



Breach made, hides open at Steart Marshes

Julian Thomas reports

After various weather-related delays reported in previous issues of *The Bittern*, work has continued apace this summer at the new WWT Steart Marshes reserve.

Environment Agency contractors made the breach in the sea bank along the Parrett Estuary in August and by early September the work on it was complete, a week ahead of the revised schedule and in time for it to be inundated by the mid-September spring tides. Warm congratulations to Tim McGrath, reserve manager, and all involved for their perseverance in the face of sometimes quite daunting challenges.

Two new hides have also been built and put in position, and are now open to visitors from 9am to 4.30pm each day: the Mendip Hide, which looks north from the viewpoint opened late last year, and the Polden Hide, which looks east from the bank opposite Marsh Farm, north of the reserve car park. Both are made from old shipping containers, refurbished and put to a new use, and are clad in locally sourced timber. I took the picture (right) of the Mendip Hide a few weeks ago, when it had only just been put in place; screening has since been added to allow visitors to approach the hide without causing disturbance. Each can be reached by a short

walk along gravel tracks from the reserve car park, and both offer excellent views over the main scrape area, which has already been visited by impressive numbers of birds. Two pairs of Little Ringed Plovers bred there this year and passage visitors this spring included Stone Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper, and Black and Little Terns.

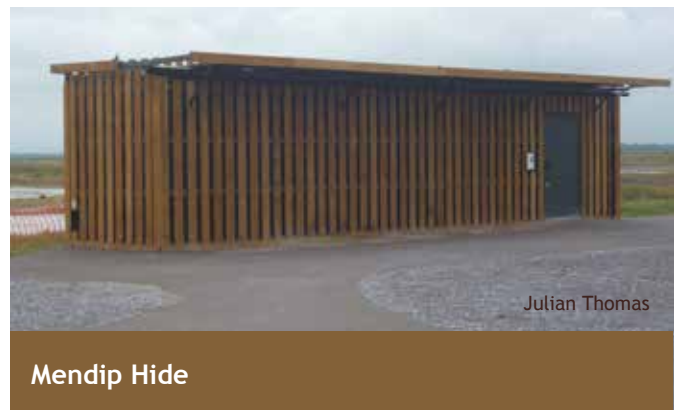
All the paths around the reserve are now also open, including one along the Parrett riverbank allowing access to the site of the breach. The second car park, between Wall Common and Steart village, is also nearing completion and should be open soon, though a date has not yet been made public. Further developments, such as the freshwater area between Marsh Farm and Stockland Bristol are still a little way off, but should add significantly to the interest of the area.

The date for the official opening has not yet been set, but will possibly be in October. For online news and updates from the reserve, keep an eye on steart.wwt.org.uk or follow @WWTSteartMarshes on Twitter.

Meanwhile, more news on planned development of visitor facilities from the Avalon Marshes, where work will begin shortly on the new RSPB car park for Ham Wall, opposite the existing Natural England car park at Ashcott Corner. The car park should be complete by the end of November, nicely in time for the influx of visitors watching the Starling roost, though it may be a little longer before the planned toilet facilities are in place.



Environment Agency



Julian Thomas

Mendip Hide

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Welcome

Hello again!

It's been a busy summer, for birds and people. The good weather seems to have provided bumper crops of insects for passerines to feed their chicks, with many species having multiple broods, and small mammal specialists like Barn Owls also seem to have had a much-needed good breeding season. As for the people, well in my case much time has been spent preparing the county Atlas for publication - nearly there now! But over at Steart Marshes, a lot of very hard work by many people in creating this new and exciting reserve is now coming fully to fruition, as our cover story describes.

Inside, there is what I hope you will find a good mixture of news and articles, from the latest successes and setbacks for rare breeders on the Levels to exploding myths about Magpies, and from the belated addition of another rare vagrant to our county list to the latest results from Mike Trubridge's annual Rook survey in his local area. I'm well known for chasing after rarities (both in Somerset and further afield) but they are the icing on the cake: Mike's efforts have lasting conservation value, and I would dearly like to feature more contributions like his - 'citizen science' at its most fundamental level.

