



# The Bittern

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The newsletter of the Somerset Ornithological Society

## More changes to the British List

**Julian Thomas** on how the old order is changing

For birders of my generation who grew up with field guides showing species in Voous order, the changes in recent years to the sequence of birds on the official lists have been unsettling, to say the least. Still more so for birdwatchers who are older still, and who grew up with the Wetmore order, which had crows at the end, the crown of the evolutionary tree, on the grounds of their intelligence. It's certainly an exciting time for those with an interest in taxonomy, as the advent of relatively easy and cheap DNA sequencing has thrown up many unexpected results, and has resulted in many changes.



World birders have had to get used to a whole plethora of new families even, and a succession of otherwise relatively uninspiring LBJs (little brown jobs) have suddenly become more desirable.

The situation is thankfully rather simpler in a British context, and more so again in a Somerset one. We still have to embrace the changes though - SOS policy has long been to follow the official British List maintained by the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU). And so it is that you have seen the order of species change in *Somerset Birds* in recent years, one of the most noticeable changes being the promotion (or should that be demotion, given that the list goes from the most primitive to the most advanced) to the start of the list of Galloanserae. Or wildfowl and gamebirds to you and me. Grebes, far from being the really primitive birds we once thought, now fall between herons and birds of prey. Changes to the order of passerine families have been wide-ranging too, with crows near the front and pipits near the back - the exact opposite of how it used to be - and lots of others jumbled up in between, including the break-up of the old, monolithic warbler family into several new families which aren't necessarily each other's nearest relatives.

And now here comes a new set of revelations, which the BOU has adopted, and which SOS will no doubt also follow, perhaps even in time for this year's report and the forthcoming Somerset Atlas. Most radically, it seems that falcons are not that closely related to other diurnal birds of prey, and now appear after the traditional final family of the non-passerines, the woodpeckers, to be followed by parrots, which have also moved in the sequence, though not quite so far. Compared to these the shake-up within the waders and gulls order seems like small beer.

Of course, for many SOS members this will not matter a whit. Any taxonomic list is an artificial construct, and coming across a singing Grey Wagtail on an Exmoor stream (for instance) is still a wonderful, intimate encounter with a beautiful bird regardless of where it falls in a man-made list. Finding it in a book or a report, on the other hand, now takes an act of memory where once it was effortless. To help out, a full list of families in the latest order is given on page 9.

Exciting times, but it's all going to take a bit of getting used to...

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## Welcome

Hello again!

After a slow start to the spring, most migrants arrived more or less on time, though while some species such as Blackcaps seem to be everywhere, others such as Spotted Flycatchers seem to have arrived both late and in smaller numbers than might have been hoped. Time will tell whether what appears to be the case in one small corner of South Somerset has been replicated elsewhere in the county, or whether other observers have a completely different impression. Differences between areas even on a local scale are one of the things that make this hobby so fascinating.

In this issue Brian Gibbs follows up issue 8's round-up of sites on the Avalon Marshes with an entertaining and informative guide to birding on the Quantocks. As I've noted before, the site guides on the website are out of date now, but it may be some time before we can update them. So in the meantime I hope that guides to areas such as Brian's will help inform and improve days out in the field, for new birdwatchers and old hands alike. We'll be aiming to do more of these in future issues, and eventually to use them as the basis for new online site guides.

The vexed issue of what to post or not post on the messageboard has raised its head again recently, as it does every spring, this time coinciding with news of a Peregrine being shot in Devon (see page 4). It is difficult to set hard and fast rules, and to strike the right balance between spreading news of special birds that people want to share and enjoy and safeguarding the welfare of the birds and their habitat. Even among the committee people have different opinions on the subject, quite naturally. All I would ask is that members read the guidance on the website carefully and use their judgment - in most cases spreading the word is fine, but in a few cases it can have unintended consequences. Please contact Brian Gibbs or myself if you are in doubt. Oh, and don't forget to enjoy your birding!



**Julian Thomas, Editor**

**Email: [julian.thomas@somersetbirds.net](mailto:julian.thomas@somersetbirds.net)**

**Phone/text: 07764165417**

# Help required

Some ways in which you can help out and make your birding count (contributed by **Roger Dickey**)

## Routes to the River Tone - An opportunity to develop Patch Birding in Taunton

Taunton is, on the face of it, a typical urban town, but a quick glance at an Ordnance Survey map shows Taunton as a rich tapestry of interwoven green spaces and waterways. These places are teeming with an huge variety of wildlife and an exciting new project has just started aimed at encouraging residents to explore those spaces and the wildlife they contain.

