.

In any doubt was still lingering, the bird was also calling fairly frequently. The calls were totally unlike any normal Chiffchaff, and were obviously distinctively downward inflecting, see figure 3. This was the trump card if any were needed, this call being diagnostic.

Of course, any bird description ought to touch on what the bird actually looked like, though in truth it was hardly needed here, given the other supporting information. Looking at the photo you can just about make out longer wings than a Chiffchaff, and the supercilium was yellow, particularly across the top of the eye, becoming indistinct towards the bill. The breast and belly were certainly white-ish and the legs were dark brown. There was no discernible eye-ring. Though to be honest, it looked very much like a Chiffchaff and we shouldn't overstate the bird's plumage here! Classic individuals like the Porlock bird may be relatively easy to identify, but it would be a brave person who tried to get a record of a silent individual accepted on current knowledge.

This bird may not have been the most spectacular, but it caused much debate, and some fascinating research. Its identity was subsequently accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee.

Though it has only relatively recently been recognised as a species, and the first to come to birders' attention was only in 1999 on Portland, it clearly was being overlooked previously, as the Porlock bird constitutes the 30th British record of Iberian Chiffchaff, though the first for Somerset.



James Packer

# Finding your way around the Avalon Marshes

Julian Thomas explains the here and there of it all

OK, so you're fairly new to the Avalon Marshes, either new to the hobby or recently moved to the area. Satnav will get you to some car parks (very useful in itself), but OS maps are better in a lot of cases, though sometimes even they won't necessarily help. For instance, you're birding the area when someone mentions that there's a bird you would like to see, but tells you it's at 'The Roughet' or along 'London Drove', which leaves you none the wiser. Most birders will notice your blank look of incomprehension and explain, but it's still embarrassing, right? With new areas of habitat being created all the time, and sometimes gaining new names in the process, even seasoned Levels birders sometimes get confused, though, so you're not alone. Here, then, is the bluffer's guide to the local names for parts of some of our best birding sites.



## Ham Wall

'Ham Wall' itself does not appear on any OS map, but at least it's easy enough if you know you just have to get to Ashcott Corner (which does), park and cross the road to enter the RSPB reserve of that name. Strictly speaking though, 'Ham Wall' only refers to the area north of the drain - to the south a bewildering set of local names apply. First off, and viewable to your right from the bridge over the South Drain, is Ashcott Heath, though confusingly it is also referred to as 'Godwin's' because it is still owned by the peat company of that name. A little further on is Walton Heath, either side of the blinds opposite the first viewing platform, and this year's favoured area for the Little Bitterns. Next up is Loxton's Marsh, where those birds first bred in 2009, but by the time you've passed '2VP' (or 'VP2', according to taste) - the second viewing platform - and the reedbed has given way to trees and rough grass you're looking at Street Heath.

Beyond that is the area known as 'Garley's', opposite which is Glastonbury Heath, across the minor road which runs along the northern edge of the reserve at that point (and where diving ducks that have gone missing from Ham Wall are likely to be found). By now you are approaching the Sharpham end, though the 'Sharpham' where the swans congregate in winter is to the south of the tea rooms there, near the deer park and Durston's peat works. Sharpham Pools, also owned by the RSPB, are a little further to the east, opposite Avalon Farm.

## Shapwick Heath

That Meare Heath, to the north of the South Drain and on your right as you walk west from Ashcott Corner car park, is part of Shapwick Heath reserve still confuses the national bird information services, but in reality that's the easy bit. The south side is more complicated - first, and containing the strange and now slightly dilapidated sculptures, is the area known as the Estate Grounds. Then there is 70-acre, the large reedbed opposite the Meare Heath lagoons. Noah's Lake is easy enough, then comes The Roughet, a large area of reedbed, pools, and willow scrub. Behind that is Decoy Lake, with a hide accessible along a peat drove off the end of the boardwalk that leads off the old railway line that forms the main path - the Sweet Track crosses that boardwalk. All of this area is officially Shapwick Heath East - Shapwick Heath West is west of the Shapwick-Westhay road and south of the South Drain, but is known to most as Canada Farm.

