



Stear Coastal Marsh project update

Dick Best reports

Once planning permission had been granted, the construction phase of the Environment Agency's Steart Coastal Management Project started this spring. The purpose of the scheme is the creation of an extensive area (over 300ha) of inter-tidal coastal marsh surrounded by an earth embankment and fed from a breach that will be made in the Parrett bank. Soon after construction commenced there followed a record-breaking period of heavy rain which halted all work on the scheme as the ground conditions made it impossible for heavy machinery to excavate and cart material for the embankments; this resulted in the scheme being delayed by over two months. Favourable weather allowed work to recommence in August since when, through an increased effort by the contractors, it is hoped that the target of making the seawall breach in mid-summer 2013 will still be met.

Apart from the problems caused by the weather, the progress of the scheme has run in to other problems - notably breeding birds! It is illegal to disturb active nests and work around a nest site has to be suspended.

A pair of Lapwings nested and reared a brood within the scheme and close to the earthworks, probably the first pair to breed successfully on the peninsula for decades. Then, on a stoned area that had been created to make a site compound, a pair of Oystercatchers nested, which prevented the use of the compound, while other pairs of Oystercatchers attempted to nest at the site of an archaeological dig and on a mound of spoil built for an artificial badger sett. Nesting Yellow Wagtails and Skylarks added to the problems.

One significant ornithological gain from the scheme has been the (unintentional) creation of freshwater flooding on a field adjacent to the Parrett Estuary at Stockland Reach. The flooding would appear to have been caused by the disruption of drainage of rain water and the resulting area of shallow freshwater has attracted a wide variety of waders, waterfowl and gulls. By mid-September it had attracted 20 species of waders, notably White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint, plus three Glossy Ibises, two Spoonbills and eight species of waterfowl.

Unfortunately this flooding will not be a permanent feature of the scheme, but the variety of species that have been found would indicate the pulling power of a freshwater scrape on the peninsula and raises the expectation that the areas of freshwater and brackish marsh that the scheme will create as part of a mosaic of wetland habitats will become a valuable and exciting addition to Somerset birding.



Dick Best



Dick Best

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Welcome

Well, the autumn had its moments, but overall it was fairly quiet, and I see that the weather took another turn for the worse while I was away in sunnier climes. Still, there were some pleasant days to enjoy and birds common and rare to see, so whether your interest is in seeing rarities, visible migration, or your local patch, I hope everyone saw something to make a day or two at least special. Now we are in the middle of another big Waxwing invasion, so keep your eyes peeled, as they could easily be coming to a village street, town park or supermarket car park near you. I was lucky enough to see a small group of them in Westonzoiland just a few hours before writing this, and was reminded again just what fascinatingly odd and beautiful birds they are.

Apologies that this issue is a little shorter than previous ones - it was always going to be a little difficult to put together a full issue in the short time between my arriving back from holiday and the run-up to Christmas. I hope that there is still plenty enough for you to enjoy though - alongside the regular features, we have news of progress on two very different habitat creation and restoration schemes, a couple of eggers getting their come-uppance, an account of the trials and joys of local patch-watching, details of the WeBS scheme, and an article on what was probably bird of the autumn for many. I've already got some interesting articles lined up for issue 5, so watch this space.

Don't forget also to keep an eye on our Facebook page for news of upcoming events and the like - we currently have 57 'likes', but could always do with more.



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News in brief

Catcott Great Fen Restoration Project - Beth Jerrett, SWT Publicity Officer

The Catcott Great Fen Restoration Project has transformed former peat diggings to reed bed, open water and fen - an important wildlife habitat, once widespread on the Somerset Levels but now scarce. Once established a new bird hide and board walks will give people a chance to enjoy many reed bed birds and the restoration will provide ideal habitat for Cetti's and Reed Warblers, Water Rail and Moorhen, Bittern, Crane, Bearded Tit and Marsh Harrier. It will also benefit mammals such as Otters and should see the build-up of a thriving fish population and good numbers of invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians.

