



Nature is in crisis
Together we can save it

Wildlife protection and planning law

Tony Cummins

I am sure many of us share less than cordial feelings about the seemingly endless M25/A3 junction improvement project. An article in the latest edition of the quarterly magazine of Surrey Wildlife Trust recently has caused me to view it with a slightly less jaundiced eye. The article concerned another imminent closure of the A3 for the installation of a new bridge linking Wisley and Ockham Commons. Strikingly it will allow the passage not only of pedestrians and riders but the greater part of its 30m width will be planted with vegetation designed to encourage passage of wildlife between the two commons. The importance of corridors such as hedgerows and tunnels linking otherwise isolated wildlife populations is well known; the green bridge is on a much more ambitious scale. It could be seen as a fine example of the environmental gains that should be a part of major developments that otherwise impact adversely on sensitive habitat.

However prospect of the bridge started me wondering about its place in a wider context. One of the priorities of the incoming Labour Government was speeding up the sclerotic national planning processes for new developments especially in the provision of much needed housing. Included in the list of the perceived obstacles to more rapid decision-making was worryingly said to be environmental regulation including that aimed at preservation of wildlife and the habitat on which it relies. One particular criticism that has been made is that the bodies responsible for overseeing such regulations act as though in blinkers and take no account of any wider national interest. For example, this has resulted in the notorious tunnel required to be built at huge cost to protect the most northerly colony of Bechstein's bat from trains on the HS2 railtrack.

A feature of the SWT article raised a similar issue. It talked about the negotiation during the planning stages of the offsets necessary for the huge damage to the adjacent heaths that the project would cause. One of the outcomes was rightly agreement to the restoration of affected heathland plus extensions to it in areas newly cleared of encroaching trees. SWT was additionally proud of its role in arguing the width of the bridge up from the 10m proposed to the full 30 and deserves praise for playing its hand for maximum benefit. However the option chosen was no doubt costlier than the smaller width even if only by a fraction of the overall £317m cost of the M25/A3 project. It remains to be seen how far the public will be willing to sustain the costs of such wildlife protection against the criticisms of frustrated developers and the priorities of a Government being pressed to make a bonfire of environmental regulations.

Just possibly we have been in a golden age of planning gain for conservation and may need to fight to preserve it.

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so that our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We also play a leading role in a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

Spring Fundraising Quiz

Tony Cummins

It's time to get our brains into gear by launching the 2026 quiz – our biggest annual group fundraising event. The event will be held on **Friday 13th March at Onslow Village Hall**.

Once again Ian and Jan Honeysett have kindly offered to host for us.

Entries can be for full teams of up to 8, or you can enter as a single or small group and we will put full teams together. Bring your own food and drink from **7pm for a 7.30 start** at Onslow Village Hall, Wilderness Rd, Guildford, GU2 7QR.

The cost is **£10.00 per person**.

To enter please email info@rspbguildford.org.uk to book a place and **either**:

Pay on line using the 'JustGiving' site:

<https://www.justgiving.com/page/tony-cummins-1>

Remember to put your name as a reference so that we know you have entered and, if you are able, adding gift aid which benefits the RSPB even more;

or

Send a cheque payable to RSPB Guildford Local Group and post to Tony Cummins, 35 Cheapside, Woking GU21 4JQ.

IMPORTANT: When booking on Justgiving you will be asked to add a "tip" immediately before payment. The default amount is 17.5% and the slider on the screen does not reduce it below 12.5%. To avoid paying the tip at all, identify on the final screen the button for "pay custom amount" and use it reduce the tip to zero; only then press the "make payment" button.

Subscriptions for 2026

Christine Shawyer

Annual Group subscriptions were due on **1st January**. The current rate is **£12** per person and **£24** per couple.

If you haven't yet paid, a renewal form is enclosed with the printed newsletter or will be e-mailed to you separately. Electronic payments can be made to Sort Code : **30-90-79** Account No. **3335 8860** or you can send me a cheque made payable to *RSPB Guildford Local Group*. My address appears on the form.

I hope you will want to continue with your membership, but if you don't, please let me know.

If you have any queries, e-mail me at membership@rspbguildford.org.uk or you can ring me on (01932) 924423.