## Westhay Moor

This one's relatively easy by comparison - the car park *is* at the start of Dagg's Lane Drove and most of the best birding is along London Drove to the west. Linking the two is what is sometimes known as the 'cross-drove' or the 'grass drove', with the raised hide on a loop trail off to the right (if heading from the car park). You can drive down London Drove, though it seems to get rougher every year and I've given up trying to do so any further than the end of the cross-drove - parking is limited anywhere along there anyway.

What you need to beware of, though, is that Westhay Heath and Westhay Level, scene of this spring's Hoopoe and on a few previous occasions a winter Great Grey Shrike or spring Garganey, are in fact along the road west towards Burtle from Westhay village, not near Westhay Moor to the north. Just to add to potential confusion, also along the Burtle road is the actual Godwin's peat works, so 'it's at Godwin's' doesn't necessarily mean the bird is on Ashcott Heath!

A site that *is* near Westhay Moor, but doesn't sound like it is, is 'Godney Ponds', which could be counted as being on the edge of Godney Moor if you stretch the definition a bit. Along Lewis Drove, which is the next left turn after passing the Westhay Moor car park heading east, the pools are also referred to as 'Rosebud Farm', as they are directly opposite the farm, which helpfully is marked on the OS map.

## Catcott Lows

Another relatively easy one, as few now remember the official name of the drove where the car park and main hide are, but it's always useful to know that 'Catcott Heath' refers to the area down the other drove off the sharp bend by the car park track, and that that track is Higher Ropes Drove (Lower Ropes Drove runs parallel just to the north and is the access to the other hide).

There are plenty of other local names, duplicate names and anomalies elsewhere in the county - Exmoor and the Quantocks in particular - but they'll have to wait for another time. Just a quick last couple for the Levels, though - there's an Aller Moor north of Westhay by Tatham Moor, as well as the better-known one near Aller itself, and there are two West Moors on the South Levels - one west of Curry and Hay Moors near Taunton, and one near Hambridge further east. Unfortunate birdwatchers have been known to waste hours searching the wrong site for a local rarity - now that's really embarrassing!

# Book review

Julian Thomas

*Birds ID Insights* by Dominic Couzens and David Nurney

There are many good field guides to the birds of Britain and Europe, and every birder should own at least one of these - the Collins Guide is generally considered to be the best, though the RSPB pocket guide (the old Mitchell Beazley pocket guide updated) is still a good option for the beginner birdwatcher or those with just a passing interest. Back in the late 1980s, though, the Macmillan Guide (as it became universally known) by Harris, Tucker and Vinicombe broke new ground. Rather than covering all species, it concentrated on the more difficult species pairs and groups, dealing with them in much more detail than space allowed in a traditional field guide. With Keith Vinicombe's insightful text well illustrated by Alan Harris and the late Laurel Tucker, it quickly became an invaluable reference, and for years was the bird book most likely to be found in my car. Now somewhat out of date in places, it has been out of print for many years.

However, this new book, by well-known bird and nature author Dominic Couzens, and lavishly illustrated by equally renowned bird artist Dave Nurney, is the natural successor to the Macmillan Guide, and a very worthy one too. Based on a long series of ID articles in *BirdWatching* magazine by the same author and artist, it too seeks to demystify those tricky-to-identify groups. As with the previous (and unrelated) book, it covers a wide range of species, from divers to finches, and deals with separating Song and Mistle Thrushes as thoroughly as it does a variety of rarer warblers in comparison with their commoner cousins.

In reviewing this book I looked in detail at species which are likely to be of particular interest to Somerset birdwatchers. Wildfowl are dealt with very well, with Dave Nurney's portrait of a female Garganey being a particular favourite. No need for plates of gaudy males here - the paintings and line drawings are of the more difficult females and immatures, in a variety of poses, from different angles, and in silhouette. The kind of views you are likely to get in the field, in other words, rather than regimented field guide poses. The comparison plate of female *Aythya* ducks, for instance, shows how to tell them apart when asleep, as they so often are. The winter-plumaged divers, always a tricky group given the likely viewing conditions, are dealt with in great detail, including a comparison plate of the heads of the three regular species from behind - a surprisingly common viewing angle - showing the proportions and patterns.