The extensive 30-acre wetland habitat creation scheme at Catcott Nature Reserve is part of an ambitious £100,000 project to restore 50 acres of former peat diggings at four sites close to Somerset Wildlife Trust's Catcott and Westhay Nature Reserves. The restoration is possible thanks to more than £51,000 in donations made by people in Somerset who responded to the Trust's appeal to 'Save the Levels'. Donations from local people allowed the Trust to secure a further £64,618 in funding from DEFRA, to complete the work.

SWT Reserve Officer Mark Blake has overseen the two-year restoration at Catcott. He said: 'The Somerset Levels provide internationally important habitat for a rich array of species. It is a stronghold for elusive otters and the reed beds are ideal for rare wetland specialists like bittern and marsh harrier. The restoration work will create bigger and better connected habitats which wildlife on the Levels needs to adapt and survive in the longer term.'

An open day was held on 8 September, giving local people a chance to learn more about the restoration and how it is part of the mosaic of connected wetland habitats on the Somerset Levels.

Devon egg collectors prosecuted

Many egg collectors fell away from this outmoded, destructive and illegal practice when new legislation in 2001 introduced stiffer fines and even prison sentences, but the RSPB considers that there are still around 50 people who continue their despicable activities. Among these it has been known for some years that there has been an active group in South Devon, a threat to both rare and common breeding birds across the Southwest, including Somerset. It was therefore very gratifying to read press reports of a successful prosecution of two Devon 'egggers', following a two-year operation by Devon Police, the RSPB and the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

On 6 November Marcus Betteridge, 53, of Totnes, pleaded guilty to intentionally or recklessly disturbing a Dartford Warbler near Teignmouth in 2009 and was fined £1,000 by magistrates with £265 costs. Seymour Parish Crang, 50, of Bittaford, Ivybridge, admitted a charge of illegally possessing 15 wild bird eggs, and received the same punishment. The two were described in court as 'obsessional' collectors and nest finders with a 'twisted psyche' who pursued their hobby despite it carrying the threat of a jail sentence.

The prosecutions were brought after raids on both men's homes in 2010 revealed the collection of bird eggs, belonging to Mr Crang, an unemployed bricklayer, including eggs of Lesser Redpoll, Linnet, Tree Pipit, and Redshank. Also found were collecting equipment, photographs and a diary belonging to Mr Betteridge, running to hundreds of pages with detailed notes covering more than a decade of activity.

PC Josh Marshall, Devon Police's Wildlife Crime Officer, commented after the hearing, "This prosecution and sentencing today highlights the benefits of joint partnership working in tackling wildlife crime and the determination to bring offenders to justice. This should send a clear message to persons engaged in such criminal activity that they will be identified and brought to justice."

Somerset stalwart gains BTO accolade

Eve Tigwell has been the BTO's Regional Representative for Somerset (and an SOS Committee member) since 1991, so it is very pleasing to report that at the BTO's Annual Conference on 8 December she was awarded their Jubilee Medal for committed devotion to the Trust - her many voluntary roles within the BTO over the years go far beyond her undoubted and substantial contribution to Somerset ornithology. Many congratulations to Eve for this richly-deserved recognition.

Sutton Bingham Reservoir

Tim Farr extols the joys and frustrations of a local patch

Sutton Bingham Reservoir is a fairly small man-made reservoir on the Somerset/Dorset county boundary a few miles south-west of Yeovil. Over the years it has hosted some pretty spectacular birds, with its heyday arguably being in the 1970s and 1980s when it produced birds such as Terek Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Whiskered Tern, and the site list stands at around 220 species. The reservoir is owned by Wessex Water and has a full-time warden on site to look after the various facilities provided. Coarse fishing is popular and a fishing lodge is located near the dam. Sailing and canoeing are the other two main leisure activities that take place at the site and there is also a remembrance garden. The increase in these leisure activities, especially canoeing, over the past six or so years coupled with growing vegetation around the southern end of the reservoir has certainly had a detrimental effect on the birds the reservoir attracts, and with the majority of the site being private access only it certainly is a hard site to bird. It should also be noted that there is a strict no dogs policy on site, though this is often ignored by dog-walkers.