If you haven't yet paid, a renewal form is enclosed with the printed newsletter or will be e-mailed to you separately. Electronic payments can be made to Sort Code: **30-90-79** Account No. **3335 8860**, giving as reference subs and your surname and initials, or you can send me a cheque made payable to *RSPB Guildford Local Group*. My address appears on the form.

I hope you will want to continue with your membership, but if you don't, please let me know.

If you have any queries, e-mail me at membership@rspbguildford.org.uk (If you need to ring me, my number appears on the back page of the programme.)

In November I travelled with *Speyside Wildlife* to Australia for the first time. I did not see the Sydney Opera House, Uluru or even the Gabba. It was my first overseas holiday since 2018.

There was a direct flight to Perth, then a transfer to Melbourne where we spent three nights. We travelled west of the city to the Youyang Ranges to visit a reserve to see Koalas (we saw one) and our first Kangaroos (Eastern Greys). (Although Tasmania was historically attached to the mainland, Koalas have never occurred there). On the second day we went east to the Dandenong Range to temperate rain forest for Lyre Birds, stopping en route to see a daytime roost of perhaps 40,000 Grey-headed Flying Foxes (Fruit Bats) on the banks of the Yarra River. It was a public holiday for the Melbourne Cup so there were a lot of people visiting the area which spoilt our chances. The guide claimed he could hear the Lyre Bird which puzzled me as they are notorious mimics. Perhaps he was hearing birds that shouldn't have been in that location, so assumed it was the Lyre Bird imitating them.

On day three we flew to Hobart for the remainder of our stay. If you ignored the eucalyptus trees, the countryside in the north of the island looked much like England. The early settlers took with them reminders of home, so there were hawthorn hedges and gorse bushes in bloom and every day we saw and heard Blackbirds, Starlings and Goldfinches. (They also brought cats, dogs and rats which devastated the native species, although surprisingly there are still good numbers of the Tasmanian Native Hen, a flightless bird which looks a bit like a Moorhen on steroids.)



Echidna - photo by Christine Shawyer

A lot of the place-names are British. The climate reminded us of England too. The weather was very unsettled with some rain on most days and it got so cold at one point several of us invested in new thermal layers! Southerly winds there come straight from Antarctica.

But the indigenous wildlife was amazing. We saw Common Wombats, Quolls, Wallabies, Pademelons (small Wallabies), Duck-billed Platypus and, everyone's favourite, the Short-beaked Echidnas. They resemble Hedgehogs, but with long snouts and a pair of backwards-facing feet. We'd imagined they would be hard to see, but they were often on the roadside verges. On two separate days, we saw five different individuals.

The iconic Tasmanian Devil still roams wild, but its numbers are being reduced by a transmittable facial cancer. We visited Devil's Cradle, a breeding centre for them.



Tasmanian Devil – photo by Christine Shawyer

Their fearsome reputation as the largest marsupial carnivore was undermined by meeting *Noah* whose keeper cuddled him in her arms throughout her presentation. (She'd hand-reared him so he thought she was his mum.) In one mountain resort the owner put food outside our cabins to attract the Devils, but as they are nocturnal trying to see them involved sitting up long into the night. On the first

night I saw a Spotted-tailed Quoll carrying off some raw chicken and a (non-native) Black Rat.



'Noah' – photo by Christine Shawyer

On the second night I saw nothing at all! Two of the other guests saw one running past their cabin which was higher up the hill, but that was the only sighting. Roy was particularly disappointed as the owner had webcam footage from the night before we arrived showing one feeding in front of Roy's cabin.

My bird life list increased by 131 species, but as Australia has around 750, I have only scratched the surface. On one of the few completely fine days we enjoyed, we had a pelagic trip with more than thirty *Shy Albatrosses and one **Wandering Albatross around the boat, as well as Shearwaters, Petrels and Australasian gannets. In Stanley and in Devonport we went out at night to watch Little Penguins coming ashore, walking past a few feet away heading for their burrows. Superb Fairy Wrens were a daily delight. Of course there were parrot species, including flocks of Sulphur-Crested Cockatoos, Galahs, Rosellas and Lorikeets.