One change you may notice in this issue is in the 'Walks and talks' section. The timing of publication of *The Bittern* has sometimes meant that events early in the month of publication have already happened by the time the issue is available to read. So this issue covers four months, and future issues will cover the three months after the month of publication, e.g. issue 12, due in December, will list events for January-March 2015. Hopefully this will provide a better service to members.

Enjoy the autumn.



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News

Mixed fortunes for rare breeders in the Avalon Marshes

With another breeding season now over, reports are coming in from the Avalon Marshes reserves about the success or otherwise of a number of rare species.

Simon Clarke, senior reserves manager for Natural England, emailed: 'Very sadly it looks like we didn't have any successful Great White Egret nests at Shapwick Heath this year. At one stage we had two and possibly three nests but all proved unsuccessful with no young reported. However it's been a good year at Shapwick for many of our other key species: we've had lots of reports of good numbers of Bearded Tits in the area with some flocks containing juveniles and data suggests our Marsh Harriers and Bitterns also had a good year. We are currently analysing data to see exactly how they got on. Alongside our partners at the RSPB we are also hoping to organise some Bearded Tit surveys in the next few weeks and if anyone is interested in that or wider species surveys please contact Simon Clarke at Natural England on 01458 860120 or e-mail simon.clarke@naturalengland.org.uk.'

Meanwhile, across the road at Ham Wall, the news on Great White Egrets is rather better, with two nests fledging five young, though away from areas that can be easily viewed by visitors. Less good news about Little Bitterns though. Stephen Couch posted this on the Ham Wall blog on 29 August: 'No females were recorded this year despite many hours put in by volunteers - although 4 barking males were. Until we know where a nest is located and that eggs/chicks are safe from disturbance etc. it is very difficult to report information and manage the situation correctly. As it happens it is our belief that no breeding took place this year but we had to be sure, hence no news until very late on. Apologies if you felt we were being over secretive or coy with information but we try to manage this as sympathetically as we can and the welfare and protection of the animal always comes first. Let's hope next year brings successful breeding back to the Avalon Marshes.'

One successful breeding attempt at Ham Wall that was enjoyed by many visitors, though, was that of a pair of Common Terns. Only the second breeding record for the county, and even more successful than the first, also in the Ham Wall area in 2008, no doubt due to the fiercely protective parents who drove off even the most unassuming of intruders. Two young fledged, and both adults and juveniles stayed around until late August.

Good news also that three pairs of Barn Owls successfully fledged young on Ham Wall this year, a great fillip after a very poor year last year across the county.

Great Crane Project update

Meanwhile, the Great Crane Project were understandably excited to announce in their July newsletter that Cranes built nests and laid eggs on the Somerset Levels this spring, the first in the area for over 400 years. Sadly they failed, as did the pair from the reintroduction project which got as far as hatching chicks at Slimbridge this year, but, as the project points out, it is encouraging news and fosters hope for next year, when more of the released birds will be reaching maturity.

The release of the last batch of 20 young Cranes is also scheduled for later this year. To celebrate the end of the release phase of the project, a special event is being planned for 22 November at Stoke St Gregory - for details of this and everything else to do with the project see www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk

Cheddar Two gets planning permission

On 10 June Sedgemoor Development Committee approved Bristol Water's application to build a new reservoir alongside the current Cheddar Reservoir. As reported in issue 1 of *The Bittern*, the new development, dubbed 'Cheddar Reservoir Two', will have wildlife habitat built into the scheme, as well as the obvious opportunities for wildfowl on the reservoir itself. The scheme still has several hoops to jump through, including approval by the water regulator Ofwat, before any construction could start, but we'll continue to keep an eye on developments. Or see for yourself at www.cheddar-reservoir-two.co.uk

Pied Wheatear: a new species for Somerset, eventually

Among a rash of rarity decisions published on 23 February this year, the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) announced the acceptance of records of three species new to Somerset. Two from 2013, Pied-billed Grebe (see *The Bittern* issue 5) and White-throated Sparrow, will feature in this year's annual *Somerset Birds*, so no more is said about them here.