It's bang up to date too - the section on telling apart the challenging group of Herring, Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls appears to include the most recent information in what is still an evolving picture. And the section on Marsh and Willow Tits includes the grey mark on the bill feature of Marsh which has also only recently come to light.

All of the plates are accompanied by lists of bullet points, concisely (and in the instances I have checked, accurately) setting out the key identification features, in comparison with the confusion species where appropriate. As one would expect from Dominic Couzens, the language used is everyday and easily accessible throughout, with a minimum of technical terms.

As ever, there are a few criticisms - the Rock Pipit on p. 239 looks too richly coloured underneath to my eye, and the juvenile Rose-coloured Starling on p. 216 perhaps just a little too contrasting between upper-and underparts, but these are relatively minor quibbles. And quickly forgotten when you switch to pages 88-9 and the spread of no less than nine different flight views of Hobby!

This then is the nub of it - this book will help you not only identify difficult birds by plumage and call, but also by that indefinable feature, 'jizz', in those many, many instances when field views are not field-guide perfect. You get a 'feel' for the birds, which is a very difficult task for any book or any artist to achieve. This book will be of continuing use to newcomers to the hobby and experienced birders alike, and at only £16.99 it is easily within every birdwatcher's budget. It looks set to become the next bird book to take up residence in my car, and for some time to come.

***Birds ID Insights* by Dominic Couzens and David Nurney, New Holland, 2013, £16.99, ISBN 978-1-78009-058-0**

# 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 SOS Committee member and Levels resident **Alison Everett**.



## How and when did you get into birdwatching?

Peter Scott and washing up! Living on a farm I got to know the commoner species from an early age but going to a talk by Peter Scott in Bristol in the mid-sixties got me interested in conservation in general, I then began to look closer at the birds seen from the kitchen window when washing up. There was more to the 'flock of sparrows', different plumages and not all were sparrows and so on and then I started a list...

## What is your favourite birding memory?

Hard to choose, but I think it is my first birding trip to Exmoor in 1965 with birding mentors George and Sybil (not a comedy duo but great characters). We walked from Webber's Post to Cloutsham and they showed me nesting Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts and singing Wood Warbler. There must have been other moorland birds that day but it was that trio that I especially remember and there have been lots of repeat visits over the years.

## Where was your favourite birding trip?

Another hard choice as I've been lucky to travel quite a bit, but probably a Southern Ocean trip in 2011, especially visiting South Georgia, what an amazing place - stunning scenery, albatrosses, petrels, and acres of penguins!

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

Short answer - too much! Lots of family and community things especially now I have two little grandsons, but I do read a lot and listen to classical music for relaxation and try to keep the house and garden up together, thankfully a wildlife garden isn't supposed to be too tidy so I usually end up birding instead.

## Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

The Avalon Marshes as I live in the middle of them and enjoy cycling around the flat bits. I like to visit some of the quieter parts but they are usually quieter on the bird front too, but it's great to have such a great range of habitats and good birds to see in Somerset so I don't need to travel far.

## What are your five desert island birds, and why?

**Barn Swallow:** they always seem to have been around, nesting on the farm as a child and either on migration or wintering in various places I have lived overseas.

**Light-mantled Sooty Albatross:** my favourite of the species seen on South Georgia.

**Barn Owl:** I have often had rodent issues in places I have lived so an owl would be useful as well as beautiful.

**Lesser Whitethroat:** not the best songster in the warbler family but there is something delicate and appealing about them with their distinctive rattle song and when they pop up from deep within a hedge in spring.