Albatross – photo by Christine Shawyer

We had distant views of Yellow-Tailed Black Cockatoos on several occasions and eventually got a telescope on a flock roosting in the tree tops, at 60cms impressive birds. We saw most of the Tasmanian endemics. The very attractive Swift Parrot breeds only in Tasmania, but winters on the mainland so isn't a true endemic. Like the Swift, it is named for its speed. I didn't see or hear any owls, but we did see a family of Tawny Frogmouths.

Surprisingly there were very few wader species on the extensive shoreline and only a few individuals of those few. Confusingly what we would call plovers the Australians call dotterels, although they have plovers too, notably Red-capped and Hooded, both of which we saw. Of the raptors Swamp Harrier was seen most often and White-Bellied Sea Eagle was the most striking. Apart from the Blackbirds and Starlings, the commonest bird was probably the Masked Lapwing, raising its young in fields and on roadside verges and roundabouts in the middle of towns.

If we had spent longer on the mainland, we would probably have seen more bird species, but Tasmania was beautiful and we wouldn't have wanted to miss out on all the marsupials we saw there. It was a memorable trip.

(*now known as White-capped; ** now known as Gibson's)

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: in England and Wales no 207076, in Scotland no SC037654

Sixteen members met at **RSPB Pulborough Brooks** a day earlier than planned to avoid poor weather and enjoyed dry, calm conditions. Highlights from the visitor centre included Stock Dove, Stonechat and Redwing. Despite dry scrapes at West Mead Hide limiting bird numbers, Marsh Harrier and Buzzard were seen, while Winpenny Hide produced large flocks of Lapwing, Wigeon and Teal, and a few Shoveler also present. A Merlin briefly flew past but was not seen by everyone. At Hangar View, the standout sighting was a White-tailed Eagle resting on the ground at some distance and then flying off. On the Brooks were also Greylag, Canada and Egyptian Geese, three Ruff and a Water Pipit. The walk finished at Fattengates Courtyard where we enjoyed the Blue Tits, Great Tits, Chaffinches and House Sparrows around the feeders. A Great Spotted Woodpecker also put in an appearance on a nearby tree. In total, 32 species were recorded on a very enjoyable walk.

Fourteen members met at **Moor Green Lakes** and enjoyed a productive walk with a wide variety of birds. We set off on the recently opened path around the New Workings. Early highlights included Mistle Thrush, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Redwing and active Jays, along with Mallard, Teal and Gadwall on a pond and a calling Water Rail. Stonechat, Meadow Pipits and finches were well represented, with a large flock of around 100 Redpoll also containing Siskin and Brambling, attracting a hunting Sparrowhawk. Kestrel, Goldcrest and Long-tailed Tits were also seen. Further around the lakes, notable sightings included Great White Egret, a lone male Pintail, Egyptian Geese and Little Egrets, Snipe, and a wide range of ducks and waterbirds such as Shoveler, Wigeon, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, gulls and Cormorants. Although the Tawny Owl was absent, a brief stop at Colebrook Lake added Lapwing and Little Grebe to our list, bringing the total to an impressive 55 species.

Ten members met at **Kingley Vale** car park under heavy clouds and from the car park the first Kestrel, Robin, and Pigeon were observed. Along the path to the Yew Tree woods we saw Blackbirds, which some consider to have become a rare sight in Surrey recently. There were about four males and one female on the day. The group did not have to wait long before spotting Red-legged Partridges. Once in the woods we were lucky to have 20 Redwings fly over our heads and then land, which gave us a chance to study them. The clearing which was a planned stop to give us a chance of finding the Hawfinches was roped off but luckily enough we found a way around this and were rewarded instead with views of a distant Sparrowhawk. Also, we observed Kites, Buzzard and Ravens.



Water Pipit – photo by Len Walker

Once back on the main track some of the group saw a Marsh tit and a Hawfinch. Both Green and Spotted Woodpeckers were seen along with three Goldcrests. For some reason the group opted not to climb to the top to view the Devil Jumps! With the gold, yellows, and reds of the autumn leaves, a family of four Sika deer, and the total of 31 species of birds, had ensured a successful return to Kingley Vale for Guildford RSPB after many years absence from the programme. Lunch was had in the carpark along with freshly brewed coffee from the man in a van. Afterwards we all made it back to the Bulls Head pub. Highlights at Fishbourne Creek were soggy feet, good numbers of Redshanks, Grey Plovers, Curlews, Black Headed Gulls, one Yellow Legged Gull, Turnstones, many Wigeon, and a couple of Teal making some welcome additions to the list.