The other, however, is a record of a Pied Wheatear which has had a long and convoluted journey before finally being accepted.

Many will already know of Brian Slade's enviable track record of finding rare and scarce birds in and around the Burnham-on-Sea/Berrow area over many years, among his many other contributions to Somerset birding. On the morning of 30 November 2003, Brian and John Ingram found a wheatear at the mouth of the Brue Estuary, at the south end of Burnham seafront. Given the late date even a (Northern) Wheatear would have been interesting enough, but immediately this appeared to be something different: it had a lot of white in the tail for starters. Brian took some video and phoned his son Andy, no mean bird-finder himself, who got there as soon as he could. From what could be seen on Brian's video it looked like a Pied Wheatear. Andy relocated the bird briefly further up the seafront, grabbing one distant photo, before heavy rain set in for the rest of the day. The bird was not seen again.

Andy posted his photo and some videograbs from Brian's video (see below) on his then Birds of Burnham-on-Sea website, but they attracted little interest, despite positive comments supporting the identification as Pied Wheatear by Bristol-based ex-BBRC member Keith Vinicombe. From the photos (which by Andy's own admission are of poor quality, though not so bad in the circumstances) it always seemed easy to discount a late Northern Wheatear, on the tail pattern alone. The difficulty was always likely to be eliminating the possibility of it being a Black-eared Wheatear: the Burnham bird was most likely a 1st-winter, and these two species are a tricky pair to separate, especially in that plumage. Some other records from elsewhere are still in that limbo of either/or, particularly frustrating when both species are rare and both would be a county first.

Andy, to his credit, remained undeterred in his attempts to prove the identity of this bird, despite BBRC managing to lose the file twice over the intervening 10 years. Last year, Andy posted the pictures on Twitter and, following further supportive comment from BBRC member James Lidster, he decided to resubmit the record once more. Finally he (and Brian and John) have their just reward in seeing Pied Wheatear added to the Somerset list. Now all the rest of us need is another (twitchable) one!



Pied Wheatear, Burnham-on-Sea, 30 November 2003

Bramwell bulletin

More local surveys and observations in the occasional series from **Mike Trubridge**

In previous issues of *The Bittern*, I have described a rookery survey that I have carried out in an area of 12.56 sq km to the north of Langport since 2011. I have now completed a fourth survey and the results are very interesting. This survey in 2014 was carried out between 7 March and 15 April of all rookeries in and around the villages of Henley, High Ham, Low Ham, Pitney, and Park, and produced the following results:

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Occupied nests	234	206	236	296
Total nests	302	320	309	345
Occupancy rate	77.5%	64.4%	76.4%	85.8%
Mean number of occupied nests per rookery	15.6	10.3	16.9	22.8
Mean number of all nests per rookery	20.1	16.0	22.1	26.5
Rookeries per sq km	1.2	1.6	1.1	1.0
Occupied nests per sq km	18.6	16.4	18.8	23.6
Total nests per sq. km	24.0	25.5	24.6	27.5
Number of occupied rookeries	15	19	14	13
Number of new rookeries	n/a	5	0	0
Number of abandoned rookeries	n/a	1	4	1
Survey period	19/3 - 6/4	14/3 - 31/3	11/3 - 15/4	7/3 - 15/4

The 2014 survey started earlier than in previous years, but there was no real advantage to this. The highest counts of occupied nests all occurred later in the survey period, which is to be expected. 2014 was a good year for surveying, with plenty of clement weather and no problems with early emergence of tree flowers and leaves to obscure the nests.