View of Sutton Bingham Reservoir from the northern causeway, looking east towards the dam

When visiting SBR there are a couple of worthwhile stops to make. Firstly, park on the northern causeway and scan the main reservoir to the east, checking gulls carefully for anything unusual such as Yellow-legged Gulls and Mediterranean Gulls both of which turn up fairly regularly. West Pool is also well worth checking out as it usually attracts diving ducks and wintering flocks of Wigeon and Teal. The causeway itself can host wagtails and pipits, especially in the winter, while during migration look out for Common Sandpipers.

If the car park is open, usually from March until October, pop in and take a walk around. The Norman Church next to the car park is also worth visiting and the trees around this area can produce Goldcrests and Siskins amongst more routine fare. A large rookery is also located in this area, though numbers vary annually.

There is a footpath following the water's edge from the car park down to the hide. It is not always that productive but you may stumble across the odd Reed Bunting or wintering Stonechat, and in the summer common warblers are noticeable. Stopping at the hide, scan the dead trees on the far side of the reservoir as they can sometimes host a migrating Osprey in spring and autumn, though this is not an annually occurring bird and some years are much better than others. The hide itself, which is now pretty useless due to the growth of surrounding vegetation, used to have a logbook so that any visitors to the site could record their sightings. Due to vandalism and theft this is a thing of the past and is much missed. But on the plus side, it does remove the element of being gripped off when reading a list of sightings for the previous day and seeing a report of a bird you need for your patch list!

In winter the area of water opposite and to the south of the hide can also contain large flocks of duck, and Great Crested Grebe numbers can rise to over seventy birds. With the use of a scope you can view the extreme south of



Southern end of SBR looking south from the Canoe Club

the reservoir, and if the water management matches migration times this area can be productive as lower water levels expose the mud and this in turn attracts waders. Common and Green Sandpipers are annual visitors, and Little Ringed Plovers are often seen during migration with rarer waders also turning up from time to time. I found a Pectoral Sandpiper in September 2001 in this area.

Now I've been birding at SBR since 1998, so most of the good stuff on the bird list occurred prior to my really working the site, but that being said I've still managed to rack up 163 species at the reservoir over the past fourteen years, and there have been some really rewarding moments over that period as well as some pretty frustrating times.

SBR is one of those sites that if you mention it to most birders they will say, "I've popped in occasionally but never seen much!", and this is not really that surprising. Few areas are accessible to the general public and only a handful of locals keep an eye on the site. So unlike the popular sites on the Somerset Levels there are not many eyes watching the reservoir, so that in turn means little or no news from the site; consequently birders don't bother with it as nothing much is reported...it's a vicious circle. That being said with a little, no, a lot of hard work some good birds can be found.

Now there are many pros and cons to having a local patch. On the plus side you have a site that is on your doorstep and feels as if it is yours alone to enjoy, and keeping a patch list means that even common birds can be rewarding if they are seldom seen at that site. So a male Goldeneye in 2011 was a really great bird for me as it was the first I had seen at SBR. Not a rare bird and we've all seen hundreds but there is a real buzz in the air when it's a new bird for your patch. In fact I probably get just as excited over a new SBR tick as I do for a UK tick or lifer. With a local patch you feel more inclined to work it hard and the rewards then become all the more worthwhile, and when that national rarity turns up it makes it all the more special as it gives you the opportunity to share the joys of your patch with those birders who would not normally visit. This has certainly been the case in recent years with birds such as White Stork and Purple Heron, both of which attracted birders from all parts of Somerset.

As with all birding there is always a flip side to the coin and I remember getting a call as I was sat in the car one Wednesday evening driving up the M5 to see Spurs play West Brom at The Hawthorns...a Pied Flycatcher was at Sutton Bingham - a mega-rarity for the site. Needless to say it had gone when I paid a visit the next day, and to make matters worse Spurs only managed a draw! Another dismal day that springs to mind was missing a site first in the form of a juvenile Sabine's Gull. Despite leaving work early after a call from Barrie Widden this particular larid decided not to linger, leaving the small handful of patch birders feeling rather glum!