**Roadrunner:** a good comedy bird and I got to see a real one in Arizona earlier this year.

## Choose a book and luxury item, and explain why.

My book choice would be *The Malay Archipelago* by Alfred Russell Wallace. I first read this when living in Sumatra 30 years ago. I knew nothing about Wallace then and was amazed by his travels and the extent of his collecting and understanding of evolution and adaptation. I'm glad he is now better recognised and of course it would give inspiration to go out and record all the wildlife on the desert island, but I wouldn't be using a gun!

Luxury item: is cheese a luxury or necessity? Definitely the former when you can't get it so I would like a supply of a strong Somerset Farmhouse Cheddar and some nice chutney to go with it.

# Walks and talks

Here is what's coming up in our area over the next three months. All SOS events are free to members and non-members alike, but there is a charge for some provided by other conservation organisations (RSPB, Natural England and Somerset Wildlife Trust).

We try to include either a grid reference or a postcode (for satnav users) for the meeting points, often both. Charges and booking details are given where known for non-SOS events, but please check with the organisers.



## December

15	Walk	RSPB	Cheddar Reservoir. 1000-1230. Meet at the car park on the Cheddar side of the reservoir (ST446535). We will be looking for wintering wildfowl on the reservoir. Contact Rosina Robinson (01749) 672749 or 07964 360696.
18	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
26	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.

January

1	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
4	Walk	SOS	Cary Moor. Focus: winter passerines and marshland birds. Leaders: Bruce Taylor and Eve Tigwell. Meet at 0930 at Carymoor Environmental Centre building (BA7 7NR, ST610306). Wellies advisable.
5	Walk	SWT	Mendip Hills. 1330-1530. Meet at Kings Wood National Trust car park off A38 between Cross and Sidcot (ST422561). Some strenuous walking and may be some steep climbing - not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.00.
7	Talk	SWT	Somerset Reptiles and Amphibians. 1930-2130. John Dickson will give an illustrated talk on the ecology, distribution and status of reptiles and amphibians in Somerset. St George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton TA1 3NR. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £3.
8	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
8	Walk	RSPB	Birdwatching for beginners. 1400-1700. RSPB Ham Wall. Come and learn how to identify the fantastic winter wildlife on the reserve. The wardens will take you through all the steps for wildlife identification as well as providing background information about the species seen. No previous experience required. Meet at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Followed by soup, homemade cookies and hot drinks at Meare Manor (included in price). £7.50 per person. Booking essential, contact Meare Manor 01458 860449.
12	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
12	Walk	RSPB	New Year wildlife walk. RSPB Ham Wall. 1400-1700. Come and see the fantastic birdlife that gathers on the reserve at this time of year. The walk is followed by delicious soup, homemade cookies and hot drinks at Meare Manor (included in price). £7 per person. Booking essential, contact Meare Manor 01458 860449.

15	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
16	Talk	RSPB	Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula - temples, humming birds and whale sharks. Well-known Devon birder and wildlife artist Mike Langman shows that there is a wealth of wildlife to discover away from the tourist areas of Cancun. Starts 1930. Millennium Hall, Seavington St Michael (TA10 0DW). Local RSPB Group Members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50 and under 18s free. Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net
18	Walk	RSPB	Chew Valley Lake. Meet at 10.30am on Herriot's Bridge (ST 570 581).
19	Walk	SWT	Gare Hill. 1000-1230. Leader Jim Rosser (07966 375143). A wander through conifer woods for wintering birds possibly including crossbills. Stout footwear required. Park in Gare Hill car park (ST799401): if icy meet at railways entrance end of Bunn's Lane (ST764422). No dogs. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.
21	Talk	SWT	Great White Egrets. 19:30 - 21:30. The successful breeding by Great White Egrets in 2012 represents a major success for nature conservation in Somerset. Kevin Anderson will tell us the story behind the project to protect these birds in Somerset. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar, BS27 3HU - off Upper North St beyond church. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.00.
22	Walk	RSPB	New Year wildlife walk. RSPB Ham Wall. 1400-1700. Come and see the fantastic birdlife that gathers on the reserve at this time of year. The walk is followed by delicious soup, homemade cookies and hot drinks at Meare Manor (included in price). £7 per person. Booking essential, contact Meare Manor 01458 860449.
24	Talk	SWT	Lundy. 1930-2100. Andrew Cleave MBE, photographer, author and committee member of Lundy Field Society will give an illustrated talk on Lundy. Meet at Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster, TA19 0DG (ST361147) Parking at roadside or West Street car park. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2, children free. Refreshments available.
25	Walk	RSPB	Big Wetland Duckwatch. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Whilst in the barn we will also be making bird feeders to take home and get ready for the weekend's RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
28	Talk	SWT	Urban Gulls: So what's all the fuss about? 1930-2100. Peter Rock, one of the UK's leading experts on urban gulls will give an illustrated talk about his work. Wells Museum (admission by side entrance) off Cathedral Green, Wells BA5 2UE. Doors open 19.00 for 19.30 start. Tea / coffee and biscuits served in the interval. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50 SWT members, £3.00 non-members.