This year there was a significant increase in the number of both occupied and unoccupied nests, after three years of little change. The reasons for this increase are unclear, but may well be connected to the very warm and sunny weather experienced in March 2012, which was the third warmest March since 1910 and the sunniest since 1929. This spell of fine weather continued into early April, so it is reasonable to assume that the birds had a successful season in 2012. Rooks generally breed at two years old, so a good breeding season in 2012 would be reflected in an increase in breeding pairs in 2014.



In issue 7 of *The Bittern*, the editor wrote that more local surveys like this rook census would be welcome, but since then none have appeared. So perhaps I can help by providing details of another bird survey that I have been carrying out for the last three summers. This involves a CBC (Common Bird Census) of Eastfield Nature Reserve, a small site of 7.6 ha located to the south east of High Ham owned by Somerset County Council and managed by South Somerset District Council. Older members of the SOS are probably familiar with the CBC, which is the forerunner of the BBS (Breeding Bird Survey). Established in 1962 by the BTO, the CBC survey is based on the mapping method in which 10 thorough visits are made in the breeding season to all parts of a defined plot and all contacts with birds (by sight or by sound) are recorded on large scale maps. All bird activity is also recorded on these maps. At the end of the season, all these registrations are copied across on to a separate map for each species, which summarises all the information

obtained for that species during the season. Each species map is then analysed to estimate the number of territories found. The essence of species map analysis is that rings are drawn around clusters of registrations that appear to represent the activities of a distinct pair of birds. A particular advantage of the mapping method is that maps are produced which show the approximate location of every territory detected. These maps can then be compared in detail between years to show the preferred sites of each species in relation to the habitat, and to show any effects of habitat change.

BBS was launched in 1994 to provide more representative habitat and geographical coverage than the CBC, which eventually ended in 2000. However, it is still a very useful method to establish bird populations on small sites such as Eastfield and then to monitor any changes brought about by habitat management. For some time this reserve had been neglected by the Council, until three years ago when Butterfly Conservation agreed to manage the site in an attempt to attract the large blue butterfly, which breeds nearby on the Polden Hills. So when I offered to start a CBC at Eastfield in 2012, the Council gratefully accepted my services. I have now completed three summers of survey work and the results are very interesting:

Species	2012 (pairs)	2013 (pairs)	2014 (pairs)
Woodpigeon	8	8	5
Tawny Owl	1	?1	1
Green Woodpecker	1	-	-
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	1	1
Magpie	1	-	-
Great Tit	7	1	3
Blue Tit	3	2	3
Wren	12	9	9
Song Thrush	1	-	1
Blackbird	6	6	6
Robin	8	5	8
<i>Blackcap</i>	7	5	8
Lesser Whitethroat	-	-	1
Chiffchaff	10	5	10
Dunnock	5	2	3
Chaffinch	8	3	6
Total species	15	11	14

Looking at these figures, it is very clear that the bird numbers have suffered a significant decrease between 2012 and 2013. However, it is not so clear why this has happened. There were probably three reasons for these declines:

- The weather in the first six months of 2013 was quite extreme at times. A prolonged spell of extremely cold and strong easterly winds resulted in an exceptionally late spring. This delayed the arrival of spring by 3-4 weeks and all wildlife suffered as a result. Migrant birds were late in arriving and some of the early arrivals actually returned to the continent. The breeding season was late in starting and some birds probably did not bother to breed at all.
- During the winter of 2012/13, more scrub was removed from the nature reserve which has reduced the amount of scrub habitat available for many breeding birds.

- Sheep continued to graze the site in 2013 until 14 June, a much later date than is advised. Together with the late spring, this meant that birds that often nest on the ground or very close to it, such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Robin, and Wren, were simply unable to find suitable cover for their nest sites.

