



# The Bittern

Issue 12  
Dec 2014

The newsletter of the Somerset Ornithological Society

## Somerset Atlas is published

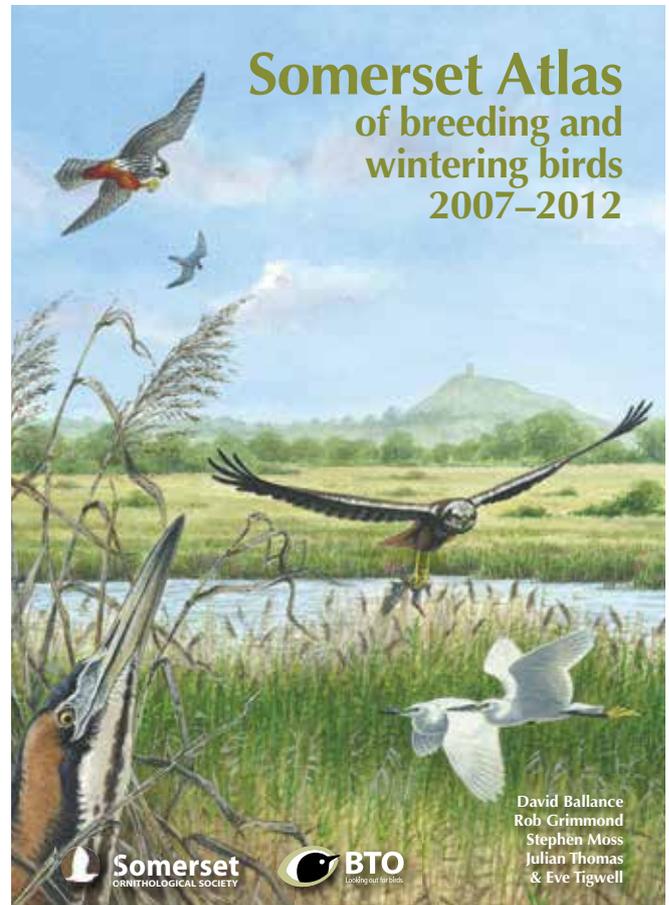
*The Somerset Atlas of breeding and wintering birds 2007-2012* has now been published. The culmination of five years of fieldwork, and a little over two years of writing, editing, and production, it joins the growing list of county atlases produced on the back of the national Bird Atlas 2007-11. We must give huge thanks to the BTO and the national Atlas team for making it possible, but this Atlas is all our very own, including a further pair of seasons of fieldwork after the national Atlas finished. This is the first Atlas for Somerset, and will prove to be an invaluable resource for all who have an interest in the county's birds for many years to come. And we owe an ever greater debt of gratitude to all of the observers, many of whom are SOS members, who contributed records, from those who sent in just a few records from their garden to those who submitted thousands of records (in one individual's case, over 20,000 records) from all over the county.

After introductory sections covering the county in detail, methodology, etc., the species accounts cover some 219

species, 195 of which are mapped for either the breeding season or winter, or both. There are some genuine surprises - many new Redstart sites were found on the Brendons, for instance - but even for those species where the Atlas mostly confirms what we already know, or thought we knew, it is of great benefit, as we now we have solid evidence to back up our presumptions. It chronicles many significant events of recent years, not just the successful breeding attempts by a number of heron species, but also the effects of particularly harsh winter weather during the Atlas period on the distributions of some species. Overall we have a much clearer picture than previously of the birdlife of the county, particularly in the many underwatched areas, and this will aid SOS and others in identifying priorities for surveys, conservation work, and responses to (e.g.) planning applications in the future.

Stephen Moss, wildlife writer and broadcaster and one of the authors of the Atlas, said: "This isn't just a very beautiful book, but a really important one too. We can now use the information here, gathered by so many hardworking birders spending hours in the field, to monitor the ups and downs of Somerset's birds during the next few years, and take action to make sure that any declines are reversed, and new species to the county are given every chance of success. We should all be very proud of Somerset's birdlife and the wonderful variety of habitats we have in the county, and do everything we can to encourage both residents and visitors to enjoy our birds."