Having a local patch is something that I would recommend to all birders, whether it's a small wood, an area of farmland or a small lake, it is a very rewarding form of birding without too much in the way of pressure. While it is always exciting seeing a new or unusual bird wherever you may be, there is something even more special when it's at your local patch and if you find it yourself...so go out there, find a local patch, and get that list started!

WeBS counting and what it means to Somerset

Martin Sage

Many SOS members will be familiar with the term WeBS but some may not be. It is an acronym for Wetland Bird Survey and has been organised by the BTO (www.bto.org/webs) since its inception in 1947 in cooperation with other wildlife organisations. The objective is to count the number of wetland birds in as many suitable UK habitats as possible on one weekend each month. Some sites are counted every month of the year but our local ones are only done from October to March. Each area has a registered counter who is responsible for submitting the records. I cover Shapwick Heath NNR and Westhay Heath with the help of other volunteers. The weather, visibility, disturbance etc. can influence counts on a specific day but long-term trends will still emerge.

One of the benefits of doing this work is a free copy of the annual report that is produced by the BTO and sent to registered counters each year. The 2010-11 winter report is now available and is a reminder of just how important our area is in the grand scheme of bird life cycles. Together with other international organisations, an area is designated as being of international or national importance for each species according to the WeBS counts. I thought it might be of interest to SOS members to list the number of species falling into each category for the main regions in Somerset and its close neighbours. These are The Somerset Levels which include the Avalon marshes complex, Greylake and West Sedgemoor, the Severn Estuary including Bridgwater Bay, Cheddar Reservoir and Chew Valley Lake. Apologies to those who see Chew as a foreign land.

The following species are designated as follows.

International importance: Somerset Levels

- Mute Swan *
- Teal *
- Water Rail *
- Lapwing *
- Common Snipe *
- Wigeon
- Shoveler
- Golden Plover

* Area with the highest count of this species in UK

International Importance: Severn Estuary.

- Shelduck
- Pintail
- Ringed Plover
- Dunlin
- Common Redshank

National Importance: All Somerset regions and Chew Valley

- Gadwall (Levels)
- Tufted Duck (Chew)
- Little Egret (Severn)
- Great Crested Grebe (Chew)
- Coot (Cheddar)
- Sanderling (Severn)
- Ruff (Levels)
- Curlew (Severn)

Rare British species such as Bittern and Great White Egret are an important addition to our local avian lists but these species are much more common in other countries. This data puts into perspective the importance of the wetland habitats of Somerset for birds that many of us take for granted and the WeBS counts can give us a very good guide to the rise and fall in numbers of our familiar wintering birds. It is easy to forget when you are reading this that we may be host to 10% of the Wigeon and 40% of the Teal in the UK within 20 miles of Westhay!

The White-rumped Sandpiper at Stockland Reach

Julian Thomas

As noted in Dick Best's piece earlier in this issue, back in the spring a single field alongside the Parrett estuary, between the track that runs from opposite the Natural England car park at Steart and the flood defence bank, flooded. It stayed that way right through the summer and into the autumn, attracting a wide variety of wildfowl and waders, so it was no surprise when another goodie was found.

On the morning of 15 September, Nick Wall and Dick Best were scanning the field from opposite ends along the bank when they nearly simultaneously noticed an unusual wader associating with three juvenile Curlew Sandpipers. Pretty much immediately they both realised that it was a White-rumped Sandpiper, only the sixth record ever for Somerset.

The bird remained largely faithful to the flooded field for a week, though it did occasionally disappear for a while when the wader flock was flushed by passing raptors or planes. It was still present on the 22nd, but could not be found the next day. Soon after, photos came to light that showed the bird to be present on 12th, overlooked in among a flock of Dunlin.