However it is very encouraging to note that there was a significant increase in both the number of breeding species and the number of bird sightings in 2014, almost back to the 2012 levels. This is probably due to the fact that no more scrub clearance has taken place and there was a much better grazing regime in 2014, when no sheep were on the site after 8 March. Unfortunately the BTO has not yet published the national bird trends for 2012-2013, but these should be out soon and it will then be possible to see how the 2013 Eastfield decline relates to both the UK figures and the SW England figures.

It is my intention to continue with this CBC to help both South Somerset District Council and Butterfly Conservation manage the site appropriately for all wildlife.

‘Thieving Magpies’?

The propensity for Magpies to steal objects that take their fancy, particularly shiny ones, has been ingrained in popular culture for centuries. Rossini even wrote an opera, *The Thieving Magpie*, where a servant girl was wrongly accused of the theft of items of silver stolen by the eponymous bird. It is such a byword that the term ‘magpie’ is applied to opportunistic human thieves. So, with all that folklore behind it, the popular image has to be right, doesn’t it?

Apparently not. Scientists from Exeter University conducted carefully controlled tests using both wild magpies and a group of birds housed at a rescue centre, and found that they were if anything unsettled by the presence of unfamiliar objects and tended to avoid them.

As reported in the journal *Animal Cognition*, the researchers tested Magpies’ responses to objects placed on the ground 30 cm from a pile of nuts provided as a food source. The objects were metal screws, foil rings, and rectangular pieces of aluminium foil, half of them shiny and half of them painted matt blue. Wild Magpies only made very brief contact with shiny objects twice in 64 tests, and none with blue ones. The captive birds made no contact at all with any of the objects. In fact, the birds often fed less and appeared wary when the objects were present.

Lead researcher Dr Toni Shephard, from the university’s Centre for Research in Animal Behaviour, said: ‘We did not find evidence of an unconditional attraction to shiny objects in magpies. Instead, all objects prompted responses indicating neophobia - fear of new things - in the birds.’

‘We suggest that humans notice when magpies occasionally pick up shiny objects because they believe the birds find them attractive, while it goes unnoticed when magpies interact with less eye-catching items. It seems likely, therefore, that the folklore surrounding them is a result of cultural generalisation and anecdotes rather than evidence.’

Co-author Dr Natalie Hempel de Ibarra, also from Exeter University, said: ‘Surprisingly little research has investigated the cognitive mechanisms of Magpie behaviour. Similarly to other large-brained members of the crow family with complex social systems, Magpies are capable of sophisticated mental feats, such as mirror self-recognition, retrieval of hidden objects, and remembering where and when they have hoarded what food item.’

‘Here we demonstrate once more that they are smart - instead of being compulsively drawn towards shiny objects, Magpies decide to keep a safe distance when these objects are novel and unexpected.’



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 keen bird-finder, cyclist, and RAF reservist Tom Raven.



How and when did you get into birdwatching?

As a family we would do many walks when I was young: mum, dad, and my older brother were instrumental in making me aware/interested in the multitude of living things we encountered, birds being the most obvious.

What is your favourite birding memory?

I have literally hundreds: finding my first rarity, a Wilson's Phalarope at Cheddar Reservoir, many moons ago; stumbling across Somerset's first recorded Penduline Tits at Westhay Moor in 1997; and finding Lesser Yellowlegs and Buff-breasted Sandpiper in the space of two days at Curry Moor a couple of years ago was fairly special.

But the real standout for me was finding a Tawny Pipit on short grass at the edge of Beady Pool on St Agnes. It was a very warm September evening with blue skies and little wind, Clouded Yellows were floating around, the clean and completely refreshing Scilly air was filling my lungs and I spent an hour all alone watching the pipit feeding with Yellow Wagtails in perfect light. Magical.

Where was your favourite birding trip?

I love the Pyrenees, but that's not a birding trip, its cycling with some birds, albeit fantastic ones, thrown in! Three weeks on Scilly in September/October 1999 was fairly outrageous!

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

Teaching science at Taunton Prep School, serving with the RAF Regiment reserves (my squadron is based at Brize Norton), and riding bikes.