*The Somerset Atlas of breeding and wintering birds 2007-2012* was launched at the Avalon Marshes Centre, Shapwick Heath, on 30 November (see page 5). It is available now and until the end of December at the introductory offer price of £25 + £4.95 p&p. After that the price will be £35 + p&p. For details of how to order a copy, please see page 6.



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## Welcome

Hello again! No doubt about the big news this issue - as our cover story proudly announces, the Somerset Atlas is here! Having been heavily involved in this project from its inception, I have seen at first hand the huge amount of effort put in by the small team to turn the contributions of so many of you in the field into the final book. I am very pleased and also massively relieved that it has finally made it into print, and that the result looks so good. Now we just need you to buy it!

While the Atlas dominates this issue (including a report of the launch event held on 30 November on page 5), there is plenty more going on too, as the News pages attest. Also, as well as the usual features, there is an account of what will have been bird of the autumn for many, and a report on the AGM, sadly poorly attended again this year. We would welcome ideas as to how to make it more attractive to members - this year's quiz was enjoyed by

those who were there. The latest castaway on our notional desert island is Andy Slade, one of a famous Somerset birdwatching family and an indefatigable recorder of common and rare birds alike. And there is a little bit of the story behind the famous Tower Hide at Steart, which I hope will interest both newer members and old hands.

I hope everyone enjoys a happy and healthy mid-winter festival of their choice, and see you in the New Year!

## New report section author required

Jeff Hazell is relinquishing his duties as author of a section of the annual Somerset Birds after many years' sterling service, so we are looking for a replacement. If you are interested, contact Brian Gibbs (phone 01823 274887 or email [brian.gibbs@somersetbirds.net](mailto:brian.gibbs@somersetbirds.net)) for details.



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# News

## New hide for Catcott Great Fen

On 23 September, Somerset Wildlife Trust officially opened the new Tower Hide at their Catcott reserve. Members will no doubt know Catcott Lows - the other, and newer, portion of this reserve is Catcott Great Fen (see issue 4 of *The Bittern* for details). The four-metre-high Tower Hide, which offers 360-degree views across the 30-acre Catcott Great Fen restoration, was opened by one of SWT's founder members Bernard Storer, and Trust President (and SOS Committee member) Stephen Moss (see photo, right).



SWT Head of Nature Reserves Tim Youngs said: “The new Tower Hide gives fantastic views across some stunning open water and reed bed that the Trust has restored from industrial sites. The project has created important habitat for wetland wildlife and now it can be enjoyed by people too. It is part of the largest visitor project we have ever undertaken and we are delighted it can now be enjoyed by local people and visitors.”

Access to Catcott Heath & Great Fen is on foot from ST399405, about a mile north of Catcott village. Walk to your right at the main Catcott nature reserve sign, along the drove which runs east-south-east, for about 800 metres to the reserve entrance in a wooded area on the right. More info can be found at [somersetwildlife.org/catcott](http://somersetwildlife.org/catcott)

SWT is encouraging visitors to join their reserves team in recording their sightings of migrating and resident birds via Twitter using [#rediscover\\_somerset](https://twitter.com/rediscover_somerset) or on the wildlife ‘arrivals and departures board’ on the website [somersetwildlife.org/rediscover](http://somersetwildlife.org/rediscover). Please do, but also continue to send your records in to SOS!

## Great Crane Project update

According to the latest (October) issue of the project newsletter, *The Somerset Crane Chronicle*, the last planned release of young Cranes took place on the Somerset Levels in August: 17 birds this time, making it 94 birds released in total over the last five years. Of these 78 are still around, and the project are pleased with the survival rate of 83%, which they describe (not without justification) as ‘impressive’.

The project is running ‘Crane Safaris’ again this winter. Cost is £15 per person, and apparently they are fully booked until Christmas, but dates in January and February are still available. Details are available from [www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk](http://www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk) or phone the Willow and Wetlands Centre on 07434 363427 to book (essential).

## We’re no. 1 for Bitterns!

It’s official - Somerset is now the county in Britain with the most breeding Bitterns! (And that’s not counting Little Bitterns, of course.) The summary of the results of the Bittern Monitoring Programme for the 2014 breeding season, published jointly by Natural England and the RSPB, makes for interesting reading on a number of counts, not least the 70 confirmed or probable nests nationally, the highest total in 20 years of monitoring. Of these, Somerset contributed at least 20, mostly in the Avalon Marshes, but also now at other sites too, and 45 booming males out of a national total of 140.