White-rumped Sandpiper is one of the commonest American waders to turn up in Britain, but like many of them it is inexplicably rare in Somerset, given our west-facing position and plenty of suitable habitat. There is a strong suspicion, though, that many of these 'Yank' waders have in fact originated from their other breeding grounds in Siberia, which might well explain the odd east-coast bias in the records of some species.

The white rump immediately distinguishes it from all other similar waders except the noticeably larger Curlew Sandpiper, but that is only occasionally visible at rest, so you usually need to use other structural and plumage features to identify one. White-rumped Sandpiper is a little smaller than Dunlin, accentuated by its shorter legs and customary bent-legged posture. The most noticeable structural difference is the long primary projection, projecting well beyond the tail and producing a classic attenuated silhouette. It shares this with the closely-related Baird's Sandpiper (only three Somerset records), but there are a number of plumage differences, with Baird's generally being more subdued and subtle in pattern.

The Stockland Reach bird was an adult and therefore in worn plumage in mid September, the pale fringes to the scapulars having abraded. The resulting dark appearance was a useful feature when trying to pick it out of a flock. A pale orange/buff patch around the base of the bill was also useful in the field, but this was due to staining and is not a plumage characteristic.

If you are faced with a sandpiper that is either White-rumped or Baird's, there is another key difference which is mentioned in some guides but not in others, and which can be very useful in the field. White-rumped shows a small pinkish patch at the base of the lower mandible, whereas the bill of Baird's is always wholly black. While the plumages of both species can vary considerably because of age and wear, this bare part difference remains consistent.



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 Atlas stalwart and this year's winner of the George Young Award, Andy Grinter.



How and when did you get into birdwatching?

It started about aged 9 - after breaking a leg playing football I was given a pile of books by the family GP. Amongst them were bird books and one in particular by Basil Ede caught my eye. The book called Birds of Town and Village was full of large colour plates. I loved that book and I wanted to see all the birds in it! I did eventually see them all (Hawfinch aside) and they satisfied me for some time. It was years before I wanted to see other birds not in that book. Now with pagers, internet and even Twitter you can soon connect with some birds previously only dreamt of.

What is your favourite birding memory?

Hard call, but I've plumped for a time years ago down at Marazion in Cornwall. Whilst giving a Baird's Sandpiper a good 'grilling' on the beach a congregation of waders assembled. There were only about 10-12 birds present together amongst the seaweed but there were singles of Ringed Plover, Knot, Turnstone, Sanderling and a few Dunlin. Lying on my belly looking at them at amazingly close quarters watching the size comparisons was a wonderful experience.

Where was your favourite birding trip?

There have been a few good ones but one to Spain with some great friends takes some beating. Down on the Mediterranean coast near Tarifa watching Honey Buzzards crossing the Med in their droves like the Luftwaffe was something to behold.

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

I still manage to play football (for now at least) and continue to follow my beloved Hammers. Listening to live music and visiting breweries trying an array of real ales helps the winter evenings pass easier. I enjoy walking which is just as well as a large amount of my recent birding has involved lots of it doing Atlas work.

Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

Anywhere that's within an hour of Chard but being Somerset born and bred I like to be loyal to our county. Living on the border of 3 counties you're always hopping from one to another which makes it interesting. I would like to spend more time on the Somerset coast and hope the new reserve at Steart brings in some varied birds for us.

What are your five desert island birds, and why?

Not in any particular order:

1. Ring Ouzel. The first really 'exciting' bird I ever found as a child. In Tatworth a male on my grandfather's TV aerial probably got my enthusiasm going. Thinking at the time Ouzels must be easy, how wrong I was! Hands up as the record never got submitted (sorry).
2. Dipper. Another bird I grew up with and never tired of. I just loved watching them feed and 'swim' under water. Oh and they can sing a bit as well!
3. Firecrest. How can such a bird be so much fun? Similar in size to Goldcrest but here the comparison ends. They are truly stunning little birds.
4. Nightjar. First time I saw one the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. Very mysterious creatures.
5. Roller. Such vivid colours for a European bird, if only they'd turn up more often. Maybe global warming will have some plus side to it?