The **Routes to the River Tone** is a three year partnership project, led by the Somerset Wildlife Trust, and funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund. As well as encouraging residents to explore their town, the project will, through series of events, activities, training programmes and surveys, inspire and enthuse communities to not only see the beauty that already exists in their town, but encourage them to play an active role in making the town a richer place for wildlife and for people and to create a joined-up network of natural places where wildlife can thrive and people can feel alive.

The organisers from Somerset Wildlife Trust are only just getting started, but are already looking for volunteers to help by mapping birdlife across the town, and with a big bat survey (training and equipment provided). Some examples of information required include the locations of Taunton's Swift populations; where are most of its House Sparrows roosting and nesting; and what species use its parks, waterways and brownfield sites? There will be plenty of other opportunities for individuals and groups to get involved and help shape where the project goes. For instance, what does Somerset Ornithological Society want to know about the birds of Taunton?

Somerset Wildlife Trust will be launching a project website but, in the meantime, you can find out a little more about the project on the Trust's website at [http://www.somersetwildlife.org/taunton\\_living\\_landscape.html](http://www.somersetwildlife.org/taunton_living_landscape.html) or, if you would like to get involved with the big bat survey, then please do get in touch directly ([nick.tomlinson@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:nick.tomlinson@somersetwildlife.org)) .

## Request for birders from Viridor

Adrian Bailey from Viridor is asking for help with providing information on how the two sites that he manages on behalf of Viridor Waste Management can contribute to the living landscape particularly in relation to birds.

He's currently looking after two closed/restored landfill sites in Somerset (Odcombe, near Yeovil and Poole, near Wellington), both of which hold the Wildlife Trust Biodiversity Benchmark accreditation. The sites are restored, predominantly, to grassland and woodland (with some other smaller habitat features) and have Biodiversity Action Plans.

If you have any suggestions as to how we can preserve and enhance the ecological value of these sites (and provide access to interested groups/individuals to become involved) he would welcome any feedback. Viridor are due to review their Biodiversity Action Plans on these sites over the next couple of months and this will offer them a great opportunity to ensure that the management of the site fits in with the Living Landscape project. Please go and have a look at the sites if you are in the vicinity or need a birding patch.

Adrian can be contacted using the details below:

Adrian Bailey  
Regional Landfill Aftercare Manager  
07780 608135 | 01929 553531 | Int Ext 323201  
Trigon Landfill, Bere Road, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 7PA

# News

## County Atlas update

We've had to put the publication date for the *Somerset Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds* back once more, this time to November. I know we keep promising and then moving the date, but please bear with us - it's even more frustrating for those of us working desperately hard in our spare time to get it out than it is for those who are still awaiting it. The species maps are done, the text nearly complete, and the rest is in hand, at least.

We've got quite a few good photos now, but you still have the opportunity to contribute if you have good quality high-resolution photos of representative landscapes/habitats from anywhere in the county, but especially the Blackdowns, the south-west, the east and south-east, the Wells/Shepton Mallet area, the South Levels or the coast. We're still really in need of a good urban habitat shot too - it doesn't have to be scenic, in fact better in some ways if it's not - suitable habitat for breeding gulls or Swifts might do the trick nicely.

## National Atlas maps online

Speaking of Atlases, the maps for the 2007-11 national Atlas project are now available online, at <http://blx1.bto.org/mapstore/StoreServlet> or via [bto.org.uk](http://bto.org.uk). All the maps which appear in the book are there if you didn't get a copy of it, or want to look something up when the book isn't to hand. Not only that, there are plenty of other maps which there wasn't space for in the book - 3,500 maps in total according to the BTO. Also there you'll find details of the BTO's Beyond the Maps programme of research, attempting to find out the reasons for the distributions of certain species identified by the Atlas, particularly where they have declined (in some cases alarmingly). There is also an opportunity to donate to an appeal raising funds for the Beyond the Maps programme (if you wish).

## BirdTrack

Eve Tigwell, BTO representative for Somerset, reminds me that logging your sightings in BirdTrack is an excellent way to continue to contribute your records to the national picture as well as the local one. Sounds good to me.

