



Where have all the migrants gone?

Julian Thomas reports

Every year birdwatchers around the country wait eagerly for the return of our summer migrants. But fairly quickly this spring people realised that something was wrong - numbers of some migrants at coastal hotspots were below average, and some species were behind schedule compared to the earlier and earlier arrivals of recent years. Now we are in mid-summer, and it is clear that while some birds were merely late, numbers of several much-loved and iconic summer species are much lower than usual. The full picture may not emerge until all reports are in after the breeding season, but from what we know now there is clearly some cause for concern.

For Somerset, the most comprehensive appraisal I have seen so far is from SOS Vice-President Brian Hill, based in Creech St Michael, so I will let him take up the story:

'Locally, Swallows and Sand Martins didn't arrive until mid-April and both have been in reduced numbers since. House Martins arrived very late locally and my main breeding site was down by almost half when checked in early June. All my local contacts report Swallows as either absent from their barns and sheds or in low numbers this year. Swifts too arrived late, but don't seem significantly down here. Reed Warblers were still arriving on the Canal and the Tone as late as the first week of June. If anything, aided by new stands of reeds, numbers are up. On the other hand both Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler are disastrously down; I've only found 2 pairs of the former (usually 5+) and none of the latter (usually 2-3). Nightingales also arrived late, and are slightly down on last year, but there is a wide spread of single birds singing in the vicinity. On the Quantocks, Wood Warblers had a welcome good spring, with numbers well up on 2017, as did Pied Flycatchers.'

My own experience chimes very largely with Brian's, and perhaps other members' will too, but these are subjective impressions. Does available data support them? We have two available sources: locally, the ringing data published by Portland Bird Observatory (PBO) on their website (www.portlandbirdobs.com) on 16 June; and nationally, reporting rates on Birdtrack (<https://app.bto.org/birdtrack/main/data-home.jsp>). As might be expected, there is some variation depending on the species. PBO also found that Sedge Warblers (right, in a stunning pic by Gary Thoburn) and Whitethroats were well down, but also Willow Warblers and Reed Warblers. Birdtrack reporting graphs show the spring peak for Sedge Warbler as only about 75% of normal, and for Willow Warbler about 80%, but close to normal for the other two species. Garden Warblers, on



the other hand, were slightly up according to the PBO ringing data (which matches impressions from Somerset, where Garden Warblers arrived early and in good numbers at Shapwick Heath), and about normal according to Birdtrack.

So what has caused this? Weather patterns seem to have played a major part. While the 'Beast from the East' was too early in the spring to have had much effect, there were other weather events which may have had a significant effect - strong northerly and north-easterly winds across the Sahara, for instance, and repeated bouts of strong headwinds and rain in southern Europe. Again, over to Brian: 'My theory is that bad weather in Iberia, consistently subject to low pressure systems in March and April during the critical time for northbound migrants, killed many of our summer visitors. It is worth noting that Lesser Whitethroats, birds that arrive here from the south-east via the Levant, arrived on time and in usual number.' (The spring peak on Birdtrack in fact suggests that Lesser Whitethroats arrived earlier and in slightly higher numbers than normal, though PBO had a poor spring for the species.) There may be other factors in play, of course: the spring peak for Wood Warblers on Birdtrack was also near normal, with no indication of the increase the Quantock counts suggest, but Devon birders tell me they seem to be almost completely absent from Dartmoor this year, so our extra ones possibly indicate a local range shift.

While it is to be hoped that Brian is being too pessimistic about mortality, he may be uncomfortably close to the truth. Tracking of Montagu's Harriers satellite-tagged in Britain has shown that some birds were still on the southern edge of the Sahara weeks after they should have arrived back in Europe. One at least even started on the perilous crossing only to turn back. Another was found dead in Algeria after local birders were alerted to a tag still transmitting but not moving for several days. We shall probably never know just how many other smaller birds, driven by the urge to migrate, attempted that crossing only to perish on the way.



