



## Avocets breed again at Steart

**Simon Fairweather, Tim McGrath, and Dick Best report on another success**

Following the successful breeding of a pair of Avocets on a lagoon on Stert Point in May 2012 (the first recorded breeding attempt in Somerset), the hope was that breeding might occur in the following years. However, apart from occasional sightings of Avocets in the summer of the next two years there was no evidence of breeding until this summer when one pair nested on WWT Steart Marshes and two pairs on Stert Point.

There had been intermittent sightings of two Avocets during the early part of 2015 around the Breach at WWT Steart Marshes, and on the morning of Friday 15 May they were seen in the pool by the Breach viewpoint. Their behaviour was noted to be a little unusual, returning to the pool after flying out into the estuary, suggesting they had a certain affinity for this particular location, and on the morning of Sunday 17 May they were observed again in the same pool. On this second occasion they were seen to explore one of the islands, even prodding the ground in a manner suggesting they were selecting potential nesting sites, and the evening of the same day they were seen to mate. A third colour-ringed Avocet had also joined the pair, albeit being kept at a distance. They were observed to mate again on Tuesday 19th when two other Avocets were present in the main tidal lagoons. Numbers continued to increase over the following days; on Wednesday 20th six were in the pool by the Breach viewpoint and on Thursday 21st a total of seven were observed.

Avocets were seen in a number of locations over the Marshes, but the general pattern that seemed to be emerging was that a single pair had become established in the pool by the Breach viewpoint and that the other birds probably consisted of two pairs and the single colour-ringed bird. [cont'd p. 3]



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## Welcome

Hello again!

Apologies that this issue of *The Bittern* is a little late. No foreign travels to use as an excuse this time, just lots of other things going on - including the annual report, *Somerset Birds*, which should be hitting members' doormats before the end of November. I hoped the delay would allow us to report the completion of some other projects too - very nearly, but not quite. See p.5 for details.

This issue's cover story is of another breeding success in the county, and perhaps the start of a colonisation by Avocets, such as has happened on the Gwent Levels in recent years? Anyway, not only is it an excellent account put together by three observers synonymous with Steart, it also seemed a decent excuse to publish Simon Fairweather's great photographs of one of the Avocet families - the chicks are just adorable, and see if you can count the legs in the pic on p.3.

Steart (and especially Steart Marshes reserve) features quite heavily in this issue, but that's where stories that I thought would be of interest have been happening over the summer. It would be great to publish more features on, particularly, the upland areas or the east of the county, but I do need people to come forward to write them. Similarly with site guides for the new website - when it launches you will see that the sites section is (necessarily) incomplete. A few sites are covered, and others are in the pipeline, but we still need text for quite a lot of those listed. Check it out when possible, and if you want to write up a site you know well that isn't covered so far, please contact me for a copy of the simple-to-use template.

Speaking of volunteers, the delay has allowed us to feature an update from Eve Tigwell on various BTO surveys - the Goldfinch survey in particular everyone should be able to help with in a small way (see p.6 for details). Eve is also trying hard to find a new WeBS counter for Cheddar Reservoir - if you can commit to counting the wildfowl there once a month, please contact Eve, either directly or via me at the email address below (or, after the end of November, at the shiny new [julian.thomas@somersetbirding.co.uk](mailto:julian.thomas@somersetbirding.co.uk)).

Winter birding is on its way - always an exciting time. I hope you enjoy it and see you in the New Year!



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## Avocets breed again at Steart

[cont'd from p. 1] By Tuesday 26th the only birds observed on WWT Steart Marshes were the pair established in the pool by the Breach viewpoint, and the following day one of the pair was observed to be sitting at the nest site. It later became apparent that the most likely explanation for the other Avocets' disappearance was that they had selected the National Nature Reserve on Stert Point as their preferred nesting location.



The pair at WWT Steart Marshes remained under close observation whilst they incubated their eggs, and on Monday 22 June four chicks had hatched. They thrived and were generally to be found in a favoured spot to the south of the pool. Saturday 4 July seemed to mark the end of their stay in this pool, as they started to explore the surrounding area, eventually taking up residence in a large pool to the south of the main tidal creek. It must have been during this move that unfortunately one of the chicks was lost. However, the three remaining chicks continued to thrive and had developed into fully grown juveniles by the time of the last reported sighting in the second half of July.