Fifteen of us enjoyed a dry, mild, slightly overcast excursion to the **WWT London Wetland Centre** where we encountered large numbers of Redwing taking advantage of the bumper crop of red berries. As ever, Parakeets were very much in evidence around the entrance and visitors centre. However, the reported Bitterns, Snipe and Water Pipit failed to appear for most of us. The hides provided excellent views of good numbers of waterbirds including Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Mallard, Coot, Moorhen, Cormorant, Grey Heron, and Canada, Greylag and Egyptian Geese. A pair of Great Crested Grebes performed a mating dance which perhaps was rather unusual for mid-November. Numerous Gulls loafed and preened on the lagoons, accompanied by a few Lapwings, Starlings, Crows and Jackdaws. Keen-eyed observers added lots more sightings to our list, including Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Siskin, Redpoll, Reed Bunting, Long-tailed Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff and even a Kingfisher! Our final total for the day was 55 species.

Fourteen of us braved the rather forbidding rain first thing in the morning to travel to **West Wittering**. However, the weather brightened up considerably during the day, and even from the car park we began to see groups of Avocet and skeins of Brent Geese flying overhead. The adjacent fields held Lapwing and in the car park Robin and Pied Wagtail came to say hello. Walking out onto the exposed salt marsh on the west side of Snowhill Creek there were Curlew and Redshank and lots of small passerines such as Stonechat, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, and Linnet, active in the low vegetation. Further out still we took in the different waders in front of us. A large group of Avocet, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, more Redshank, and as we watched one or two Golden Plover were joined by more reinforcements. Grey Plover and both Black Tailed and Bar Tailed Godwits were in evidence. A pair of Red Breasted Merganser worked the shoreline and gave good views and a couple of Sandwich Terns flew around, diving for food in spectacular fashion. Once around the headland eventually we saw four Great Northern Divers at some distance and watched them battling against the wind and tide. On a distant spit of land we could just make out the shape of a Peregrine perched on the ground surveying the goings on. We also saw one or two Red Throated Divers flying low over the water. Walking back along the beach a lovely party of Sanderling ran about in front of us. Lunch was taken back at the car park after which we walked along the other side of the creek to view the freshwater pools, adding Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall, Mallard and Moorhen to our list in the process. A lone Greenshank was picked out. We heard the explosive song of a Cetti's Warbler and in the distance suddenly a Grey heron, Buzzard and Kestrel were all in the air together.



Curlew – photo by Keith White

Sharp eyes spotted a well camouflaged Snipe some distance away. We puzzled over the identification of some large Gulls which on reflection were probably immature Great Black Backed Gulls. The tide was still high although falling and a couple of the Great Northern Divers had ventured nearer to us giving splendid views. Together with ever present common birds such as Black headed Gulls, Cormorants and Blackbirds, we had amassed a grand total of 53 species in all for the day.

A cold but sunny day at **Frensham Great Pond** was a welcome contrast to the recent rain. Fourteen of us were treated to Robin and Chaffinch in the car park. As the mist rose from the pond, we could make out Great Crested Grebe, with one pair displaying to each other. There were a pair of Little Grebe, and rafts of sleeping Tufted Duck and Pochard further out. One or two Gadwall, Wigeon and Black Headed Gull were dotted around and a Lesser Black Backed Gull flew over. In the holly bushes along the path there was a large group of Redwing chattering to each other, only giving brief views as they flew restlessly in to feed on the berries before flying away again. We continued to see Redwing throughout the walk. One or two Blackbirds and Goldfinch were also seen. Walking around the outflow stream we saw Goldcrests, one at very close range displaying, and a Treecreeper. Two Egyptian Geese were very vocal. A Kingfisher flashed across the water at one point, and another perched up briefly. As we continued near the Hotel, we saw some Siskin and mixed Tit flocks comprising Blue, Great and Long Tailed Tits. Three of the group had sightings of Firecrest but they were largely staying out of view for most of us. Meanwhile the previously distant Pochard were now closer and looked glorious in the sunshine. Unfortunately, there were no heathland birds to be seen, but 36 species were seen and it had been a pleasant way to end the walks programme for 2025.