As weather conditions eased, some later migrants, such as Nightjars, do not seem to have been affected, though the same cannot be said for Spotted Flycatchers (left, in another great Gary Thoburn pic). Brian notes: 'I usually manage to locate somewhere in the region of 5-10 pairs in a five-mile radius. This year I have only found one pair each in West Monkton and Kingston, and none at the regular sites in Creech and Cheddon.' Others seem to have found them similarly scarce elsewhere in the county, and the spring peak on the Birdtrack reporting graph is barely two-thirds of the average, suggesting a disastrous year. In intriguingly stark contrast, however, PBO reported a good spring for this species (99 ringed compared to a mean of 51 this decade).

It is not just the commoner migrants which have suffered: it is also notable that there have been no confirmed records of Little Bittern from the Avalon Marshes, for the first time in 10 years. Nor, as far as I am aware, have any Savi's Warblers been heard either.

The overall picture, sometimes confusing and contradictory as it is, is generally less than encouraging, and really quite worrying for some species. Set alongside that, the good news seems to be that, with a warm and wet spring producing lush growth and plenty of insects, and with competition for food being reduced because of the paucity of migrants, resident species such as tits generally appear to have done very well. Scant consolation, perhaps, but we must take the positives where we can and hope that this is merely a single-season effect due to exceptional weather. However, if Brian is right (and he is by no means alone in taking this view), even if we do not see similar weather events in the forthcoming years, the exceptional mortality of adult birds this spring may have lingering effects for a number of years to come. To counter that, some species can make up at least a proportion of such losses fairly quickly if conditions are right. Fingers crossed.

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Welcome

Hello again!

It's been a while since the last issue of *The Bittern*, and a lot has happened in the intervening months. There have been plenty of developments in the saga of the Taunton Peregrines (a project which SOS is proud to support) - see p. 4 for details. While this is a very welcome success story, a much more worrying issue is the drastic reduction in numbers of some of our commoner summer migrants - our cover story attempts to address this and the reasons for it, though the true picture and its lasting effects are still far from clear.

Other developments in the wider world of the environment are also concerning. Scottish Natural Heritage's granting of a licence to cull Ravens as an 'experiment', though the lack of any clear scientific protocol or measure of success or failure means it hardly deserves the name, has met with widespread outrage, and a crowd-funded legal challenge is to be launched shortly. Unfortunately, the Government has seen fit to follow this announcement with one of its own which will mean trial culls of Ravens in five English counties, including two of our neighbours - Wiltshire and Dorset. In recent issues of *The Bittern* I have given a cautious welcome to announcements made since Michael Gove took over as Environment Secretary, but if he continues with such policies, can he realistically continue to claim that this is 'the greenest Government ever'? The specific exclusion of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives from the blanket promise to incorporate EU law into UK law upon Brexit, with still no clear idea of what new UK legislation will be introduced to replace them, also does nothing to allay the fears of many conservationists.

While the future for our birds may be uncertain, back in the present Eve Tigwell has a much more positive tale to tell about another nature reserve in Somerset which has grown from small beginnings in recent years (pp. 5-7). Also in this issue, our desert island castaway is a newcomer to the county, Dan Watson, who has already applied himself to the task of keeping a close eye on Cheddar Reservoir. A warm welcome to him, and to any and all other new members - I hope you enjoy exploring the avian delights of Somerset.

In the meantime, the sun is shining and the dog days of summer are here, along with the joys of watching and recording our breeding birds (and no doubt a few summer holidays coming up too). Soon (and without wishing the summer away) the waders and seabirds will be moving south again, and autumn is just around the corner. Enjoy your birding, wherever it may be.



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News

SOS offers free membership to under-21s

At the last committee meeting the perennial subject came up - how to attract new members, particularly from among younger birdwatchers. We already have family membership, of course, but for young adults between 16 and 21 (whether in work or full-time education) money can be tight and other calls on it more necessary or attractive than spending it on joining SOS. We decided, therefore, to offer free subscriptions to birdwatchers under 21 years of age - all you need to do is to complete the application form as per usual and provide some form of proof of age. Full details are on our website somersebirding.org.uk.