The first evidence of breeding on the National Nature Reserve was in early June when two pairs were found nesting on separate islands in the brackish lagoon on The Fenning at Stert Point, the same site as the breeding attempt in 2012. Both pairs were sitting continuously and when the birds changed over, taking turns for incubation duty, two eggs could be seen in each nest. One of the pairs shared an island with a pair of Oystercatchers whose nest was no more than two metres away. The two pairs seemed compatible, or possibly had adopted a state of armed neutrality, until the Oystercatchers hatched a single chick, at which point the Avocets became very aggressive, with the Oystercatchers eventually encouraging their chick to swim to a neighbouring island. On 21 June the first Avocet chick successfully hatched and the second egg of that clutch was seen to hatch on the next day. Both chicks from this pair were moved overnight to the adjacent tidal lagoon where they remained for several days, closely attended by both adults and feeding independently. The remaining pair continued to sit but by 3 July the nest and the site had been vacated and there was no sign of chicks or adults in the area.

The man-made islands upon which both pairs were nesting are approximately 25cm high with very steep sides, which could have proved fatal for the first chick to hatch as it fell off the island and was unable to climb back. The adults were unable to help although they continually encouraged the chick to attempt to scale the earth wall and did attempt to brood it as it was clearly becoming exhausted. Thankfully the second chick hatched that evening and overnight the adults escorted both chicks from the lagoon.

On Sunday 5 July, two pairs of Avocets were found at separate sites on WWT Steart Marshes (North) in addition to the pair established in the pool by the Breach viewpoint. One pair was seen to be accompanying two chicks to which they were very protective but no chicks could be seen with the other pair, nor were they displaying any aggressive behaviour to potential predators. It is speculated that these birds were those that had bred on the Fenning and had made their way into WWT Steart Marshes via the Breach and the creek system, as no other sighting of Avocets on the Fenning were reported.

Over the following days close monitoring was made difficult by the distances involved and the extensive creek system which provided limitless hiding places. In general, it was only possible to locate the adult birds and infer the presence of young from the aggressive/defensive behaviour directed towards any potential predators, although between 7 and 15 July a single adult with one chick were regularly seen in lagoons in WWT Steart Marshes (North). Consequently, it is not possible to be conclusive [cont'd p.4]

[cont'd from p.3] regarding the outcome for the pairs that bred on the Fenning. However, it is noteworthy that on Friday 31 July a fully fledged juvenile Avocet was seen with a single adult in the pool by the Breach viewpoint and these birds, or a separate adult and fully fledged juvenile, were seen in the northern part of WWT Steart Marshes.

Incidentally, a report was submitted regarding the colour-ringed Avocet to the Wader Study Group, who were able to establish that it was ringed as a chick at the salt marshes of Fahretofter Koog (54° 42' N, 8° 48' E) in the far north of Germany, close to the border with Denmark, in June 2013.

## Leucistic Sparrowhawk at Steart Marshes



Simon Fairweather, who's evidently been having a good year, found and photographed a rather strange raptor at Steart Marshes on 16 August, which turned out to be a leucistic Sparrowhawk - both striking and rather beautiful as the photos left and below show. This kind of plumage aberration is rare, but occurs occasionally in many bird species. As many members probably know (but some may not), leucism is not the same as true albinism - rather than being pure white, leucistic birds usually show (at least very largely) the normal plumage pattern for the species, but with very muted, washed-out colours. Bare part coloration is usually normal, unlike the pink eyes etc. of a true albino. (There is a debate about whether 'leucistic' is the correct term to use to describe these birds, but that's for another day.)



Unsurprisingly, this stunning little raptor has attracted quite a bit of attention, and has been seen on many occasions since Simon's first report in August, hunting small waders and passerines across the reserve. For an ambush predator like a Sparrowhawk, being so conspicuous is presumably a bit of an issue, but as the bird is still present over two months after it was first seen, it seems like it must be doing OK. If you are visiting the reserve, keep an eye out for it - it is certainly worth seeing!