Where do you currently most enjoy birdwatching?

Shapwick Heath/Ham Wall, mainly because they are so close which allows me to cycle there in the morning/evening if I want. Huntspill Sea Wall in autumn would be next on the list.

What are your five desert island birds, and why?

1. **Barn Swallow:** It encapsulates so many happy emotions; very jolly, pretty birds whose happy chattering announces their arrival and leads to the joyful thoughts of summer.
2. **European Bee-eater:** How can anyone not be stunned by the plumage of one? And it's cool that they detoxify their prey so efficiently.
3. **Sabine's Gull:** Monotone beauty.
4. **White-winged Black Tern:** Just go look at a good HD photo of an adult in sum plum!
5. It was almost Wryneck, nearly Northern Parula, but it's going to be **Blackbird**, mainly for the male's wonderful song.

Choose a book and luxury item, and explain why

Book: *Learning to Breathe* by Andy Cave, an autobiography worth many a re-read.

Luxury: Got a funny feeling Rita Ora might not be up for a stranding with me, so it'll have to be a 20-60x zoom for my telescope to help with the seawatching!

Walks and talks

Here is what's coming up in our area over the rest of 2014. 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. Charges and booking details are given where known for non-SOS events, but please check with the organisers.



September			
13	Walk	SOS	Avalon Marshes. Leaders: Alison Everett and Jeff Hazell. Meet at 0930 at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Exact itinerary will depend on what birds are where. New members are especially welcome. Free.
13	Walk	RSPB	Stearth. Leader: Tony West. Meet at 1000 at Natural England car park (ST275469). Visit to Bridgwater Bay NNR hides, then short visit to WWT Stearth Marshes on return. Finish approx.. 1230-1300. Free.
14	Walk	SWT	Westhay Moor. Leader: Phil Wright. 1100-1400. Birds and general interest. SWT have transformed restored peat diggings into a network of open water, reed bed and the largest surviving fragment of lowland acid mire in the south west. Meet at reserve car park at ST456437. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility.
14	Family event	NE	Shapwick Heath: A Wild Day Out in Autumn. 1000-1530. Children's environmental activities going on all day: games, artwork, crafts, trails, tractor rides across the reserve and much much more... The Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay, BA6 9TT. This is a joint Avalon Marshes Partnership event. Free admission - no booking necessary.
16	Talk	SWT	The effects of flooding on agriculture and wildlife in the levels. 1930-2130. Catherine Mowat is the Brue Valley Living Landscape Advisory Officer for SWT. Her talk will examine the impact of flooding in the Somerset Levels and consider how the negative effects of flooding can be reduced in the long term. Cheddar Catholic Church Hall, Tweentown, Cheddar BS27 3HU, off Upper North St beyond church. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50.
20	Walk	SWT	Autumn Woodland Walk. Leader: Mick Ridgard. 10:00-12:30. A walk through Harridge Woods and surrounding area for autumn flora and fauna. Park at entrance to Harridge Woods (ST638484). No dogs. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50 children £1.00.
20	Walk	RSPB	WWT Stearth Marshes. Meet at 1000 at Stearth Marshes car park (ST270458). Free.
20	Family event	NE	Avalon Marshes Young Wardens. 1000-1500. Introduction to Wildlife Photography with Lynne Newton. The Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay, BA6 9TT. Part of a programme of activities designed for 12-16 year olds, covering a range of practical skills useful for those interested in wildlife, conservation work and perhaps future study or employment in these areas - or just for enjoyment! Please always come prepared with waterproofs, long-sleeved clothing (to guard against ticks), sturdy footwear, water and a packed lunch. Booking essential: contact Julie Merrett on 01458 834 326 or 01458 860 120 or e-mail: juley.merrett@gmail.com
23	Talk	SWT	A Month in Alaska. An illustrated talk by Nigel Milbourne describing the rich and varied wildlife and landscapes he recorded on a visit made in 2012. Wells Museum (admission by side entrance) off Cathedral Green, Wells BA5 2UE Doors open 19.00 for 19.30 start. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.50 non-members £3.00.