Taunton Peregrine project update

As members who have been following this project through the regular updates on Facebook and Twitter will know, it's been eventful, indeed sometimes almost worthy of a soap opera. The open day in March launching the live camera feed in St Mary Magdalene Church (see last issue) was very successful, and several SOS members assisted in showing members of the public the pair of Peregrines on the church. After that it was an anxious wait to see if the birds would make a breeding attempt. A mixture of joy and concern when they did, as for reasons best known to herself, and despite attempts by the tiercel to entice her to the purpose-built nestbox, the falcon chose to lay her first egg on the 'cache ledge' among the remains of various pigeons and other prey. Disaster struck after only a few days as she, in returning to the nest, managed to knock the egg off the ledge. In the video clip her apparent bewilderment would have been comical had the event itself not been so serious.

Happily, not only did the pair try again, but the falcon appeared to learn her lesson and moved to the nestbox. Two eggs were laid, and the anxious waiting started again. After a few weeks, though one egg failed to hatch, the other did! The project team were understandably overjoyed with such a success in only the first season, and very appreciative once again of the financial assistance provided by SOS and others to enable it to happen. At the time of writing the chick is just over three weeks old, and has been inspected and ringed under licence (photo right, courtesy of Chris Hooper and the Taunton Peregrine Project). It has been sexed as a male and given the name 'Rod' (after the Rev Rod Corke - see last issue), and as can be seen in the photo the colour ring details are black 'TT' on blue. There is still a way to go yet, but he has been growing well and getting plenty of food (and already has an impressive set of talons), so the signs are hopeful. A hearty well done to all involved with the project, and fingers crossed not only that Rod fledges successfully, but is also the first of many to fledge from the site.



SOS Members' Day 2018

After the success of the inaugural Members' Day last year, we are running it again this year, but this time in the autumn. The date has been set for 15 September, and full details of the programme for the day will be published on our website in due course.

Rodden Nature Reserve

Eve Tigwell reports on an unsung reserve in the underwatched east of the county

Rodden Nature Reserve was constructed over 10 years ago as a means of preventing the River Frome from flooding Frome town; so when it rains a lot, the reserve floods, not the town! The construction was funded by ASDA as part of an S106 planning agreement, and they continue to fund the necessary maintenance work. (Their store is next door, and in the early days the site was known colloquially as the ASDA Pools.) During construction a small brook was moved and areas were planted with trees, and areas of grassland seeded. One side of the reserve is bounded by the River Frome. Over the years the species list has grown phenomenally from that of managed grassland to that of a nature reserve, such that it has been designated a Local Wildlife Site by Mendip District Council.

The reserve is divided into three parts: the Western area, the North Meadow, and the Eastern area, each of which differs in habitat and in species mix.

The Western area is only open to the public from 1 August to 31 January, inclusive, to protect breeding wildlife. However, most areas can be seen from the road bridge or the viewing screen in the North Meadow (another viewing screen should follow soon). Habitats here include open water (Large and Small Pools) with marginal vegetation; there are plenty of fish, and Mute Swans are present for most of the year. There is a small scrape (an area of shallow water that dries out in the summer), which provides different feeding opportunities for animals that prefer this habitat. There are some small woodland areas for other birds and woodland animals.



The grassland was originally sown with wildflowers; these are thriving and attract plenty of butterflies and other insects, especially in the summer. A lot of wildlife moves between the reserve and the River Frome, including various fish and Kingfishers. There are bird feeders behind a viewing screen, making it easier to watch the smaller birds.

The North Meadow is open all year round; when the main reserve is closed it can only be accessed from the A362, otherwise there is a bridge over Rodden Brook between the two areas. This is mainly grassland with wildflowers; a rare plant (Corky-fruited Water-dropwort) grows well here. There is a viewing screen by the bridge over Rodden Brook; this overlooks a large part of the Western area and is a key viewing point when the latter is closed.

The Eastern area forms a quiet refuge and buffer for the wildlife; it remains closed all year round. The habitat is similar to that of the Western area, but with only one small pool and much less woodland. Most of the area can be viewed from the pavement alongside the road.

So what's the bird list like? At lot better than it was about 15 years ago! Bear in mind that this was fairly ordinary farmland, with very few records; but both Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail had been seen on the River Frome, with Dipper a little further downstream in Frome. It is very encouraging that colonisation by invertebrates, mammals, and birds has been rapid and impressive. The bird list is now well over 100 species, some of which have only been seen once, but others now breed due to the additional habitats that have been created.