# News

## New SOS website update

### Rob Grimmond reports

We are delighted to announce that the launch of our new website, [www.somersetbirding.co.uk](http://www.somersetbirding.co.uk), is planned for the end of November. After several months work with our web designers, Make Hay, we have a website which, in technology terms, will move the Society into the 21st century.

The site will have news and event sections, publications (including *The Bittern*), ringing information, a facility for sending bird records direct to the Recorder, an expanded section on County birding sites, a photo gallery, and a forum section that will cover not only bird sightings but also a facility for ringing news and general discussion.

We will be able to update the site easily and quickly and are confident it will become an excellent source of information for birding in Somerset. The web pages will be easily readable on PCs, laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

We welcome any contributions (within reason) to the website, whether information or photos.

Keep an eye on the current messageboard for the exact launch date.



## New facilities at Ham Wall *nearly ready*

I'd hoped to be able to report in this issue that the various new facilities mentioned in the last issue of *The Bittern* would be ready and open for use by now, but (perhaps inevitably) there have been further delays. They're nearly ready, though. The new raised hide on the north side between the viewing platforms (left) is all but finished, with just the windows to go in - I'm told they will open, and be of similar design to the windows in the hide at Greylake.

The toilets and visitor reception post are in place in the car park (below left), but the plumbing still needs to be done, so it seems it will be a little while yet before they are open for use.



Once finished, all should be very useful additions for birdwatchers visiting the reserve. RSPB warden Steve Couch will no doubt keep us all updated via the Ham Wall blog: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/placestovisit/hamwall/b/hamwall-blog/default.aspx>. It's well worth a read anyway for all the latest sightings and goings-on on the reserve.

(Thanks to RSPB volunteer Lee Dutton for permission to use his photos.)

# BTO survey news

Eve Tigwell, BTO representative for Somerset, on upcoming surveys you can take part in and results of previous surveys

## Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS III)

As its title suggests, NEWS surveys our shorebirds, specifically in winter. It gives a detailed picture of the changing populations of these popular bird species over a long time period, and is complementary to the International Waterbird Count (17 January 2016). NEWS III will repeat similar surveys undertaken in the winters of 2006/07 (NEWS II), 1997/98 (NEWS I), and 1984/85 (Winter Shorebird Count). Many of the species monitored by NEWS occur in internationally important numbers, yet the remote nature of the rocky shores and other non-estuarine coastal habitats included means they are often poorly monitored by WeBS. Therefore, periodic coverage by NEWS is a key part of the UK's waterbird monitoring programme.

As your WeBS Local Organiser I shall also be organising NEWS III for Somerset. There are two regions available for us to survey:

- East of Lynton (county boundary) to Watchet.
- Watchet to the start of Steart Flats.

Each of these regions has been split into smaller (roughly 2km long) sectors. There are priority sectors, which I shall need to allocate first because of the usual scientific reasons. Records can be submitted online, but paper forms are also available for those who want them. If you would like to take part in NEWS III, please see full details at: [www.bto.org/webs-news](http://www.bto.org/webs-news). Many thanks in anticipation!

## Goldfinch feeding survey

This survey runs from 4 November 2015 to 29 February 2016 and is much less strenuous. It involves counting Goldfinches in your garden and noting their feeding preferences: it takes just two minutes! You can submit data on a weekly basis, or just make one submission. The aim is to support current research on whether garden-bird feeding has influenced the increase of Goldfinches. We are looking to find out what Goldfinches are eating, and what other foods are available that they are choosing not to eat. Full details will be on the BTO website ([www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)) as of 4 November.

## House Martin survey

This important two-year survey aims to estimate the UK population of this declining species, and to investigate productivity at nest sites. Many thanks to all those who managed to check sites this year. Next year the emphasis will be on monitoring the nests in a colony to record activity, the number of young etc. The full details are not yet finalised, but if you know of a House Martin colony, it would be great if you could be involved. Further information to follow.