## Peregrine shooting

A timely reminder that the persecution of birds of prey is not restricted to Northern England and Scotland comes in the form of the awful tale of a Peregrine found shot and injured in Seaton, East Devon in May. The bird was taken into care but later died of its injuries. We don't think there is a big problem with raptor persecution in the South West, but this shocking case shows that the risk is always there. So please be careful about giving out any information which might lead to the identification of a breeding site for any bird of prey to anyone you do not know well, and do not post such details on the SOS messageboard. Please do, however, contact County Recorder Brian Gibbs with the details, not only so that we have the record (and don't forget there is a national Peregrine survey going on this summer), but also so that we can consult with conservation organisations as appropriate if there is a nest which needs special protection.

## Avalon Marshes festival

The annual Avalon Marshes festival runs from 12 to 27 July this year, and as ever is a celebration of the diversity of wildlife and the 10,000 years of cultural heritage of this wonderful area. The Avalon Marshes Day which kicks it all off on 12 July and a few events which are specifically bird-related or likely to be of interest to birdwatchers are featured in the Walks and talks section at the end of this issue, but there are many more events going on over the two weeks, some at least of which are bound to appeal to SOS members' various other interests. These cover a wide range of subjects - butterflies, moths, bats, and other general wildlife interest, as well as local history and archaeology, art exhibitions and a farmers' market. Even a night wildlife safari and opportunities to see Ham Wall RSPB reserve by canoe! Looking through the programme there is something for all ages, and many of the daytime events are specifically designed to be of interest to families with children.

The festival events are organised by the Avalon Marshes Landscape Partnership, its partner organisations, the local community and businesses. A full listing and further information about the festival events are at [www.avalonmarshes.org](http://www.avalonmarshes.org). If you wish to get involved in the festival or the project please contact the Avalon Marshes Landscape Partnership team.

## GPS tracking of Gannets reveals impact of fishing vessels

A team of scientists from Exeter University and University College, Cork have used GPS tracking data to show that fishing vessels have a far bigger ecological footprint than previously thought, in research published in early June in the journal *Current Biology*. The team attached GPS tracking devices to 74 Gannets from six colonies around Ireland and compared the data to similar GPS data from fishing vessels.

Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) dive for fish, of course, and unlike tube-nosed seabirds such as shearwaters and storm-petrels which have extraordinary senses of smell, they are primarily visual foragers. Gannet populations have been steadily increasing for decades, and studies have confirmed that they are also making use of waste from fishing vessels by eating fish that have come from far deeper than they are able to dive. What this research has revealed is that Gannet behaviour is influenced by the presence and activity of fishing vessels at distances of up to 11km!

Dr Thomas Bodey of the University of Exeter, who led the study, said: 'Our work suggests each fishing vessel has a substantial footprint, with the behaviour of seabirds affected within a 22km diameter circle surrounding it, much larger than we expected.'

By studying bird-boat interactions, the team also discovered that individual Gannets can adjust their behaviour depending on whether the vessel is actively fishing or not, and also based on the type of fishing gear carried.

Dr Mark Jessopp of the Coastal & Marine Centre at University College Cork, a co-author of the work, added: 'The fact that birds responded differently to boats depending on whether they were fishing or not, and the type of gear they were carrying, indicates just how finely attuned these animals are to the opportunities humans can provide'.

For more details see the news story on the University of Exeter website, at [http://www.exeter.ac.uk/research/newsandevents/news/title\\_384340\\_en.html?utm\\_source=exeter.ac.uk&utm\\_medium=billboard&utm\\_campaign=ResearchGannetnav](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/research/newsandevents/news/title_384340_en.html?utm_source=exeter.ac.uk&utm_medium=billboard&utm_campaign=ResearchGannetnav)



# Finding your way around the Quantocks

Brian Gibbs gives a brief guide to some of the popular sites on the Quantocks and directions on how to cover them.

There are many more and a number of birds that we don't receive records for - if you come across them why not send the records in.



## Hodder's Combe area

For Hodder's Combe park in the car park at Holford Green (ST154410) and follow the track up into the combe. The first section is usually relatively quiet although a Dipper is sometimes seen on the stream that runs parallel with the track. It is not until just before the first ford that you usually encounter the woodland species that most people come to see: Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Wood Warbler. Although Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are present in these combes it is more likely you will come across the larger Greater Spotted. As you continue up the combe another forks off on the left - this is Somerton Combe and like the other which branches off a little further along, the strangely named Slaughterhouse Combe, it contains the same species. Further along Hodder's Combe becomes Sheppard's Combe. This then climbs up onto the open hill at Bicknoller Post - here there is an almost complete change of species from woodland to amongst others Tree Pipit, Yellowhammer, Willow Warblers and nearer the top Stonechats.