The tables at the end of this report provide lists of species according to their status on the reserve, with details of their occurrence and conservation status, as appropriate. As well as the more regular visitors listed in those tables, another 54 species have been recorded on the reserve on at least one occasion,

including Bittern, Red Kite, Osprey, Jack Snipe, Savi's Warbler, and perhaps the most famous and rarest visitor, a first-winter Bonaparte's Gull present on 18-25 March 2006.

The reserve is between the old A362 as it runs into Frome and the new housing estate beyond ASDA.

Access is through one of two gates: off the road between the estate and ASDA (ST787474), and from the



old A362 between the ASDA roundabout and Frome (ST787477). Access is through kissing gates; the field gates have to remain locked due to grazing animals and the risk of fly-tipping.

If you have any queries or comments about the reserve, please email the management team at info@roddennaturereserve.org.uk and they will get back to you as soon as possible. Do take a look at the fantastic videos on the website: www.roddennaturereserve.org.uk or visit Rodden Nature Reserve on Facebook for the most up-to-date news.

Residents

Common Name	Species Name	Comments: BoCC 4 Designation
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Attempted breeding one year: Amber
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Confirmed breeding: Amber
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Confirmed breeding: feral
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Confirmed breeding; feral
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Confirmed breeding
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Confirmed breeding: Amber
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Confirmed breeding
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Confirmed breeding (box): Amber
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Confirmed breeding (box)
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Confirmed breeding (box)
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>	Possible breeding
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	Resident in early years
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Confirmed breeding
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Confirmed breeding
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Probable breeding: Red
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Confirmed breeding
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Confirmed breeding
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Probable breeding: Amber
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Probable breeder
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Possible breeding: Amber
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	Possible breeding
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Possible breeding: Amber
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Confirmed breeding: Amber

Visitors, all-year-round

Common Name	Species Name	Comments: BoCC 4 Designation
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Occasional breeding attempts usually thwarted by Otter predation: feral
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	One or two present most days
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Amber
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	

Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Amber
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Amber
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Red
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Amber
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Display seen
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Amber
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	
Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Possible breeding: Red
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	

Summer Visitors

Common Name	Species Name	Comments: BoCC 4 Designation
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Amber
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Amber
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Amber
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Probable breeding
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Probable breeding: Amber
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Confirmed breeding
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	Possible breeding
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Possible breeding
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Possible breeding: Amber
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Probable breeding
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Confirmed breeding

Regular Passage & Winter Visitors

Common Name	Species Name	Comments: BoCC 4 Designation
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Regular winter
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Regular winter, occasional in summer
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Regular passage: Amber
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Regular winter: Amber
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Occasional passage
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Regular winter: Red
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Regular winter: Red
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Regular winter: Amber
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>	Regular winter: Red
Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	Regular winter

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 newcomer to the county (though not to birding), **Dan Watson**.

How and when did you get into birdwatching?

There is a slightly two-fold answer to this question, as I first started looking at birds when I was 5 years old. I'd just watched Jurassic Park at the cinema, and my father told me that dinosaurs still persisted to this day - as birds. This information made me see these wonderful creatures in a totally new light, and growing up in Norfolk meant I was in the perfect location to learn about a broad range of species. I dipped out of birding for a few years in my early 20s, but a chance encounter in Waxham sand-dunes - I was lucky enough to find a juvenile Red backed Shrike - reignited my passion. It was good fun to see the first birders arrive to see the shrike, and then use their optics to have a closer look - at the time I'd sold my scope and wasn't keen on being seen in public sporting binoculars!



What is your favourite birding memory?

I've been lucky enough to travel to quite a few countries in the last decade or so, and as a result I've a lot of wonderful memories of encountering 'dream' species in the wild. I must say that in all my travels, there is something particularly special about witnessing a big fall on the East Coast in October. Perhaps my favourite such occasion took place in Burnham Overy dunes.