The exponential increase in the Somerset population has finally seen our county overtake Suffolk as the best county for breeding Bitterns, though it has to be said that another contributory factor has been the inundation by saltwater of some Suffolk coastal reedbeds (though thankfully not Minsmere) in December 2013. But the risk of that happening has always been what makes the Norfolk and Suffolk populations so vulnerable, and is a major reason why the colonisation of Somerset over the last seven years has been greeted so warmly elsewhere too.

## Study reveals startling decline in European birds

As you might have already seen in the national press, a study by the Environmental Sustainability Institute of the University of Exeter, the RSPB, and the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, published in early November, has shown drastic declines in bird populations across Europe. While this might not be unexpected, given what we already know about the declining fortunes of farmland birds in particular in Britain, some of the numbers quoted by this latest report are startling.

The study, published in the journal *Ecology Letters*, reveals a decrease of 421 million individual birds over 30 years. Around 90% of these losses were from the 36 most common and widespread species, including House Sparrows, Skylarks, Grey Partridges, and Starlings, highlighting the need for greater efforts to halt the continent-wide declines of our most familiar countryside birds. Not all common species are declining, however: garden birds such as Great Tits, Blue Tits, Robins, and Blackbirds were all shown to be increasing. Populations of rarer species, including Marsh Harriers, Ravens, Buzzards, and Stone Curlews have also shown increases in recent years, most likely as a direct result of conservation action and greater legal protection.

The study brought together data on 144 species of European bird from many thousands of individual surveys in 25 different countries, highlighting the value of the different national monitoring schemes increasingly working together. The researchers suggest that greater conservation funding and effort should be directed to wider scale environmental improvement programmes. These could include urban green space projects, and effective agri-environment schemes, which, informed by lessons learned from past schemes, should aim to deliver real outcomes for declining bird species whether they are rare or common.

Richard Inger from the Environment and Sustainability Institute at the University of Exeter's Penryn campus in Cornwall said: "It is very worrying that the most common species of bird are declining rapidly because it is this group of birds that people benefit from the most."

"It is becoming increasingly clear that interaction with the natural world and wildlife is central to human wellbeing and significant loss of common birds could be quite detrimental to human society."



## Mires restoration boosts Dartmoor Dunlins

Interim results for the 2014 breeding season published by the Dartmoor Mires Project (on the Dartmoor National Park website, see <http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/lookingafter/laf-naturalenv/dartmoormiresproject>) show that the number of breeding Dunlins on Dartmoor has increased by six pairs from 16 to 22 since 2010. A small increase, for sure, but an increase nonetheless, and all the new pairs, it seems, have been on and around restored mires. It gives hope, therefore, that the similar project on Exmoor (see *The Bittern*, issue 2) might encourage the species to breed there once more, a century after the only confirmed breeding record.

If you do see a Dunlin exhibiting breeding behaviour on Exmoor next summer (an adult quietly 'standing sentinel' is a good indicator), then please contact County Recorder Brian Gibbs in the first instance.

# Somerset Atlas launch

The *Somerset Atlas of breeding and wintering birds 2007-2012* was launched at the Avalon Marshes Centre, Shapwick Heath on 30 November. The launch event, which started at 2pm in the Gallery space, was attended by more than 50 people, including all five authors of the book.

Roger Dickey, President of SOS, opened proceedings by thanking all of those involved in getting us to this point, beginning with the army of observers who contributed records, without whom there would be no Atlas, and the 'collectors' who coordinated observer efforts in their allotted areas, spotting gaps in coverage and filling them. He then went on to thank Mike Langman, the celebrated Devon bird artist who produced all the line drawings used in the book as well as the cover artwork, Tim Davis of DJ Environmental who typeset it, and Chris Dee of Garganey Consulting, who created the interpretative maps in the introductory sections, all of whom were in attendance. And finally the Atlas team within SOS, all of whom had put in a huge amount of effort in validating data, producing the maps, and writing and editing the text - not just the authors whose names appeared on the book, but the others who helped with the text or collating extra data (particularly Dave Chown, but also Dick Best, Brian Gibbs, and Geoff Suter) or raising sponsorship (notably Alison Everett), and, last but not least, Roger Butcher, who was also an invaluable member of the Atlas Committee during the fieldwork phase.