## Holford Combe

Again park in the Holford Green car park but this time walk back down the road and turn up and walk along Combe Lane and you will find yourselves entering the bottom of Holford Combe. Similar species to those found in Hodder's Combe are present and the smaller combes that branch off of here as well, namely Frog Combe and Lady Combe.

## Bin Combe

Park in the layby on the minor road named Five Lords (ST163388) that runs from Dead Woman's Ditch to the A39 and walk down into the combe. The same species that are found in Hodder's Combe are here in smaller numbers, but it is relatively sheltered from the winds with a southerly bias.

## Bicknoller Combe and Weacombe

Park in Hill Road, Bicknoller near the gate (ST113398) where the road terminates; there is room for a couple of cars but otherwise park further back in the village. Walk up the combe to Bicknoller Post - red deer are often seen lying on the tops of the sides as you progress. Species likely to be seen here include Redstarts, Yellowhammers, Tree Pipits and the occasional Cuckoo. Kestrels and Buzzards are often seen; more unusual is the odd Hobby hunting overhead. At the top of the combe there are usually a number of Stonechats, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks. It is possible then to walk down the east side of Weacombe Hill across the southern end and back up the west side to Bicknoller Post. This area is good for passage Wheatears and was formerly a stronghold for Whinchats although you will be lucky to come across one nowadays. From Bicknoller Post you can return down through Weacombe Combe, which runs off to the SW and at the bottom follow the footpath along the edge of the hill to your car in Bicknoller.

## Staple Plain and Beacon Hill

Most local people know the area as Staple Plain but the name does not appear on the OS map; parking is at ST116410. The walk from here is by following the track from the car park to the NE skirting Beacon Hill on your right and continuing when you reach the cross track to the right towards Bicknoller Post and the return is back down the main ridge track to your car. The area is particularly good for birds of the open hill namely Stonechat, Yellowhammers, Meadow Pipits and Skylark. Nightjars are also present but they are not as easy to see here as they used to be. This was an area favoured by Dartford Warblers before their crash in the winter of 2009/10, and if they are to make a comeback on the Quantocks this will be one of the most likely places to see them. If Wheatears breed on the Quantocks then this is also the mostly likely area with birds seen through the summer in some years.

## Lydeard Hill and Wills Neck

Park in the car park at Lydeard Hill (ST180338). From the car park walk along the edge of Muchcare Wood to the NE and then when reaching the fenced field turn to the west following the path to the gate across the main track. This area is excellent for Redstarts, Whitethroats, Yellowhammers and Tree Pipits. The walk then continues along the main spine track and until a track goes up over the open hill to Wills Neck, the highest point on the Quantocks at 386m. As with similar areas on these hills it is very good for Stonechats and Skylarks. Siskins and Lesser Redpolls from the Quantock Forest frequently overfly here as well, with the occasional Crossbill seen more towards the northern flank of Wills Neck.

## Cothelstone Hill

A place that birders seem to neglect, but it does hold a number of species in a relatively small area - the car park is at ST200328. Although very popular with dog walkers the birds here are perhaps more tolerant than at some other sites because of the number of people using the area. If you walk from the car park along the main track after about 400m go into the clearing on your left where there is a picnic table and then follow the small path to the SW which goes along the top edge of Buncombe Wood. Along this path there is the occasional Pied Flycatcher and more common woodland species. At the end of the path turn right and out on to the open area of Cothelstone Hill. This area is probably one of the best in the county for Tree Pipits, along with good numbers of Redstarts, Yellowhammers, Whitethroats and Willow Warblers.

## Broomfield Hill

Very similar to Cothelstone Hill with equally good numbers of the species described for there found here as well, but usually less people! Park along the road at ST211326. I found the best way to cover this area is to walk to the NW from the car with the field on your right-hand side and then go through the footpath gate into the open area overlooking Travellers Rest before going back to the circular walk around the scrubby area centred on ST215329. Tree Pipits and Yellowhammers are at quite a high density here.