## 2013 Woodcock survey results

The results of the 2013 Woodcock survey have been published and show a 29% decline in males since 2003. You can access the paper in *Bird Study* here:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00063657.2015.1092497#.ViCz-n6rRpg>

The BTO website has been updated too: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey>

## 2014 Peregrine survey

BTO has published the PROVISIONAL results of the 2014 Peregrine Survey: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/peregrine-survey/results>. This shows a 5% increase in numbers in the UK and Isle of Man since 2002. There are increases in England (+34%) and Northern Island (+17%) and declines for Wales (-12%), Scotland (-11%), and the Isle of Man (-26%). I must stress these numbers are PROVISIONAL and will change as further analyses are undertaken. The final report will included a more detailed breakdown by region.

# Red-necked Phalarope at Steart Marshes

## Simon Fairweather on a very welcome find

Friday 31 July this year presented an opportunity for me to enjoy one of my regular early morning bike rides on the WWT Steart Marshes wetland reserve. I hadn't been out for over a week and I was keen to check up on the breeding Avocets (see p.1). It was a beautiful morning without a breath of wind, in complete contrast to the days leading up, as I made my way out to the Breach viewpoint. Stopping at all the usual vantage points along the way, the only notable birds were a Green Sandpiper at the Steart Gate viewpoint and one of the juvenile Avocets with an adult bird at the Breach viewpoint. I was joined there by Dick Best and we compared notes on recent sightings. Dick was keen to see the Green Sandpiper so I offered to let him know if it was still there when I headed back that way.

As I approached Steart Gate on the way back, I started to scan the shallow pool where I had seen the Green Sandpiper to see if it was still there. The water was perfectly still and, even though it was only just after eight o'clock, the light was already very strong and the blue sky reflecting in the water made every bird in the pool very obvious despite being quite distant. All thoughts of Green Sandpipers evaporated immediately when my attention was drawn to a small bird that had joined the 20 or so Dunlin in the pool. I instantly knew from its rapid and erratic whirling behaviour that it might be a phalarope (and a lifer, not having seen any of the phalarope species before). I hurriedly got my scope onto it and, after getting some good views and consulting my Collins Guide, I phoned Dick to tell him I was pretty sure I'd just found a Red-necked Phalarope. He set off straight away to meet me and while I waited for him to arrive I took numerous record photos in case it decided to depart (a practice I've always found extremely useful to help me confirm my sightings). Fortunately it stayed and after a few minutes of deliberation we concluded that it definitely was a Red-necked Phalarope, probably a juvenile, and put the news out. It stayed for the rest of the day into the evening, allowing a good number of birdwatchers to see it, and it was as a result of these additional observations in better light that it was concluded it was an adult moulting into winter plumage.



The Red-necked Phalarope (second from left) was always quite distant on the single day of its stay. Simon's photo shows useful size comparisons with a Dunlin and a Black-headed Gull.

*[This was the first Red-necked Phalarope in the county since the juvenile found on Meare Heath scrape on 1 October 2006 by the late Alan Bundy. It was notable in two other respects too: not only was it a very early autumn record, suggesting perhaps a failed breeder, but it was already remarkably advanced in its moult for the time of year, showing a lot of grey/white winter feathering in the crown and mantle in particular. - Ed.]*

# The next new bird for Somerset?

## Julian Thomas gazes into the crystal ball

Among list-minded birders all over the country it's an age-old subject for idle discussion in the field or in the pub - what will be the next new bird for [insert area of interest]? Our county list is really quite odd in a number of ways - that we are blessed with uplands, wetlands, and coast gives us an unusually varied mix of residents and regular visitors, and our list of rarities includes some truly extraordinary vagrants. On the other hand, some scarce migrant species which are virtually annual in Dorset, for instance, are very rare here, and other 'common' rarities have been recorded there several times but have never occurred here at all. So there are more than a few candidates for the accolade of the next 'county first'. Here I present just five of the more glaring omissions - there are plenty more candidates with a similar likelihood of turning up, and no doubt the actual next 'first' will be something else entirely. Still, here goes...

### Surf Scoter

Probably the commonest duck that hasn't yet occurred, though a long-stayer off Ilfracombe in 1992 was a near miss. Sometimes they turn up alone, but regularly they accompany flocks of Common Scoter, so if the first doesn't just fly past an ecstatic Brian Gibbs at Hurlstone Point it is most likely to be found off Stolford/Hinkley Point one winter.

### Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

There are quite a few waders which would have been considered as more likely to occur than, for instance, Hudsonian Godwit, and a case could be made for any of them. With a recent near miss in 'old Somerset', a long-staying late-autumn bird at Blagdon Lake in 2011, this is as likely as any of them, and would be much appreciated. As the Blagdon bird showed, a reservoir shore is just as possible as a location as the seemingly more attractive Meare Heath or Steart Marshes.

### Subalpine Warbler

The commonest of the rare Mediterranean warblers, it is surprising that one of these little beauties hasn't been found in Somerset yet. A succession of good years for the species nationally, and a relatively recent record in Avon in 2004, put it head of the list for the next rare passerine to be recorded in Somerset. Of course, telling whether it is a Western or Eastern race bird (or even the newly split Moltoni's Warbler) might make it a bit more interesting (or frustrating) when it does finally happen.

### Siberian Stonechat

Another recently split species, it is a little rarer than the others suggested here, but has the advantage of usually being pretty conspicuous when it does appear, so would seem to be a good outside bet. Could turn up anywhere where Stonechats do, particularly along the coast. So if you see a really pale Stonechat somewhere next October, give us a shout.

### Desert Wheatear

Another species which has not only been recorded in 'old Somerset', at Clevedon in November 1997, but also as another recent near miss, at Severn Beach in 2013. It is surely just a matter of time before a late-autumn bird is found here. There are plenty of places along our coast just as suitable as the sea walls of Avon, though sandy areas like Berrow or Dunster Beach would be favourite.

# 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 ex-committee member and well-known Chard-based birder, **Dave Helliar**.

## How and when did you get into birdwatching?

I'm not exactly sure when I started birding, but I was given a pocket guide called 'Spotting Birds' at the age of nine and I well remember flicking through the pages, pausing at such exotic species like Roller, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, and Golden Oriole and never in my wildest dreams thinking I'd ever see such birds! My first 'serious' birding excursion was in September 1973, when Henry Squire took me to Seaton, Devon and I saw 9 new species of wader on the Axe estuary!

## What is your favourite birding memory?

There could be many contenders, but my first encounter with Kiwi (North Island Brown) in New Zealand was very special indeed. I remember it almost brushing past my leg - I held my breath, hoping not to spook it!

Closer to home, co-finding Northern Parula (sorry Julian!) at The Garrison, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly back in 1992 almost gave me a heart attack! I was holidaying with Barrie Widden and Barry Mathews and we were lucky to find the Parula, but we couldn't find any other birders to alert! In those days we didn't carry mobiles or a CB Radio, so I, being the youngest, ran all the way to the Porthcressa Café to put the news out over the CB and chalk it up on the blackboard! Needless to say, birders soon flocked to The Garrison.

## Where was your favourite birding trip?

Almost impossible for me to pick just one having being fortunate to visit many wonderful places in the world, but I feel privileged to have visited Antarctica this year, and South Georgia held one of the most impressive wildlife gatherings I've ever seen (and smelt!) - a 250,000 strong King Penguin rookery! But it wasn't all about the birds - the mammals were equally awe-inspiring, with close encounters with Blue Whales and Leopard Seals, amongst many other species.

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

I enjoy keeping my wildlife garden in shape and during the winter I spend much of my time keeping fit with voluntary conservation work at a nearby Dorset nature reserve. I am interested in all natural history and try to capture anything unusual with my bridge camera, whether in my garden or local patches. Motorcycling has always been a major part of my life, both riding and watching racing on TV - occasionally I'll even turn up at a twitch on the Ducati!

## Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

I've been birding at Chard Reservoir since 1973 and still visit daily, although it's not attracting the numbers of birds it used to. I also regularly visit a reserve just over the border in Dorset. The Blackdown Hills have long been one of my favourite birding areas, especially in spring.

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

**Wandering Albatross:** In fact any albatross is simply a stunning bird to see in effortless flight. This year I saw my first Light-mantled Albatross - I'm still on cloud nine!



Dave at Shapwick Heath, on the bench overlooking Noah's Lake that commemorates much-missed Somerset birder and great friend Alan Bundy.