Roger then handed over to Stephen Moss, SOS and Atlas Committee member, but rather more famous as a wildlife author, broadcaster, and TV producer. In his speech, kept deliberately short as he thought we should all be outside on such a glorious day, he emphasised the Somerset Atlas's usefulness, not just as a snapshot of the current situation with birds in Somerset, and of the gains and losses during the five years it covers, but also as a resource to be used as a baseline against which to measure changes in bird populations in the county in the future. Not least when we plan its successor when the national Atlas next comes around in perhaps no more than a dozen years' time.

Eve Tigwell, BTO representative and Atlas author, said: "It is wonderful to see how a joint effort between a local society (SOS) and national organisation (BTO) can result in such an excellent book. We all worked together very hard to ensure that the first ever Somerset Atlas would come to fruition and the result is impressive - my thanks to my fellow authors, collectors, and, of course, to everyone who got out there, found the birds, and submitted their data."

The very positive reaction to the book was hugely pleasing, and after the speeches, the authors were kept surprisingly busy signing newly purchased copies. A totally unexpected bonus, though, was that Mike Langman offered his time and considerable talent to draw pencil vignettes of the bird of the owner's choice on the flyleaf.

Many thanks to Al and Val Knowles of Somerset Crafts for making the pleasant surroundings of the Gallery available, and also to Amy Lawson of EcoFriendly Bites for providing the refreshments. Afterwards, many attendees drove round to Ashcott Corner to enjoy the spectacular sight of the Starling roost at Ham Wall against a rather gorgeous sunset.

# Annual General Meeting report

## Rob Grimmond

The Society's 2014 AGM took place at Ruishton Village Hall on 3rd April. Fifteen people attended the meeting, nine of whom were Committee members.

In his President's Report, Roger Dickey thanked Brian Hill for his work as President. It had been a difficult year for the County, with drought followed by floods, which had a big impact on people and wildlife. Erosion of habitat was a big issue. There was now a good flood action plan in place that would help protect the future of birds and wildlife. The new Steart reserve would be a great boon to the County.

Roger wished to emphasise the need to grow membership yet look after existing members (the good quality speakers provided would hopefully bring people in), the success of field meetings and the forthcoming Somerset Atlas, which would hopefully kick start surveys within the County.

He thanked the three Committees - General, Rarities, and Atlas - for their work and praised the quality of the Somerset Bird Report.

The Treasurer Jeff Hazell read through the financial statement. Jeff said the Society's finances were in a healthy situation but that allowances needed to be made for the Atlas. No sponsorship had been received in the previous year. He also said that postage costs would go up.

Jeff also gave an update on membership. The membership subscription had been increased by £2. Despite news of the increase being circulated to all members, 172 had ignored it and paid at the old rate. A reminder about the subscription rate would be circulated with the next general posting. Jeff said that membership had fallen from a high of 478 in 2013 to 456 in 2014: 19 members had not renewed, 12 had resigned, and 4 had died. Roger Dickey commended Jeff for his work.

In Stephen Moss's absence, Roger Dickey said he was delighted with the Indoor Meetings, which had been first class, with an average attendance of 30-40.

In 2013, nine successful Field Meetings had taken place, most of them having two leaders. Perhaps some of the success was due to the use of popular venues.

Roger Dickey's formal election as President and Brian Hill's as Vice-President were endorsed by the meeting. All other Officers and Committee members (including Rarity Committee members) were re-elected.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm and, after an interval, was followed by a general knowledge quiz run by Brian Hill, which was enjoyed by all participants.

## Somerset Atlas order form

To order the Atlas, please complete this form:

Name: .....

Address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

Email: .....

Tel /Mob: .....

I enclose a cheque for £\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_ copy/copies of the Somerset Bird Atlas.