There'd been a low fog pushed in off the back of an easterly wind, and then rain in the early hours, a perfect recipe for a big fall of migrants. Every bush seemed to pulse with Goldcrests, Robins, Chiffchaffs, Chaffinches, Redpolls, and the odd Brambling. Overhead in the murk there was a near-constant cacophony of thrushes and Meadow Pipits. I sat on the beach with my partner and watched in awe as a Goldcrest alighted on her boots - to see something so tiny and fragile having crossed the North Sea in appalling conditions was really touching, and brought home the converse side of migration. That all these birds had made it over the sea was near-miraculous, and at the same time difficult to witness. Walking along the strand line we found a number of corpses of the birds that didn't quite make it.

Later that afternoon the rain stopped and for about 10 minutes the sun broke through; my partner pointed to 'something small and stripy' in the sedge, and I was delighted to see it was a Pallas's Warbler. Crossing the North Sea was one thing, but this 7-gram wonder had flown at least 3000 miles to end up at this point, a truly awe-inspiring sight.

Where was your favourite birding trip?

It's a tough call...I dearly love South East Asia, but I will opt for Uganda. We spent an incredible 10 days there last September - wonderful people, breathtaking scenery, and spectacular wildlife. I only hired a guide for one morning, and still managed to record over 300 species. When you take into account that you can also see Elephants, Lions, Gorillas, Chimps, Hippos, Crocodiles etc., it gives an indication of how special this country is. Shoebill is also a must-see in my opinion - the closest thing to a real-life dinosaur!

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

I work as an invasive species surveyor, so I spend a lot of time on the road travelling to different parts of the country. My partner and I both enjoy travelling and sampling different culinary delights, and as a result we enjoy cooking (nearly as much as finding the accompanying wine!) I've played guitar for as long as I've been birding, but I don't seem to have improved much in that time... The rest of my spare time is generally spent birding!

Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

90% of my birding takes place at Cheddar Reservoir at present, and despite its limitations I'm really enjoying it as my local patch. We lived in the Cotswolds before we moved down to Somerset, so it's almost overwhelming having such an incredible diversity of both species and habitats literally on our doorstep. The Levels are a fantastic example of landscape-scale ecosystem engineering, and I manage to get there at least once a week, usually avoiding the more crowded areas. I'm hoping to check out the coast over the autumn, trying to find some goodies inside the county boundaries - perhaps not Sand Point!

What are your five desert island birds, and why?

In no particular order:

1. **Resplendent Quetzal** - An outrageous cloud forest dweller, one wouldn't imagine that something emerald and red with a metre-long tail would be challenging to see, but it gave me the runaround for a few hours in Panama.
2. **Shoebill** - A living dinosaur, with 'rex' in its scientific name - what isn't there to like?
3. **Pallas's Warbler** - An absolute jewel of a bird; whether you've seen one or thousands, it's a species that never fails to bring a smile to your face.
4. **Thrush Nightingale** - Incredible songster, strongly evocative of the wilds of Eastern Poland. Walking through the forests at night with their songs reverberating through the canopy is something that everyone should enjoy.
5. **Eurasian Starling** - Less exotic than the others, but what a bird! Incredible looks (check out those recently moulted birds in August/September through a scope - wow), a vocal repertoire to put most songsters to shame, intelligent and fascinating to watch, breathtaking winter murmurations, and sadly in decline. If I could establish a colony on the desert island to bolster the UK population back to where it was 15 years ago, I'd happily leave the other 4 in their respective habitats.

Choose a book and luxury item, and explain why.

My luxury item is probably quite predictable - my Swarovski binoculars. They've been everywhere with me and never let me down. They're also quite heavy, so I could also use them as an anchor on a raft, or alternatively as a weapon if needed - hopefully repairs would be covered under guarantee...

My book of choice would be a fieldguide to whichever archipelago I was marooned on. I can't think of anything worse than being somewhere new and not knowing what I was looking at!

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 and Somerset Wildlife Trust in July-October 2018.

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.