And your book and luxury item?

My trusted Collins Field Guide would do depending where I was stranded of course. Presuming I already had binoculars with me, I would like a radio that could pick up football results.

Where shall I go birding today?

Winter might be cold and the days short, but it can be one of the most exciting times for birdwatchers.

December

It's another Waxwing year. Taunton always seems to get at least one flock in influx years, but last time around towns from Frome to Minehead shared in the fun. Check out any areas of berry-bearing trees or shrubs - supermarket car parks are traditionally favoured sites, so you might even get a nice bonus while doing the Christmas shopping.

It's also a good month for divers - try Minehead or other points west for regular Red-throateds and an occasional Black-throated or Great Northern. The latter also regularly turn up on Cheddar Reservoir, which will also almost certainly host a Scaup or two and perhaps something rarer like a Black-necked Grebe.

January

A new year, and the list-minded will be out trying to rack up a decent total. The Steart/Stolford area is always a likely bet, with good chances of Avocets in the Parrett estuary, Brent Geese and seaduck off Stolford, and probably a Short-eared Owl or two along with raptors and masses of waders around Steart itself.

The Brue estuary is a good spot for a wintering Spotted Redshank or two, and with a bit more effort perhaps a Jack Snipe.

On the Levels all the usuals should be around, and the Starling roost will build towards its peak. Look for Whooper Swans around Sharpham, and small groups of Bewick's Swans could turn up anywhere.

February

It could be another good winter for Bramblings - look for them near beech trees, and even possibly in your garden. One classic spot is in the Brendons, along the road between Ralegh's Cross and Wimbleball Lake.

Any prolonged period of stormy weather might produce a 'wreck' of seabirds, particularly Kittiwakes and even Leach's Petrels, in Bridgwater Bay.

Greylake is always a good bet for raptors, usually including Hen Harrier, as well as impressive flocks of Golden Plovers and winter thrushes, and the best chance of a wintering Ruff.

Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers will start to get active in the Quantock and Exmoor combes later in the month too.

Walks and talks

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

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

December			
15	Walk	SOS	Cary Moor. Focus: winter passerines and marshland birds. Leaders: John Hansford and Bruce Taylor. Meet at 0900 at Carymoor Environmental Centre building (ST617312). Wellies advisable.
18	Event	SWT	An Evening with Stephen Moss. Starts 1900. Enjoy an evening in a pub with Stephen Moss, BBC Springwatch producer, author, local wildlife expert and vice-president of the Somerset Wildlife Trust (not to mention SOS committee member). Stephen will read from his recent book Wild Hares and Hummingbirds and answer questions. Supper (and wine) included. £25.00. The Swan, Cheddar Road, Wedmore, BS28 4EQ. Booking through the pub on 01934 710337.
19	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! West Sedgemoor. 1000-1200. A warden-led walk in a part of the reserve not normally open to the public where thousands of ducks and waders flock. Hot refreshments provided. Warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear essential. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under-18s free. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
26	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19th.
31	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19th.