Cheques should be made payable to 'Somerset Ornithological Society' and sent to:

Somerset Atlas Offer, Motcombe House, Combe Wood Lane, Combe St Nicholas, Chard, Somerset TA20 3NH

# The Pallid Harrier at Steart Marshes

Rog Musgrove on an unexpected visitor to the new reserve

At dusk on 20 October, Dick Best saw a ringtail harrier over WWT Steart Marshes, but distance and limited light militated against identifying it to species. The next day was very windy, so all eyes were trained out to sea, and on 22 October the winds were still blowing well, hence me sitting in my car sea-watching at Stolford when I received a call from Tim McGrath, warden of Steart Marshes. Tim had seen what was presumably the same bird quartering over the marshes from the Mendip Hide; it was still distant, however, and its identity was still unclear, but it was orange! I arrived an hour later but it was another two hours before I saw the bird, albeit distantly. A call to Dick and he was soon on the scene - another distant view was had, the underparts looked unstreaked, but frustratingly we couldn't see a neck boa. The only niggling thing was it didn't look long-winged (in hindsight probably due to the strong winds), so thoughts turned towards a juvenile of the American race of Hen Harrier, colloquially known as 'Northern Harrier'. I rang Julian, knowing that he'd seen one at Tacumshin in Ireland a few years ago, to discuss ID features, and we both decided to release the news, though without a confirmed identification, mainly to alert people to the presence of an unusual bird.



It was now mid-afternoon and it looked like the bird was going to escape identification, but eventually after five frustrating hours it did the decent thing and did a close fly-by allowing the five of us on the bank by Steart Gate to clinch its identity as a juvenile Pallid Harrier. The all-important neck boa gleamed in the late afternoon sun as it sauntered past over onto Wall Common and over the coastal reed bed heading towards Steart village. The news was broadcast immediately but it was only seen again that day by Julian just before dusk.

Although it could sometimes be elusive, even going missing for whole days on occasion, the Pallid Harrier lingered in the area for another two weeks, last being seen on 7 November, and giving a variety of views to appreciative audiences, including many visiting birders. Tim and Alys were especially pleased, I suspect, as, coming as it did only a few weeks after the breach was made in the Parrett bank, it was an early and ideal opportunity to showcase the new reserve. Usually the best views of the harrier were to be had from the path round the marshes near the secondary car park at Steart Gate, but occasionally it wowed visitors to the Mendip Hide with close fly-pasts. It ranged widely during its stay, and was seen several times over the Fenning out at Steart Point, across the Parrett from the Brue Estuary down to Pawlett Hams, and even as far west as Stockland Marsh and Catsford Common. One or two enterprising local birders even managed to get it on their patch lists by scoping it from the end of Burnham seafront!

This is the second county record of Pallid Harrier, and follows fairly hot on the heels of the first, at Black Down on Mendip on 28 September-16 October 2011. Unlike in that case, however, this year there was no significant influx nationally, so it was perhaps more of a surprise, though no less welcome. And particularly so for those who missed the Black Down bird (which was similarly wide-ranging and elusive), and could not have expected another opportunity to see this great raptor in Somerset quite so quickly.

# The Tower Hide at Steart

Julian Thomas looks back at the history of this striking hide

With so many exciting developments happening on Somerset reserves, we have seen a plethora of new hides in recent years, most notably at WWT Steart Marshes (and see the News pages for another one, at Catcott Great Fen), and all are very welcome additions to facilities for visitors. But spare a thought for the older hides still around further out at Steart Point, not least the extraordinary Tower Hide, which saw its 17th anniversary this year.

Longer-standing members may remember its predecessor, of the same vintage as the other original hides which are still there, still in use, and frankly showing their age now, in design as much as anything else. The original tower was a rickety thing by the mid 1990s, narrow and very cramped at the top, even for one person, and the whole experience was quite alarming in anything above a strong breeze. So, in 1996 came change and architects Wilf Burton and Tony Eastman were commissioned to create a new Tower Hide, as a centrepiece for the reserve but also to mark the end of the newly created Parrett Trail. And they created what might be considered a mini masterpiece: much larger than the hide it replaced, telescope-friendly, and much sturdier in a strong wind, though the quirky design has divided opinion ever since its opening in 1997.