# Order of families on the Somerset List

Following on from the story on page 1, here is the new list of families on the official BOU British List in taxonomic order, minus a few that are only represented by vagrants which have not occurred in Somerset.

| Family name       | Common name<br>(representative species) |
|-------------------|---|
| Anatidae          | Ducks, geese, swans                     |
| Phasianidae       | Pheasants, quail, grouse                |
| Gaviidae          | Divers                                  |
| Diomedidae        | Albatrosses                             |
| Procellariidae    | Shearwaters                             |
| Hydrobatidae      | Storm-petrels                           |
| Sulidae           | Gannets                                 |
| Phalacrocoracidae | Cormorants                              |
| Ardeidae          | Hérons                                  |
| Ciconiidae        | Storks                                  |
| Threskiornithidae | Ibises, spoonbills                      |
| Podicipedidae     | Grebes                                  |
| Accipitridae      | Hawks                                   |
| Pandionidae       | Osprey                                  |
| Rallidae          | Rails, coots                            |
| Gruidae           | Cranes                                  |
| Otididae          | Bustards                                |
| Burhinidae        | Stone-curlews                           |
| Recurvirostridae  | Avocets, stilts                         |
| Haematopodidae    | Oystercatchers                          |
| Charadriidae      | Plovers                                 |
| Scolopacidae      | Sandpipers                              |
| Glareolidae       | Pratincoles, coursers                   |
| Stercorariidae    | Skuas                                   |
| Alcidae           | Auks                                    |
| Sternidae         | Terns                                   |
| Laridae           | Gulls                                   |
| Pteroclididae     | Sandgrouse                              |
| Columbidae        | Pigeons, doves                          |
| Cuculidae         | Cuckoos                                 |
| Tytonidae         | Barn owls                               |
| Strigidae         | Owls                                    |
| Caprimulgidae     | Nightjars                               |
| Apodidae          | Swifts                                  |
| Upupidae          | Hoopoe                                  |
| Meropidae         | Bee-eaters                              |
| Coraciidae        | Rollers                                 |

| Family name    | Common name<br>(representative species) |
|----------------|---|
| Alcedinidae    | Kingfishers                             |
| Picidae        | Woodpeckers                             |
| Falconidae     | Falcons                                 |
| Psittacidae    | Parrots                                 |
| Oriolidae      | Orioles                                 |
| Laniidae       | Shrikes                                 |
| Corvidae       | Crows                                   |
| Regulidae      | Kinglets (Goldcrest, Firecrest)         |
| Remizidae      | Penduline tits                          |
| Paridae        | Tits                                    |
| Panuridae      | Bearded Tit                             |
| Alaudidae      | Larks                                   |
| Hirundinidae   | Swallows                                |
| Cettiidae      | Bush warblers (Cetti's Warbler)         |
| Aegithalidae   | Long-tailed tits                        |
| Phylloscopidae | Leaf warblers (e.g. Chiffchaff)         |
| Sylviidae      | Scrub warblers (e.g. Whitethroat)       |
| Locustellidae  | Grassbirds (e.g. Grasshopper Warbler)   |
| Acrocephalidae | Reed warblers                           |
| Bombycillidae  | Waxwings                                |
| Tichodromidae  | Wallcreeper                             |
| Sittidae       | Nuthatches                              |
| Certhiidae     | Treecreepers                            |
| Troglodytidae  | Wrens                                   |
| Sturnidae      | Starlings                               |
| Cinclidae      | Dippers                                 |
| Muscicapidae   | Thrushes, chats, flycatchers            |
| Prunellidae    | Accentors (Duncock)                     |
| Passeridae     | Sparrows                                |
| Motacillidae   | Wagtails, pipits                        |
| Fringillidae   | Finches                                 |
| Emberizidae    | Buntings                                |

# Spotlight on... Nightingale

In another in this occasional series, Julian Thomas writes about this unassuming virtuoso.

The song of the Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) is legendary, so much so that many talented human singers have been given its name as an accolade. The name 'Nightingale' is Anglo-Saxon in origin and dates back over 1,000 years - as might be expected it means 'night singer', after their habit of singing strongly during the hours of darkness. The song is so rich and varied that few other British birds come close to matching it - perhaps Blackbird and Blackcap at their best. And yet, even more so than those two, its plumage does not match its virtuoso vocal repertoire, being a rather nondescript soft russet-brown, more rufous on the tail, and off-white or pale buff below. Be that as it may, it is still one of those birds that many birders look forward to hearing and seeing every spring.

It is essentially a southern species, right at the north-western edge of its range in Britain, and replaced in northern and eastern Europe by the similar Thrush Nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*), which is a rare vagrant to Britain and has never been recorded in Somerset.