**Firecrest:** My favourite British bird, an absolute gem - I'll never tire of the thrill of finding one!

**Rockhopper Penguin:** Has to be the penguin with character! They will hop over to investigate you if you're sitting down quietly.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Almost the 'Holy Grail' of British breeding birds and now so rare in Somerset, I always feel privileged to see one these days.

**Wood Sandpiper:** I love waders and the Wood Sandpiper has to be my favourite UK species by far - it's just so exquisite!

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

I guess being on an island somewhere in the world would mean that at least I'd see some seabirds, so I'd take 'Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World' by Onley and Scofield. I'd need a good telescope and tripod too of course to 'try' and ID them!

## 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 November 2015-January 2016. Most are specifically bird-related and in Somerset, but also included are some general wildlife talks with bird interest and a few field trips to areas close by in neighbouring counties.

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.



### November

4	Walk	RSPB	Seaton Wetlands, Devon. A guided walk and a visit to the hides led by John Tolfree. Meet at 1000 at Seaton Wetlands car park, accessed through cemetery off Colyford Road (SY248914, EX12 2DQ). Free.
4	Talk	SWT	<b>Born to Bird.</b> 1930-2130. Teenage world birder, conservationist, and blogger Mya-Rose Craig (aka Birdgirl), accompanied by mum Helena, talks about being born into a birding family and finding her own path to becoming a world birder, her birding in Britain and of her desire to inspire young people to become interested in birds, wildlife and conservation. Shapwick Village Hall, Shapwick, TA7 9NJ. Disabled access. £2.50 per adult. Children free.
14	Walk	SOS	<b>Avalon Marshes.</b> 0930. Leaders: Alison Everett and Jeff Hazell. Focus: Waterbirds and reedbed birds on Shapwick Heath and Ham Wall reserves. Meet at Natural England car park (ST449395, BA6 9SX).
19	Talk	SOS	<b>Wild Mongolia.</b> 1930. SOS's own Rob Grimmond gives an illustrated talk about Mongolia, its birds and wildlife. Ruishton Village Hall, Ruishton, nr Taunton, TA3 5JE (ST268270).

19	Talk	SWT	<b>The Flora and Fauna of Botswana.</b> 1930-2130. Mike Parr is a regular visitor to Botswana and brings a naturalist's understanding to his descriptions of the flora and fauna of the country. The Parish Rooms, Market Square, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7NB. Refreshments available prior to the talk. Suitable for wheelchairs and those with limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00.
20	Talk	SWT	<b>Born to Bird.</b> 1930-2130. Teenage world birder, conservationist, and blogger Mya-Rose Craig (aka Birdgirl), accompanied by mum Helena, talks about being born into a birding family and finding her own path to becoming a world birder, her birding in Britain and of her desire to inspire young people to become interested in birds, wildlife, and conservation. Parish Hall, North St, Ilminster TA19 0DG. Refreshments available. Suitable for wheelchairs / limited mobility. SWT members £2.00, non-members £3.00, children free.
21	Talk	SWT	<b>My Wild Life: An evening with Iolo Williams.</b> 1930-2130 (venue open 1700, theatre doors open 1900). BBC presenter Iolo Williams is one of the UK's best-known conservationists and his witty, enthusiastic and friendly style is sure to please budding naturalists of all ages. Iolo will be taking a wildlife tour of his Welsh homeland from mountain tops to seashore. On the way you will meet disco-dancing black grouse, the Lamborghini of the bird world, Britain's largest spider and a sex-changing fish. You will get an honest view of what he sees as the challenges facing our terrestrial and marine wildlife and the wildlife connections between Wales and Somerset. Followed by question time hosted by Stephen Moss. Queens College, Trull Road, Taunton TA1 4QS. Tickets (£10/£14) need to be booked through the SWT website ( <a href="http://www.somersetwildlifetrust.org">www.somersetwildlifetrust.org</a> ), where full details available.
19	Talk	RSPB	<b>The Natural Beauty of Dorset - A Whistle Stop Tour.</b> 1930. Colin Varndell presents a selection of images from his new book, published in 2014, covering Dorset's geology, landscape, and natural history, with informative accompanying narrative. Millennium Hall, Seavington, near Ilminster, TA19 0QH. Crewkerne RSPB group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free.
20	Talk	RSPB	<b>Highlands and Islands - Scottish Wildlife.</b> 1930. An illustrated talk by David Kjaer. Trull Memorial Hall, Taunton, TA3 7JZ. Free.
26	Talk	SWT	<b>Do You Know The Way To San Jose?</b> 19:30-21:00. Mick Ridgard will give an illustrated talk on a magical 3 week tour of Costa Rica, a wonderful country full of birds, animals etc. St Catherine's Church Hall, Park Road, Frome, BA11 1EU (ST 774 478). Suitable for wheelchairs & limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.