Rog Musgrove recently sent me the photos above, taken by an unknown hand, which show not only the newly finished hide, but also, either side, two views of it in the late stages of construction. You can see a workman fixing the famous/infamous ‘alien antenna’ lightning conductor to the roof. The other distinctly odd styling point is the ‘dinosaur egg’ in the middle of the viewing area; quite what was going through the architects’ minds there I’m not sure, but it has proved to be a handy extra perch for a latecomer on the rare occasions when the hide is full. It’s looking rather more weathered now than in these photos, but, having travelled the length and breadth of the country and visited many reserves, I have never come across another hide quite like it.

As a postscript, though, the builders of the new hide, perhaps imbued with the spirit of its oddball design, decided to mark the passing of the old tower by building a Phoenix out of some of its timbers, which they then ceremonially burned (see photos, right). A fitting tribute to its years of service - may the current hide continue to be of service to birders for many years to come.



# 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 another of the county's most committed patch watchers and regular finder of rare and scarce birds, **Andy Slade**.



Wendy Slade

Andy with daughter Freya

## How and when did you get into birdwatching?

Birdwatching has always been in my life. Playing on Berrow golf course with my brother, while my father watched breeding Hoopoes, standing in Cheddar quarry and seeing a Wallcreeper or having the morning off school for a trip to Chew to see the Greater Sand Plover are all events which helped cement this hobby into my life.

## What is your favourite birding memory?

There are too many daylight memories, so the one that stands out for me involved a few pints at the Pulpit Inn on Portland. Professor Morgan and I were sitting inside one October evening hearing the constant calls of Redwings. There were thousands of birds including Redwings, Song Thrushes, Blackbirds, Fieldfares, Robins and lots of UFOs passing through the lighthouse beams and even circling the observatory moth traps. Surprisingly at dawn the next morning there was no sign of the movement from the previous night, with hardly a bird to be seen.

## Where was your favourite birding trip?

In 2006 Wendy and I, with James and Emma Packer, spent two weeks in Costa Rica. The birds were fantastic, but also the countryside, and the erupting Arenal Volcano. So many mammals and invertebrates to admire with great company along the exciting roads and bridges, some of which I had to close my eyes to cross in our hire car (even when I was driving).

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

I love watching football (Bristol City) and cricket (Somerset CCC) normally accompanied by a soundtrack of my diverse collection of music, small children, and wife. In the warmer months I spend a peaceful hour sorting out the moth trap in our garden, while savouring a freshly brewed coffee.

## Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

The coast at Burnham-on-Sea and Berrow is where I spend many hours birding. The coast here has so much potential and so little coverage. I love the feeling that there might be something interesting to be found. Having said that I have a real soft spot for Portland Bill, which holds nostalgic memories of happy birding and provides anticipation of the interesting birds that can turn up.

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

1. **Bearded Tit:** A Berrow bird with a quality plumage.
2. **Common Swift:** The best of the season clocks, with amazing aerial ability.
3. **Ruby-throated Hummingbird:** Hummingbirds are literally incredible in so many ways.
4. **Dunlin:** I love wading birds, so I have to include the Dunlin. They are quite stunning in summer and the sight of a swirling winter flock is hard to beat.
5. **Skylark:** The countryside in a bird with a Chemical Brothers (band) soundtrack.

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

My book would be *How to teach quantum physics to your dog* by Chad Orzel. I am fascinated by science and the peace and quiet of the island may give me a chance of getting the hang of Quantum Theory.

My luxury item would have to be a hammock, hoping there are some trees to tie it to.

# Walks and talks

Here are details of all SOS walks and talks and a selection of events organised by the RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust in the first three months of 2015. Most events mentioned here are specifically related to birds, but a few are of more general wildlife interest.

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.