January

6	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19 December.
6	Walk	SWT	Uphill and the Axe Estuary. 1330-1530. Focus: wintering birds. Meet at the car park near the Dolphin pub in Uphill Way (ST 315 585, BS23 4TN) Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.
9	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19 December.
9	Walk	RSPB	Bird watching for beginners. 1400-1700, RSPB Ham Wall. The reserve wardens will take you through all the steps for wildlife identification as well as providing background information about the species seen. No previous experience required. The walk is followed by delicious soup, homemade cookies and hot drinks at Meare Manor (included in price) £6.50 per person. Booking essential, contact Meare Manor 01458 860449.
12	Walk	SOS	Cheddar Reservoir. Focus: wildfowl. Leaders: Stephen Moss and Brian Hill. Meet 0930 at the Cheddar car park (ST446535;).
16	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19 December.
17	Talk	SOS	Bird Slaughter in Cyprus. Liz Browne talks about the continuing hunting pressure on migrant birds crossing the Mediterranean. Starts 1930. Ruishton Village Hall, Ruishton, nr Taunton (ST268270, TA3 5JE).
20	Walk	SWT	Winter Walk in Harridge Woods. 1000-1230. Walk led by Adel Avery (Volunteer Warden) for wintering wildlife and a review of the work of the conservation volunteers. Park at ST648484. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility Adults £2.50; Children £1.00.
25	Talk	SWT	Picture a Bird. 1930-2100. Illustrated talk by John Crabb, who has developed novel techniques to capture images of birds in flight. Parish Hall, North St, Ilminster (ST361147, TA19 0DG). Parking at roadside or West St car park. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2, children free. Refreshments available.
26	Walk	RSPB	Big Wetland Duck Watch! 1000-1330, RSPB West Sedgemoor. A walk to see where thousands of ducks and waders flock to at West Sedgemoor, then after the walk to make birdfeeders to take home. RSPB members £2, non-members £5, under 18s free. Pay on the day. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk
26/ 27	Event	RSPB	Big Garden Birdwatch. The annual event where sightings from your garden can help build up a national snapshot of wintering birds.
27	Walk	SWT	Boons Copse Wildlife Stroll. 1030-1230. Visit Boons Copse, West Hatch, nr Taunton - an ancient woodland relict of the original Neroche Royal Forest. Help identify which birds used the nestboxes on the reserve and clean them ready for the next season. Park at ST282197. Reserve entrance is to the northwest through a field. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility.

February

2	Walk	SOS	Stearth. Focus: wintering waders, wildfowl and raptors. Leaders: Dick Best and Brian Gibbs. Meet at 0930 at NE car park (ST279460).
3	Walk	SWT	Cheddar Reservoir. 1400-1600. A walk around the reservoir learning how to identify wintering ducks, led by Brian Roberts-Wray. Park at Sharpham Road car park (ST446534, BS27 3DR). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.
6	Talk	SWT	The Story behind Britain's first nesting Great White Egrets. Starts 1945. The big news of 2012. Kevin Anderson illustrates this talk on how it all happened. Shapwick Village Hall, Shapwick (ST418384). Parking available. Children welcome. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.
10	Walk	RSPB	Birdwatching for beginners. 1000-1130, RSPB Greylake. £2 RSPB members, £4 non-members, under 18s free of charge. Booking essential. Call 07774 620879 or email west.sedgemoor@rspb.org.uk.
13	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19 December.
14	Talk	SWT	Buzzard: Territories, Behaviour and Social Interactions. Starts 1930. Robin Prytherch talks about his observations while studying buzzards near Bristol for over 30 years. The United Reform Church Hall, West Street, Somerton. Parking close by near Williams Supermarket. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £3.
21	Talk	SOS	Birds and Landscapes of East Germany. Starts 1930. Roger White gives us an insight into the attractions of an area rarely visited by British birders. Ruishton Village Hall, Ruishton, nr Taunton (ST268270, TA3 5JE).
23	Walk	SWT	Winter Wildlife at Alfred's Tower. 1000-1230. A walk with Eve Tigwell through part of the ancient Forest of Selwood to look for wintering wildlife. Park at Alfred's Tower ST749354. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility Adults £2.50; Children £1.00.
24	Walk	RSPB	Ducktastic! As 19 December.
26	Talk	SWT	The Great Crane Project. 1930-2100. Damon Bridge or another speaker from the Project will give an update on the progress of the project so far and answer questions. Wells Museum, Cathedral Green, BA5 2UE. Doors open at 7pm. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non members £3.00.
28	Talk	SWT	West Somerset Bird Life - past and present. 1930-2130. Ringer (and long-serving ex-SOS committee member) John Webber will be looking at the loss of habitats and the changes that have occurred in West Somerset over the last 60+ years. Meeting at the EMN hall, Monksilver. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50.

On behalf of Somerset Ornithological Society - www.somersetbirds.net

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