27	Walk	NE	Shapwick Heath: Small Mammals. 0700-1000. Join the reserve team for a morning walk to learn about the natural history of some of the exciting small mammal species that make the reserve home. The walk will include opening a set of live traps set the previous evening. The Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay, BA6 9TT. Booking essential: please call 01458 860120 or e-mail Simon.Clarke@naturalengland.org.uk
27	Family event	NE	Avalon Marshes Family Wildlife Group. 1400-1700. Forest School for all the Family: camp-fires, using handtools and nature exploration. The Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay, BA6 9TT. The Avalon Marshes Wildlife Group's activities are aimed at children aged 5 -12 years old and their families. Booking essential: for further information phone 01458 860120 or 01458 834326 or email: juley.merrett@gmail.com. Free for Wildlife Explorer and Watch members; suggested £1 donation from non-members.
30	Walk	SWT	Blagdon Lake Birds. Leader: Nigel Milbourne. 1000-1200. A morning stroll at a good time to see migrant waders and large numbers of ducks. Meet at Fishing Lodge car park (ST507595). Park in lane or in Blagdon village and walk. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.00, children free.

October			
1	Talk	SWT	The Effects of Flooding on Wildlife. David Leach from SWT will explain how the floods over the last two winters have affected wildlife on the Somerset Moors and Levels, and the long-term impact on species populations and distribution. Starts 1930. Park and meet at Shapwick Village Hall, Shapwick TA7 9NJ. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50
2	Talk	RSPB	A birding Tour de France. Ken Hall talks about bird conservation success stories in France. Starts 1930. St Paul's Church Hall, Walliscote Road, Weston-super-Mare. £3 for non Weston RSPB group members.
11	Walk	SOS	Stearth. Leaders: Dick Best and Brian Gibbs. Focus: wildfowl, waders, and passerine migrants. Meet at 0930 at Natural England car park (ST275469).
12	Walk	SWT	Riverside walk, Rode to Tellisford. Leader: Tony House. 1330-1600. Circular walk Rode to Tellisford along river for Kingfisher, Dipper, and other wildlife. Park in Rode Mill car park (ST802544). No dogs. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50 Children £1.00
15	Walk	RSPB	Brean Down. Leader: Denise Budd. Focus: passerine migrants. Meet 1000 at NT car park (fee) (ST297585). Finish c1230. Free.
18	Family event	NE	Avalon Marshes Family Wildlife Group. 1400- 1600. Help the Hedgehogs: make your own hedgehog box with staff and volunteers from Secret World. Secret World Wildlife Rescue, New Road Farm, New Road, East Huntspill, Highbridge, TA9 3PZ. The Avalon Marshes Wildlife Group's activities are aimed at children aged 5 -12 years old and their families. Booking essential: for further information phone 01458 860120 or 01458 834326 or email: juley.merrett@gmail.com. Free for Wildlife Explorer and Watch members; suggested £1 donation from non-members.
16	Talk	RSPB	Birds in flight - a photographic adventure. An illustrated talk by John Crabb. Starts 1930. Millennium Hall, Seavington, nr Ilminster, TA19 0QH. £3 for non Crewkerne and District RSPB group members (including national RSPB members).