Brian Hill

January			
4	Walk	SWT	<b>A Winter Walk in the Mendip Hills.</b> 1330-1530. An opportunity to step into 2015 and blow away the excesses of Christmas. There may be some steep climbing but the views should be worth it! Park in National Trust car park off A38 between Cross and Sidcot (ST422561). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.00.
10	Walk	SOS	<b>Cary Moor.</b> Leaders: Bruce Taylor and Roger Dickey. Meet at 0930, access via Dimmer Landfill Site, ST617310. Focus: wetland birds, winter passerines. See how this private reserve is developing and hear about ongoing bird monitoring activities.
11	Walk	SWT	<b>Woods for wildlife in winter.</b> 1000-1230. Leader Eve Tigwell. Roddenbury Hill Fort has been a major landmark on the Selwood Ridge for thousands of years: its history and the wildlife that frequents the surrounding landscapes of woodland and farmland provide a fascinating walk, especially in winter. Meet at East Woodlands Church car park (ST790442). NO DOGS. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.
13	Talk	SWT	<b>Flooding on the Levels.</b> 1930-2130. Catherine Mowat will examine the impact of severe and prolonged flooding and what strategies might be employed to reduce negative impacts. St George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton, TA1 3NR. Plenty of parking at the school. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £3.00.
15	Talk	SOS	<b>Exploring Ethiopia.</b> Starts 1930. Oliver Smart gives an illustrated talk about the birds and other wildlife of this fascinating country. Ruishton Village Hall, Ruishton, nr Taunton, TA3 5JE (ST268270).
15	Talk	RSPB	<b>Wildlife on Somerset's Coast.</b> Starts 1930. An illustrated talk presented by Nigel Phillips, chairman of the Somerset Wildlife Trust's Marine Awareness Campaign, which will cover the birds, plants and 'between the tides' marine wildlife. Millennium Hall, Seavington, TA19 0QH. Price: Local Group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50 and under 18s free. Contact: 01460 240740 or email denise.chamings@talktalk.net
17	Walk	SWT	<b>Field Trip to West Sedgemoor and Greylake RSPB reserves.</b> A visit, led by a warden to the raised barn hide overlooking the reserve for, hopefully, good views of wildfowl and possibly birds of prey, followed by a short visit to Greylake reserve nearby. Walking in the morning may be muddy but there are good boardwalks in the afternoon. Meet at 1030 at Dewlands Farm at the bottom of Red Hill near Curry Rivel (ST381264). Free.
20	Talk	SWT	<b>Longwood.</b> 1930-2130. Chris Billingham has been the reserve manager of Longwood for more than 30 years. She will talk about the wildlife in the wood and issues of conservation management. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar, BS27 3HU, off Upper North St beyond church. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50.
24	Walk	SOS	<b>Big wetland duck watch.</b> 1000-1200. A winter walk and thousands of ducks at West Sedgemoor. Binoculars and telescopes available. Be sure to wear warm clothing and stout footwear (walking boots or wellingtons). Booking essential. Directions will be provided when booking. Price: £5 per person, payable on the day.