July

17	Event	SWT	British Wildlife Photography Awards Exhibition. 0900-1700. Now in its ninth year, the British Wildlife Photography Awards highlights and showcases the great diversity and wealth of the country's wildlife, and raises awareness of our natural habitats, including here in Somerset. Exhibition open until Saturday 25 August. There will be an events programme related to the exhibition, including a wildlife photography walk on 22 August. Red Brick Building, Morland Enterprise Park, Morland Road, Glastonbury BA6 9FT. No booking required. Cost: Free, but donations welcome and will be shared equally between SWT and the Red Brick Building.
17	Walk	SWT	Guided Walk at Lower Chelmsine Private Nature Reserve. 1400-1600. A visit to Lower Chelmsine where David and Lindy Edmondson have developed a private nature reserve with 10 acres of broadleaf woodland, 5 acres of hazel/sweet chestnut coppice and a most attractive garden and wildlife area. There is also a 400-yr-old linhay barn. Refreshments available; proceeds for local charity. Lower Chelmsine, in the Blackdown Hills. Booking essential: please contact Valerie 01460 234551. Cost: Free, but donations welcome.
28	Event	RSPB	Telescope and Binocular Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. Time for some new optics? Knowledgeable experts from the RSPB Shop in Darts Farm, Exeter will be on site to guide you through a range of binoculars, telescopes, tripods, and accessories. Ham Wall Welcome Centre, in car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Cash and card payments accepted.

August

4	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. One-hour group tours between 1000 and 1500. Another chance to join a qualified instructor and an expert wildlife guide to experience this amazing nature reserve by canoe. No experience needed. Price: £15 adult non-RSPB member/£13 adult RSPB member/£10 child non-RSPB member/£8 child RSPB member. Children (6-17) must be accompanied by an adult. Book online at https://hamwall-naturebycanoe.eventbrite.co.uk . Booking essential. Meet at Ham Wall car park, Ashcott Road, Meare (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Car park charge (£3) for non-members, refunded if you join RSPB on the day.
5	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. As on 4 August.
25	Event	RSPB	Telescope and Binocular Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. As on 28 July.

September

1	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. One-hour group tours between 1000 and 1500. Another chance to join a qualified instructor and an expert wildlife guide to experience this amazing nature reserve by canoe. No experience needed. Price: £15 adult non-RSPB member/£13 adult RSPB member/£10 child non-RSPB member/£8 child RSPB member. Children (6-17) must be accompanied by an adult. Book online at https://hamwall-naturebycanoe.eventbrite.co.uk . Booking essential. Meet at Ham Wall car park, Ashcott Road, Meare (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Car park charge (£3) for non-members, refunded if you join RSPB on the day.
2	Event	RSPB	Nature by canoe at Ham Wall. As on 1 September.
4	Talk	SWT	Birds of Prey. 2000-2115. Alan Wells of Pitcombe Rock Falconry will talk about the different birds of prey; and their work rescuing birds, and educating people about raptors. Caryford Hall, Ansford, Castle Cary, BA7 7JJ. Booking/information: Caroline Rathbone (01749 812127 or carolinerathbone@btinternet.com). Cost: adults £3, children free.
8	Walk	SOS	Avalon Marshes. 0930. Leader: Alison Everett. Focus: reedbed and wetland birds, waders. New members are particularly welcome. Meet at Ham Wall car park, Ashcott Road, Meare (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Free.
15	Event	SOS	Members' Day. Details to be announced.
18	Talk	SWT	Drought Risk and You. 1930-2130. Drought poses a significant threat to the environment, agriculture, and our water supplies. It could affect us all in various ways. Sarah Ayling will describe her work on the DRY project, which has concentrated on grassland ecology and the way that it responds to drought. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar, BS27 3HU. Booking/contact information: Ged Keele (gerard.keele@btinternet.com or 01278 769010). Cost: SWT members £2.50/non-members £3.
20	Talk	RSPB	Winterbourne Downs RSPB Reserve: Creating a Nature Reserve from Bare Ground. 1930. After the (usually very brief) South Somerset RSPB group AGM, Patrick Cashman (Site Manager) will tell the story of how the RSPB changed an arable farm in Wiltshire to a chalk grassland landscape full of wild flowers, butterflies and nesting Stone Curlew. Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster TA19 0QH (ST407147). Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net . Cost: South Somerset RSPB group members £3, non-members (including national RSPB members) £4, and under 18s free.
25	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 and has helped document the area for magazines and TV. Located in the western Amazon, Manu National Park is the world's most biodiverse protected area, encompassing the humid montane forests of the eastern Andes and the adjacent Amazon lowlands of the Manu river watershed. With neighbouring areas it forms part of the largest contiguous wilderness remaining on Earth and is home to over 1000 bird species and 300 mammals. Wells Museum (side entrance), Cathedral Green, Wells BA5 2UE. Booking/contact information: Jean Mantle (jaye.mantle@btinternet.com) or call 01749 677600. Cost: SWT members £3, non-members £3.50.
29	Event	RSPB	Telescope and Binocular Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. As on 28 July.