24	Talk	SWT	SWT Nature Reserves. 1930-2100. David Northcote-Wright, reserves manager for West Somerset and Blackdowns will give an illustrated overview of SWT nature reserves then focus on the Blackdown reserves. Parish Hall, North Street, Ilminster TA19 0DG. Parking at roadside or town car-parks. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.00, non-members £3.00, children free.
26	Walk	RSPB	Cheddar Reservoir. Leader: Ady Gough. Meet at 1000 at car park on Cheddar side (ST446535), off B3151 along Sharpham Road. Free.
28	Family event	SWT	Avalon Marshes Young Wardens. 1000-1500. Wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and relocation with the staff of Secret World. Secret World Wildlife Rescue, New Road Farm, New Road, East Huntspill, Highbridge TA9 3PZ. Booking essential. For further information or to book please contact Julie Merrett on 01458 834326 or 01458 860120 or email: juley.merrett@gmail.com
28	Talk	SWT	Our Missing Migrants. 1930-2100. Liz Browne, who has worked with the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), will describe how volunteer groups are trying to enforce bird protection laws in the Mediterranean region where illegal hunting threatens many species on their way to Britain. Wells Museum (admission by side entrance) off Cathedral Green, Wells BA5 2UE. Doors open 19.00. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. SWT members £2.50, non-members £3.00.
29	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.
30	Talk	SWT	A Dipper's nest and other wildlife on a small Somerset river. 1930-2100. An illustrated talk by Tony House about the wildlife of a small Somerset river. St Catherine Church Hall, Park Road, Frome BA11 1EU (ST774478). Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. Adults £2.50, children £1.00.

November

1	Walk	SWT	An Owl Prowl with Chris Sperring. 1930-2130. Chris Sperring will lead an owl prowl around Longwood where we shall look for owls. Please wear warm clothes and stout footwear and bring a torch. Booking essential - contact Ged Keele at gerard.keele@btinternet.com (preferred) or 01278 769010. Park in layby on the B3135 at the top of Cheddar Gorge (ST482546). Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £1.00.
5	Walk	RSPB	Catcott Lows. A visit to the hides. Leader: Faith Blackmore. Meet at 1000 at car park (ST400417). Free.
5	Talk	SWT	The New BTO Bird Atlas. 1930-2100. Eve Tigwell, Somerset's BTO representative and SOS committee member, will present an overview of the valuable data included in the new Atlas and the field work that contributed to it, with special reference to key species of importance in Somerset. Park and meet at Shapwick Village Hall, Shapwick TA7 9NJ. Suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility. £2.50.
19	Walk	RSPB	Ham Wall. Leader: Don Hurrell. Meet at 1000 at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Free. Radar key access available for disabled visitors.

22	Family event	NE	Avalon Marshes Young Wardens. 1000-1500. Practical conservation work with The Hawk & Owl Trust. Meet at Shapwick Moor car park, between Shapwick and Westhay (ST 417398). Part of a programme of activities designed for 12-16 year olds, covering a range of practical skills useful for those interested in wildlife, conservation work and perhaps future study or employment in these areas - or just for enjoyment! Booking essential. For further information or to book please contact Julie Merrett on 01458 834326 or 01458 860120 or email: juley.merrett@gmail.com
30	Walk	SWT	Boon's Copse. 1030-1230. Informal walk in Boon's Copse, ancient woodland relict of the original Neroche Royal Forest; monitoring nest boxes and clearing them ready for the breeding season. Park at ST282197, entrance to north-west through field. Not suitable for wheelchair users/limited mobility.

December

4	Walk	RSPB	West Sedge Moor. Leader: Eric Luxton. Meet at 1000 at Dewlands Farm (ST381263). Free.
4	Talk	RSPB	Birds and habitats of East Germany. A talk by Roger White about the breeding and visiting birds of this area. Starts 1930. St Paul's Church Hall, Walliscote Road, Weston-super-Mare. £3 for non Weston RSPB group members.
7	Walk	SWT	Ham Wall. Leader: Don Hurrell. 1330-1530. A walk around the RSPB reserve to view winter birds, suitable for inexperienced birdwatchers. Park at Ashcott Corner car park (ST449397, BA6 9SX). Not suitable for wheelchair users/ limited mobility. £1.00.
13	Walk	SOS	Cheddar Reservoir. Leaders: Brian Hill and Stephen Moss. Focus: winter wildfowl. Meet at 0930 at car park on Cheddar side (ST446535), off B3151 along Sharpham Road. Free.