Across Britain the Nightingale is declining and restricted ever more to the south and east - our birds are probably the most westerly regular breeding population remaining in the country, with South Somerset being the undoubted stronghold for the species in the county. The national survey in 2012 could only find 35 singing males in Somerset, compared to 116 in 1999, a worrying drop even if some allowance is made for the poor weather during the survey season - nationally the picture is even worse, as it revealed a 91% drop in numbers in just 40 years. For this reason SOS tends not to publish sites openly (not on the internet, at least), but the biggest population is well protected behind the fences of the Royal Navy airfield at Merryfield, near Ilminster. The well-publicised singing male at Ham Wall this spring is an exception to the general rule somewhat unintentionally, but it's hard to keep quiet about a bird that makes its presence so obvious to all comers!

The reasons for the decline are still unclear, but scrub clearance, browsing of woodland undergrowth by deer, and wetter springs, as well as repeated droughts in their West African wintering grounds all may have had their effect.

Their favoured habitat is scrubby areas and dense thickets in lowland woods, and, as is often the case with birds with sombre plumage but big voices, Nightingales can be very shy and retiring, making them notoriously difficult to see. Not so on the Continent, though, where they may often sit out and sing from an open perch. Crucially, if you want to see one, some of our birds do this too (though they rarely show as well as in the excellent photograph above taken by Gary Thoburn), but only for a short while when they first return in mid to late April. After that they revert to type, and are virtually impossible to find once they cease singing altogether in mid-June.

# Desert Island Birds

Based loosely on the famous radio show, each issue we will feature a prominent (or not so prominent) Somerset birder. This issue's castaway is SOS Rarities Committee chairman **James Packer**.



Emma Packer

## How and when did you get into birdwatching?

My youngest 'birding' memory was throwing chips to gulls out a hotel window in Torquay. My mum was pregnant with my sister, so that puts the date at about 1972. Of course, it might be one of those stories that you only remember because your parents keep going on about it! The first 'proper' birds I remember seeing were American Golden Plover and Marbled Duck on Cheddar Reservoir in 1984. That's 30 years ago, which is quite scary!

## What is your favourite birding memory?

Last year Emma and I arrived in Miami late at night, and early the next morning drove to the Wakodahatchee Wetlands. The place was alive with bird song - pretty much all of it I didn't recognise. There were birds everywhere, and from the stunning boardwalk were point blank views of new birds around every corner. It was a combination of being in an unfamiliar country at a site with an overload of unfamiliar bird sound, smells and views. I said to Emma at the time "it's like being in a birding dream, but better!" Had we visited the site two weeks into the trip, the sensory overload would have no doubt been diluted, but that experience was a never to be forgotten one.

## Where was your favourite birding trip?

I've been on a few superb trips, but one that will live long in my memory was a trip to Zimbabwe in 1999. It wasn't a hard core birding trip, but the wildlife we saw was spectacular. What made the trip special was that very soon after we left, things in the country started to go horribly wrong very quickly. I'm not a political person, but it soon became apparent that many of the country's residents, as well as its stunning reserves and wildlife, were suffering from the consequences of its political leader. The memories I have of a country with lovely people, fantastic wildlife and stunning scenery are tinged with sadness. Unfortunately I don't expect it's a country I'll ever revisit!

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

Sleep? But then, that wouldn't be strictly true because I've seen some good birds in my sleep. Once I had a Bewick's Wren at Berrow. I couldn't have dreamt a more unlikely occurrence and I never did submit it to BBRC.

## Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

I'm easily tempted by new birds that I can see or photograph, so I enjoy birdwatching anywhere there's a chance of this happening! That's probably not very scientific, but I am really happy birding anywhere. Except, seawatching off Burnham or traipsing over Brean Down - these are the two activities most likely to result in disappointment currently known to birders. Of course, I still do these two things, but often I wonder why!

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

**Resplendent Quetzal** because it's exotic, smart, has an interesting name, and I've seen one, so is a good talking point. Mind you, I'm guessing there might not be many people to chat to, so I guess I'll be talking about it to myself!

**Mute Swan** because it might remind me of home and if I get hungry it would probably taste nice.

**Hooded Vulture** so that it could clear up all my bits of left over rubbish and isn't too big to get intimidating.

A **Yellow-browed Warbler** because there's a relatively easy chance of finding it and knowing that you've had a good day.

