



## **Welcome to our summer newsletter**

*John Denham, acting Chair*

Introducing the latest edition of our quarterly newsletter is a first for me and quite unexpected. Normally, Margaret Vernon, who has for many years been a driving force in our local group, would be writing this. Sadly, Margaret suffered a stroke in April. I am pleased to say that she is well on the road to recovery, but she is much missed and we look forward to her return.

Our local group is fortunate in having a strong committee and a reliable band of helpers who keep us going. But we are few and really need your help! If you feel you could help in any way, perhaps at indoor meetings, helping with organising trips or a bit of admin, please contact me ([john.denham50@gmail.com](mailto:john.denham50@gmail.com)) or speak to any member of the committee.

A recent presentation by Herefordshire's **Verging on Wild** team reminded us how important the County Council schedule of mowings is to maintaining biodiversity along our roads and lanes. If you see any example of ill-timed mowing or verges that need particular safeguarding, please let me know

As you will see from our events list overleaf, we have a full programme of activities taking us through to the year end. You'll see that our regular meetings start again in September but do also have a look at what we have been up to over the past few months...

### **The Great Bustard Project and The Hawk Conservancy Trust 9 April**

*Report from Phil Chambers*

Amongst the heaviest of living flying animals, the two adult male great bustards that we see displaying to ten females only minutes after arriving on Salisbury Plain, each weighs in at an average of 12kg. A nearby flock of corn buntings gleaming under the sun, have an average weight of 50g. It would take 240 corn buntings to balance the scales on one great bustard.

Great bustards undergo a complete transformation when displaying at a lek, it's not surprising that they can be mistaken for anything from a sheep to a white piece of plastic garbage. There is, however, no mistaking a pair of grey and a red-legged partridges directly in front of us, while skylarks sing above. Other signs of spring are the stock dove's lustrous, blue-grey plumage and the red kite, with its constantly twisting, deeply forked tail. On the fringes, hares and roe deer watch us watching them.

The afternoon was spent with the residents of the Hawk Conservancy Trust in Andover, Hampshire. The aviary cages were reassuringly spacious and the birds were in different and appropriate habitats. The young staff were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the importance of this for the conservation of birds of prey.



*Male great bustard displaying by David Kjaer*

A little later, in the theatre that is Reg's wildflower meadow, Vaughan-Williams' *The Lark Ascending* introduced hooded vultures in surprisingly graceful flight and the day was rounded off with the sight of two barn owls, stroking the air with whispering wings and facial discs tilting as they quartered the wood. Other glorious moments included the vertical stoop of the peregrine, black kites locking talons, battling for catapulted food, a red kite mobbing a juvenile bald eagle and the silent flight of the great grey owl, phantom of the north.

### **Bird Calls at Knapp and Papermill 27 April**

*Report by Neil Edwards*

An early morning walk on an overcast, rather chilly, day may not be everybody's cup of tea but for the group that turned up, a real treat was in store. Led by WWT Senior Conservation Officer, Steve Bloomfield, this walk was not just your ordinary bird spotting jaunt, it developed into a fascinating insight into how birds see and react to the variety of habitats existing throughout the reserve. With more foliage on the tree canopy, seeing birds flitting around was all the more difficult, so picking up their calls became the only sure way of identifying various species – easier said than done!

Steve pointed out that birds have differing calls depending on the situation, whether singing to attract a mate, an alarm call or perhaps a warning against the invasion of its territory. The relaxed call is more melodious, whilst an aggressive call is much sharper and generally delivered with gusto. We experienced many examples of these differing mood changes. Steve explained that the varying types of habitat within the reserve suited differing species of bird. It is important that the reserve management team recognise the many opportunities to develop biodiversity to suit the wildlife requirements in general so that adequate food supplies are available when needed. The extent of food determining the number of feeding territories that can exist with fierce competition, particularly along the woodland marginal areas.

## ***Bird Calls at Knapp and Papermill (continued)***

On several occasions, Steve asked us all to just stand with closed eyes and simply listen for a short period to identify the number of different bird songs/calls that could be heard. Whilst most people counted five or six, Steve suggested 10 or 12 would be more appropriate. In total, in excess of 30 different species were seen and/or heard during the visit. These included thrushes, jays and other corvids in the top of tree canopies; blackcaps, chiffchaff, tree creeper and goldcrest in the woodland margins; kingfisher, grey wagtail, mallard and a pair of goosander alongside the Leigh brook, not forgetting the circling buzzard and an unexpected peregrine flying over.