## December

5	Walk	SOS	<b>Cheddar Reservoir.</b> 0930. Leaders: Brian Hill and Stephen Moss. Focus: wintering wildfowl. Meet at the car park on the Cheddar side, at the end of Sharpam Road (ST446535, BS27 3DR).
10	Walk	RSPB	<b>West Sedgemoor.</b> 1000. A guided walk led by Eric Luxton and a visit to the hides. Meet at Dewlands Farm, near Curry Rivel (ST381263). Free.
13	Walk	RSPB	<b>Westhay Moor and Shapwick Moor.</b> Morning visit to Westhay Moor NNR, then short drive to Shapwick Moor Hawk and Owl Trust reserve in the afternoon. It may be muddy and the route is not suitable for wheelchair users. Meet at 1030 at Westhay Moor car park (ST456437). Free.

**19 Walk RSPB Big Wetland Duck Watch.** 1000-1200. In the winter tens of thousands of ducks and waders visit the fields of West Sedgemoor. Join RSPB guides for a rare opportunity to witness this wildlife spectacle, with the chance also of seeing the Somerset Cranes. Adults: £5 non-RSPB member/£4 member; children £3 (ages 5-17) / free (under 5). Payable on the day, but booking essential. Directions will be provided on booking. West Sedgemoor office - tel.: 07774 620879, email: west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.

## January

**3 Walk RSPB Uphill and the Axe Estuary.** 1330-1530. Recover from Christmas with a walk around Uphill and along the Axe Estuary, providing opportunities to look at wintering birds. Meet at the car park near the Dolphin pub in Uphill Way, Uphill (ST315585, BS23 4TN). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.

**20 Walk RSPB Big Wetland Duck Watch.** 1000-1200. As 19 December.

**21 Talk RSPB Birds without Borders - The Mystery of Migration.** 1930. Peter Holden, MBE, will be illustrating how birds and other animals navigate across land and sea and will be revealing some of the incredible journeys they make every year. Millennium Hall, Seavington, near Ilminster, TA19 0QH. Crewkerne RSPB group members £2.50, non-members (including national RSPB members) £3.50, under 18s free.

**22 Talk RSPB Steart Marshes WWT Reserve.** 1930-2130. Alys Laver, Acting Site Manager, will outline how the newly-created wetland reserve provides salt water marshes and freshwater habitats for wading birds and wildfowl; an accessible area for public interest as well as protection from flooding for Steart village. Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster, TA19 0DG. Tea & coffee available. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. RSPB members £2, non-members £3, children free.

**26 Talk SWT Peregrines.** 1930-2130. Well-known naturalist, wildlife broadcaster, and author Ed Drewitt has been studying urban Peregrines in Bristol and Bath for the past 17 years. During his talk he will be revealing much more about why they are in our towns, what they are eating, and where young birds go once they leave the nest, with some fascinating surprises. The Parish Rooms, Market Square, Somerton, Somerset TA11 7NB. Refreshments available prior to the talk. Suitable for wheelchairs and those with limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00.

**26 Talk SWT Greylake Reserve.** 1930-2100. Site Manager Harry Paget-Wilkes will talk about developments in this RSPB reserve and what to see on a visit. Wells Museum, off Cathedral Green, Wells, BA5 2UE. Suitable for wheelchairs & limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00, children free.

**28 Talk SWT Pictures and Patterns of Change.** 1930-2100. Eve Tigwell will talk on pictures and patterns emerging from the new national and Somerset Bird Atlases. St. Catherine's Church Hall, Park Road, Frome, BA11 1EU (ST774478). Disabled access. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.

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