February

7	Walk	SOS	<b>Wall Common/WWT Steart Marshes.</b> Leaders: Brian Hill and Brian Gibbs. Meet at 0930 at Steart Marshes car park (ST255445). Focus: wildfowl, waders, and passerine migrants.
8	Walk	SWT	<b>Wintering Wildlife at Westhay Moor.</b> 1400-1600. Leader: Mick Ridgard. A walk around SWT's Westhay Moor reserve and its surroundings for wintering wildlife especially wildfowl including Goosanders. Meet at Westhay Moor car park (ST457437). NO DOGS. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.
17	Talk	SWT	<b>Garden Birds and Citizen Science.</b> 1930-2130. Roger Lucken is an experienced birder who is involved in important national and international projects. He will explain how local people play a key role in BTO recording projects. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar, BS27 3HU. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50.
19	Talk	RSPB	<b>A Journey to the Pantanal and the Iguassu Falls in Southern Brazil.</b> 1930. An illustrated talk presented by Lynn and Steve Osborne. Join them on a journey around Southern Brazil in search of jaguars, Hyacinth Macaws and much more. Millennium Hall, Seavington, TA19 0QH. RSPB Crewkerne group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50 and under 18s free. Contact: 01460 240740 or email denise.chamings@talktalk.net
19	Talk	SWT	<b>Great White Egrets come to Somerset.</b> 1930-2100. Great White Egrets represent a major success for nature conservation in Somerset. Kevin Anderson will tell us how these birds came to nest here in 2012, how they have been doing since, and the story behind their protection. United Reform Church Hall, West St, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PS. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00.
22	Walk	RSPB	<b>Chew Valley Lake.</b> A good venue for winter wildfowl, including occasional smew. This is often a very muddy site so please come prepared. Meet at 10.30am at Herriot's Bridge (ST570581). There will be a charge for a day permit to the hides around the lake.
24	Walk	SWT	<b>Steart National Nature Reserve.</b> 0915-1115. Leader: Dick Best. Viewing the newly created salt marsh at Steart at high tide, followed by a visit to Wall Common to watch winter waders as the tide falls. Park at the Natural England car park on the road to Steart Point (ST254444). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.00.
25	Walk	SWT	<b>Steart Marshes.</b> 1030-1230. Alys Laver, WWT Senior Conservation Warden, will lead a walk around the new salt marshes and fresh water wetlands. Meet at main WWT car park (ST255445), signposted from the Hinkley Point road. Wear warm clothing and sensible shoes. The ground may be uneven and muddy. Bring binoculars. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Booking is essential - contact Simon Briggs on 01823 270529. £2.00.
26	Talk	SOS	<b>Fledgling Thoughts.</b> Starts 1930. Young writer and TV researcher Ben Macdonald on his experiences in breaking into the wildlife media. Ruishton Village Hall, Ruishton, nr Taunton, TA3 5JE (ST268270).
27	Talk	SWT	<b>Introduced Species: Increased Biodiversity or Conservation Nightmare?</b> 1930-2100. Dr Colin Ryall is a recently retired university lecturer in ecology and environment whose publications and research interests include invasive species. This illustrated talk will discuss the issues involved as a result of man's introduction of non-native species to locations outside their native range, their threats to biodiversity and economic impacts. Global context will be reviewed before focussing on the situation in UK and Europe and future prospects. Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster, TA19 0DG. Parking at roadside or town car parks. Everyone welcome. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2, non-members £3, children free.

## March

7	Walk	SWT	<b>Hinton Blewett and Litton.</b> 0930. Leader: Vic Matthews. A walk of a little over 5 miles providing good views across the Chew Valley and taking in Coley, Sherborne, Litton reservoirs, and Litton village. It can be muddy in places so please wear suitable footwear. Please park considerately in the centre of Hinton Blewett near to the village green (ST595569). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.00.
10	Talk	SWT	<b>Lost Islands of Somerset.</b> 1930. Richard Brunning, Level and Moors Archaeologist of SCC will explore a unique wetland heritage and how Somerset's coastline has changed since the end of the ice age. St George's Catholic School, The Mount, Taunton, TA1 3NR. Plenty of parking. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £3.00.
17	Talk	SWT	<b>Dragonflies. 1930-2100.</b> Dragonflies predate the Dinosaurs and have been in their present form for nearly 300 million years. This talk will cover dragonfly behaviour and ecology, especially feeding, territoriality, and their complex reproduction biology. United Reform Church Hall, West St, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PS. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00.
19	Talk	SOS	<b>Birds of Eastern North America. Starts 1930.</b> Steve Rogers gives an illustrated talk on the birdlife just across 'the pond', with a slant on migration. Ruishton Village Hall, Ruishton, nr Taunton, TA3 5JE (ST268270).
24	Talk	SWT	<b>Stuart Marshes. 1930-2100.</b> Alys Laver, Senior Conservation Warden at Stuart Marshes will give an illustrated talk describing how Somerset Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Environment Agency are creating one of the UK's largest new wetland reserves. 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. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00.
26	Talk	SWT	<b>Buzzards: a long-term study.</b> 1930-2100. Robin Prytherch has been studying Buzzards in North Somerset for over 30 years. He will talk about the changes in territory holders, their behaviour, and social interaction with other individuals and bird species. St Catherine's Church Hall, Park Road, Frome, BA11 1EU (ST774478). Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.
27	Talk	SWT	<b>Conserving Somerset's Barn Owls.</b> 1930-2100. Chris Sperring MBE of the Hawk & Owl Trust will give a lively presentation bringing us up-to-date on the project to support this nationally important population of one of Britain's favourite birds and its habitat. Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster, TA19 0DG. Parking at roadside or town car parks. Everyone welcome. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.00, non-members £3.00, children free.