A **Magpie** because it's a totally under-rated species with amazing adaptivity that deserves more respect. It's bound to give me some good ideas about how to survive.

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

A book? That's a tricky one. The standard answer would be the field guide to the region, but in the circumstances I'm not sure that would be much use. Could I take the BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11? It's so huge that I'm sure I could find a use for it. Even after I've used it to start a fire, make a paper water collecting device and an origami water filter, I'm sure there will be plenty of it left to read in the evenings.

Luxury item would be a camera with an ever-lasting battery and memory card. I'm sure I could accumulate a good collection of wildlife images for later identification. I can see my own island photo ID guide coming up - drop me off!

# Walks and talks

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

We try to include either a grid reference or a postcode (for satnav users) for the meeting points, often both. Charges and booking details are given where known for non-SOS events, but please check with the organisers. Being the summer, there aren't many bird-related events going on, but loads to do with butterflies, moths, bats, and plants, so if you're also into any of those groups check out the various organisations' websites - there's sure to be something for you to enjoy.

| June |              |      |   |
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| 5    | Walk         | RSPB | Ashcott Corner. Starts 1000. A walk of 2-4 miles led by Eric Luxton. Meet at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Free.   |
| 7    | Walk         | SOS  | Alfred's Tower. Leaders: Bruce Taylor and Jeff Hazell. Meet at 0930 at car park (ST745352)  |
| 11   | Family event | RSPB | A date with nature at the Bishop's Palace, Wells. 1000-1600. Meet near the drawbridge. Activities suitable for all ages. RSPB activities free, entry charge to the Bishop's Palace and gardens. Adjacent to Wells Cathedral and is easily accessed from the Market Square. It is in easy walking distance from the bus station and from all central car parks in Wells. Please note: Whiting car park is used for markets on Wednesdays.                    |
| 14   | Walk         | SWT  | Conservation of Somerset Levels & Moors. 1100-1600. Led by Steve Parker. A visit to part of Natural England's NNR at South Lake Moor to see wildlife characteristic of the area. Free but numbers restricted so booking essential (01460 234551). Meet at National Trust car park at Burrowbridge ST360305. Bring your own packed lunch / refreshments. Uneven ground. Wear suitable footwear. No dogs. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. |
| 15   | Walk         | RSPB | Bossington and Porlock Beach. Starts 1000. A walk of over 4 miles led by John Connolly. Meet at Bossington car park (SS897479).   |
| 15   | Walk         | RSPB | An evening stroll on the Marshes. Ham Wall. 1830-2130. Meet at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). £5.00 per person. Booking essential. Telephone: 01458 860494 or email: ham.wall@rspb.org.uk   |
| 22   | Walk         | SWT  | Jack & Jill Hill. 1000-1230. Leader Jim Rosser. A circular walk up Jack & Jill Hill, then following disused railway line looking for summer flowers, birds & butterflies. Meet at Kilmersdon (ST697523). Some steep hill walking. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.   |
| 28   | Walk         | SOS  | Haddon Hill. Leaders: Nigel Cottle and Brian Hill. Meet at 0930 in car park (SS970287). Focus: birds, butterflies and moths.  |
| 27   | Walk         | RSPB | Staple Hill. Starts 2000. An evening walk of 2-4 miles on rough tracks in the Blackdowns looking for Nightjars, led by Colin Sampson. Meet at forest entrance (ST232162). Free.   |
| 29   | Walk         | RSPB | An evening stroll on the Marshes. Ham Wall. 1830-2130. Meet at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). £5.00 per person. Booking essential. Telephone: 01458 860494 or email: ham.wall@rspb.org.uk   |