October

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| 6 | Event | SWT | British Wildlife Open Exhibition. Doors open 1000. A new exhibition celebrating the best of British Wildlife art, including paintings, prints, and photographs. Organised by SWT in partnership with local arts charity and gallery, ACEarts. All artworks are for sale and all proceeds from the exhibition will be shared equally by SWT and ACEarts. Also an opportunity to vote for the best artwork, which will be awarded the 'People's Prize' at the end of the exhibition. ACEarts, Market Place, Somerton TA11 7NB. Exhibition open until Saturday 3 November. Opening times: Tuesday to Saturday 1000-1700 (special viewing for SWT members and guests Sunday 7 October 1100-1600). No booking required. Free. |
| 13 | Walk | SOS | Brean Down. 0930. Leader: Brian Hill. Focus: autumn migrants. Meet at NT car park (£3.50 all day; free to NT members) (ST297587, TA8 2RS). |
| 18 | Talk | RSPB | Kenya's Fabulous Mammals and Birds. 1930. An illustrated talk presented by award winning wildlife photographer Mike Mockler, whose images have been published in books and magazines around the world. A brand new talk which looks at some less well-known parts of this wonderfully varied country. It also offers an insight into the new conservancies around the Masai Mara that provide a quieter alternative from the famous but over-utilised game reserve itself. Plenty of mammals and birds including some very special sightings. Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster TA19 0QH (ST407147). Contact: 01460 240740 or denise.chamings@talktalk.net Cost: South Somerset RSPB group members £3, non-members (including national RSPB members) £4, and under 18s free. |
| 20 | Event | RSPB | Telescope and Binocular Day at Ham Wall. 1000-1600. Time for some new optics? Knowledgeable experts from the RSPB Shop in Darts Farm, Exeter will be on site to guide you through a range of binoculars, telescopes, tripods, and accessories. Ham Wall Welcome Centre, in car park (BA6 9SX, ST449397). Cash and card payments accepted. |
| 25 | Talk | SOS | Stearth: A generation of change. 1930. Dick Best talks about the changes to the Stearth peninsula in recent years, including the creation of the Stearth Marshes reserve. Ruishton Village Hall, Cheats Road, Ruishton TA3 5JD (ST268250). All welcome. Refreshments available. Free. |
| 26 | Talk | SWT | Better Birding with Mike Langman. 1930-2130. Mike Langman will present a fun evening on how to improve your skills in bird-watching & other wildlife. Tips on identification, estimating numbers in a flock, and remembering bird calls. Very interactive presentation: pencil & notepad useful. Sales table. Tea & coffee available. Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster TA19 0DG. Contact: Valerie Godsmark, 01460 234551. Cost: SWT members £2, non-members £3. |
| 30 | Talk | SWT | Somerset's Wonderful Wildlife. 1930-2100. Local naturalist Les Cloutman will be looking at Somerset's wildlife and flowers through the seasons, from back gardens to wild places, from hills to levels, lakes, rivers, and coast, and why our county is so very special. Wells Museum (side entrance), Cathedral Green, Wells BA5 2UE. Booking/contact information: Jean Mantle at jaye.mantle@btinternet.com or call 01749 677600. Cost: SWT members £3, non-members £3.50. |

Photo credits:

Gary Thoburn (pp.1 and 2), Julian Thomas (p.3), Chris Hooper (p.4), Richard Downes (pp.5 and 6), Dan Watson (p.8), and Brian Hill (p.10).



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