## February

1	Walk	SWT	Westhay Moor. 1400-1600. Mick Ridgard will lead a walk round this interesting reserve for wintering birds including Goosander. Booking essential as numbers limited. Meet at Westhay Moor car park ST457437. No dogs. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.
2	Walk	SWT	Shapwick Heath. 1400-1600. Don Hurrell will lead a walk around the Natural England Shapwick Heath NNR to view winter birds. This walk will be suitable for inexperienced birdwatchers. Park at Ashcott Corner in the Natural England car park on the Ashcott to Meare road (ST449397). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.00.
2	Walk	RSPB	New Year wildlife walk. RSPB Ham Wall. 1430-1730. Come and see the fantastic birdlife that gathers on the reserve at this time of year. The walk is followed by delicious soup, homemade cookies and hot drinks at Meare Manor (included in price). £7 per person. Booking essential, contact Meare Manor 01458 860449.
9	Walk	RSPB	Birdwatching for beginners. 1430-1745. RSPB Ham Wall. Come and learn how to identify the fantastic winter wildlife on the reserve. The wardens will take you through all the steps for wildlife identification as well as providing background information about the species seen. No previous experience required. Meet at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Followed by soup, homemade cookies and hot drinks at Meare Manor (included in price). £7.50 per person. Booking essential, contact Meare Manor 01458 860449.
11	Talk	SWT	The Quantock Hills. 1930-2130. An AONB Ranger will discuss how the Quantock Hills are managed for people and wildlife. Meeting at St George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton TA1 3NR. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £3.
12	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
15	Walk	SOS	Stolford/Hinkley Point. Focus: winter waders, wildfowl, and raptors. Leaders: Brian Gibbs and Jeff Hazell. Meet at 0930 at Stolford car park (TA5 1TN, ST231460).
16	Walk	RSPB	Bird watching for everyone & National Nestbox Week. 1100-1500. RSPB Greylake - meet at reserve car park (ST399346, TA7 9BP). Pop in during the day and join us for some birdwatching. And for a small donation come and make a nestbox for your garden.
20	Talk	SWT	Exploring Ethiopia. 1930. Oliver Smart tells the story of the fascinating wildlife and history to be found in Ethiopia. Millennium Hall, Seavington St Michael (TA10 0DW). Local Group Members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free. Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net

23	Walk	SWT	West Sedgemoor and Greylake RSPB Reserves. Meet and park at 1030 at Dewlands Farm, at the bottom of Red Hill, near Curry Rivel (ST381264). A visit to the raised barn hide overlooking West Sedgemoor for, hopefully, good views of wildfowl and possibly birds of prey. May be muddy. In the afternoon we will make a short visit to Greylake reserve nearby. Free.
23	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic. West Sedgemoor. 1400-1600. A warden will take you to a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Binoculars and telescopes will be on hand. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18 free, pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.

On behalf of Somerset Ornithological Society - [www.somersetbirds.net](http://www.somersetbirds.net)

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