With a very big thank you to our guide, Steve, for his time and what seemed to be limitless knowledge, we departed with appreciation of the value of simply listening to all the sounds around us.

### ***Mull Adventure - May 2022***

*Report compiled by Sandra Young*

Ross of Mull is quite some distance from Malvern so an overnight stop in Dumbarton allowed us time to visit Wanlockhead, Scotland's highest village, Lyndon's favourite ice-cream parlour and the exhilarating Falls of Orchy. A bright calm crossing from Oban to Craignure was followed by a beautiful drive to Achaban House, with red deer and a variety of birds lining the way to welcome us. The week ahead was packed with travel, walks, ferry and boat trips, wildlife and some rather persistent rain! On our first day we walked across to the tidal island of Erraid. Beautiful beaches, views, birds, plants (I was introduced to navelwort), insects, lichens and then, yes, rain! The following day's visit to Kintra and a bit of rock scrambling was rewarded with a great view of bow-riding dolphins.



*Posing Puffin by Andy and Jean Young*

Uisken was our next destination, a glorious beach and a grassy bluebell bank studded with orchids. Ardalinish Weavers and Bunessan were also on the day's agenda, with moon jellyfish spotted near the jetty. The next day being wet and windy we embarked on a motor tour, often using the minibus as a hide. Despite the miserable weather, this turned out to be a fantastic day for sightings – a great northern diver courtship display, splashing seals, red deer, fishing otters, mergansers, dolphins (possibly porpoise), fallow deer, hen harriers, white-tailed and golden eagles, short-eared owls...the raptors were taking advantage of a break in the rain! The next two days were bright (but windy) and were spent exploring beautiful Iona,

a short ferry ride from Fionnphort. A couple of lucky people had sightings of corncrake but most of us got to hear his call. On our last day the wind had finally dropped enough for our boat trip to Lunga and Staffa. The puffins and seabird cliffs of Lunga, and the chance to peer from the (rather choppy) sea into Fingal's Cave, rounded off our fabulous adventure. Birds were too numerous to mention but I shall pick out the cuckoo as one I was delighted to see and hear – even at 4.30am! Treasures at Achaban House included swallows, sand martins, spotted flycatcher, male and female adder and green hairstreak butterflies.

We missed Margaret; Lyndon and Sheila were stars.

## ***Meetings, Trips and Walks 2022***

*See our website for full details of all trips & walks*

[www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk](http://www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk)

### **Indoor Meetings:**

Held at 7:30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms, Church Street, Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50. Children free. Non-members welcome. Our meetings will resume in September.

#### **Thursday September 1st**

*Gardening for Wildlife.* Helen Mugridge, ARPS wildlife photographer. Attracting wildlife for over 20 years to a garden in the Forest of Dean.

#### **Thursday October 6th**

*Hedgehogs and how we can help them.* Terry Green, retired lecturer, Pershore College. The life of the hedgehog: the hazards it faces and how we can make its life a little easier.

#### **Thursday November 3rd**

*The Herefordshire Ice Age Ponds Project.* Beth Andrews, Project Officer. The geology and ecology of Ice Age ponds

#### **Thursday December 1st**

*Ancient Woodlands.* Dave Taft, local naturalist, U3A Natural History Group. The characteristic features of ancient woodlands and how they have changed over time

### **Trips:**

For more information or bookings, phone **Lyndon 01905 455222**. It's worth putting your name on the reserve list.

**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> & Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July** (two separate days): *Greenham and Crookham Commons, West Berkshire (BBOWT)*. Cost: approx. £22. Depart from the Splash 7.30am. Return mid-evening. Take packed lunch. Some places may still be available.

**November 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>** (2 nights, 3 days). *Donna Nook, Lincs* (grey seal pupping) and nearby reserves (winter waders).

**Friday May 19<sup>th</sup> – Sunday May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023** *The Burren (Co Clare) and Connemara (Galway coast)*. This 2-centre holiday includes 2 nights at the Premier Inn, Dublin. 1 week in Ballyvaughan, Co Clare, visiting the Burren and Inishmore Island and 1 week at Clifden, Co Galway visiting the Connemara area, plus Inishbofin and Clare Island. Currently full but a reserve list is operating.

### **Walks:**

For more information and to book your place, phone **Neil Edwards on 01684 564288**.

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> July:** *Butterflies at Old Hills*, led by Mel Mason. Meet at 10.30am. (approx. 2.5 hrs).

Other walks and trips may be arranged at short notice and advertised via the Malvern Group email list and website: [www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk](http://www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk). To be on our mailing list, contact [malverngroup@live.co.uk](mailto:malverngroup@live.co.uk)