July

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| 1  | Walk         | RSPB                        | Dawlish Warren, Devon. Starts 1000. A walk of 2-4 miles on rough paths plus a hide visit, led by John Tolfree. Meet at car park (SX980787). Free.   |
| 12 | Family event | RSPB/<br>NE/<br>SWT/<br>HOT | Avalon Marshes Day. 1100-1700. The first day of the two-week Avalon Marshes Festival, a day for all ages with lots of activities, talks, walks, exhibitions and more relating to the Avalon Marshes. Come along and find out more about the marshes, try your hand at crafts, be part of a mini bio-blitz, walk in the landscape, learn about its history, enjoy local food and whet your appetite for the wider festival and the area as a whole. Some of the activities will be outside including on the adjoining meadows so please be prepared for rain or sun and possible soft ground. Chris Sperring MBE, Hawk & Owl Trust Conservation Officer, will be at the event throughout the day. Red Brick Building, Morland Road, Glastonbury. Free - donations welcome. For full listing and further information about organisations and events involved in the Avalon Marshes Festival events visit <a href="http://www.avalonmarshes.org">www.avalonmarshes.org</a> |
| 19 | Family event | RSPB                        | Wildlife by canoe. Ham Wall. 1000, 1130, 1330, and 1500 (each tour lasting about an hour). A canoeing tour around the reed beds of a usually inaccessible part of the reserve. This event is suitable for families with children and beginners. Meet at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Booking essential. Price: £10 adult / £6 children. Contact RSPB for full details: Telephone: 01458 860494 or email: <a href="mailto:ham.wall@rspb.org.uk">ham.wall@rspb.org.uk</a>   |
| 19 | Walk         | RSPB                        | Chetsford Water, Exmoor. Starts 1000. A walk of over 4 miles on rough paths, led by Ady Gough. Meet at car park above bridge (SS848419). Free.  |
| 19 | Walk         | SWT                         | Orchardleigh Park. 1400-1630. Leader Tony House. A circular walk from the outskirts of Frome around Orchardleigh Lake and golf course for otters, kingfishers and other summer flora and fauna. Meet at the junction of Coalash Lane/Cuckoo Lane and Spring Gardens (ST773497); roadside parking at Innox Hill. No dogs. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.  |
| 23 | Walk         | SWT                         | Owls in the Landscape. 1930-2200. Leader Chris Sperring MBE. A dusk walk through Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve. A chance to learn about and (hopefully) watch owls in their natural environment. Part of SWT's Community Barn Owl project which is jointly run with the Hawk & Owl Trust. Meet at the Avalon Marshes Centre, Shapwick Road, Westhay, Glastonbury, Somerset, BA6 9TT. No dogs. Booking essential. £5.00 For further information email <a href="mailto:info@avalonmarshes.org">info@avalonmarshes.org</a> or phone 01458 860556.   |
| 23 | Family event | RSPB                        | A date with nature at the Bishop's Palace, Wells. 1000-1600. Meet near the drawbridge. Activities suitable for all ages. RSPB activities free, entry charge to the Bishop's Palace and gardens. Adjacent to Wells Cathedral and is easily accessed from the Market Square. It is in easy walking distance from the bus station and from all central car parks in Wells. Please note: Whiting car park is used for markets on Wednesdays.  |
| 24 | Family event | SWT                         | Butterflies, Birds and Bugs: Wildlife in a churchyard. 1330-1600. Discover how the wardens at the Church of St George in Edington have been caring for wildlife in the churchyard. Church of St George, Church Road, Edington TA7 9JT. Free - donations welcome.  |

August

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| 6  | Walk         | RSPB | Westhay Moor. Starts 1000. A walk over 4 miles long, led by John Connolly. Meet at reserve car park (ST456437). Free.  |
| 6  | Walk         | SWT  | Long Wood. 1830-2300. Chris Billingham, the reserve warden, will lead a walk through Long Wood looking at the Cheddar Flood Relief Scheme and the wildlife of the area. Meet at the entrance to the Black Rock reserve on the B3135 (ST483544). Some paths are slippery/steep - stout footwear advisable. Adults £2.00, children free.   |
| 13 | Family event | RSPB | A date with nature at the Bishop's Palace, Wells. 1000-1600. Meet near the drawbridge. Activities suitable for all ages. RSPB activities free, entry charge to the Bishop's Palace and gardens. Adjacent to Wells Cathedral and is easily accessed from the Market Square. It is in easy walking distance from the bus station and from all central car parks in Wells. Please note: Whiting car park is used for markets on Wednesdays. |
| 24 | Walk         | RSPB | Robbers Bridge, Exmoor. Starts 1000. A walk led by Colin Sampson over 4 miles long over rough tracks. Meet at car park (SS821464). Free.   |
| 27 | Family event | RSPB | A date with nature at the Bishop's Palace, Wells. 1000-1600. Meet near the drawbridge. Activities suitable for all ages. RSPB activities free, entry charge to the Bishop's Palace and gardens. Adjacent to Wells Cathedral and is easily accessed from the Market Square. It is in easy walking distance from the bus station and from all central car parks in Wells. Please note: Whiting car park is used for markets on Wednesdays. |