The suddenly cold conditions did not deter 28 for the walk at **Riverside Stoke Meadows** to see in the New Year. It was good to add common birds such as Blue Tit, Great Tit, Robin and Blackbird for our lists from the car park. A female Chaffinch posed on top of one of the Alder trees by the canal and a few of us got a view of a lone Siskin. A couple of Moorhen could be seen and groups of Long Tailed Tit moved through at intervals. Cormorants flew by and a Heron was in one of the fields. A distant Stonechat perched on some vegetation. An Egyptian Goose perched in an unusual position high in a tree. We had splendid views of a Buzzard perched up and a Red Kite soared overhead. Groups of Mallard swam around. A Kingfisher flashed across the water and a couple of Snipe flew in. Walking further along the canal we saw Grey Wagtail and a Great Spotted Woodpecker. The number of Gulls was impressive as we neared the Recycling Centre, with hundreds of Herring Gulls and Black Headed Gulls circling around. The lake past Stoke Lock was fairly quiet and partly frozen but there was a Chiffchaff in the hedgerow and a couple of Teal were tucked up in fallen branches along the river here. We saw a small group of Redwing as we negotiated the boardwalk along with Dunnock and Wren. Arriving at the lake there were Little Grebe, Tufted Duck, Shoveler, Great Crested Grebe and Coot. We were also able to pick out a lone Common Gull and a couple of Lesser Black Backed Gull loafing around on the water. Along with the ever-present Magpie and Carrion Crow, by the end of the walk

Mid-October saw eighteen members gather at the beautifully situated Langston Cliff Hotel in Dawlish Warren for four days of autumn birding. The first day was spent at the renowned nature hotspot of Berry Head near Brixham. There we were met by Mike Langman, a local guide and artist whose services we had been fortunate to secure for the day. We first surveyed the hedges of a meadow in hopes of a Cirl Bunting but without success. Magpies and overflying Woodpigeons were our initial fare but as we headed towards the Napoleonic fort there were the calls of Chiffchaffs and the song of Robins accompanying us. Then the first of a multitude of Barn Swallows massing for migration swooped overhead. Behind the fort a survey of the cliffs revealed over 500 Guillemots crammed onto the ledges, the largest breeding colony on the south coast.

Unusually the birds overwinter there because the ledges are premium breeding territory and they prefer not to risk leaving them when there are ample food supplies in the adjacent bays. On nearby offshore rocks a few Shags were perched not far from some Great Cormorants allowing for study of the differences in their features.



Cirl Buntings – photo by Richard Cheeseman

We proceeded towards the headland to the tune of a helicopter whose engine noise provoked the Guillemots to abandon the cliffs and form long streams over the sea, quite a spectacle. At the point of the headland we were treated to the sight of half a dozen Harbour Porpoises close in to the cliffs.

Next came the path towards the quarry. Along it we encountered first a male Stonechat followed shortly by perched

Goldfinches. In the bushes Goldcrests, Chiffchaffs and Long-tailed Tits could be heard and occasionally glimpsed. In the quarry a Kestrel was quartering and the alarm call of a Peregrine could be heard. Our efforts scanning every crevice on the quarry wall were frustrated by the bird's camouflage and we failed to manage a sighting. On the return a few Blackcaps were flitting across the path ahead and a Firecrest called close by and again was glimpsed. We headed under the navigation beacon in the company of Blue Tits and Chaffinches and emerged on a meadow in the wake of a Sparrowhawk that retreated ahead of us. A flock of Linnets flew past as we watched two hunting Kestrels. Finally we returned to the field where we had started and struck gold in the form of several Cirl Buntings. Initially the birds were flighty and tracking them was tricky because of the presence of confusing House Sparrows. Finally though some settled on newly cut grass and gave excellent views.

After lunch we took a final scan of the calm sea. Our guide quickly spotted a solitary Gannet and beneath it a pod of Common Dolphins, their triangular fins constantly surfacing. From there we headed down the coastal path and into Brixham where we walked the long breakwater.



Little Egret – photo by Keith White

En route we spotted a Kingfisher perched on a rock. From the breakwater the first new sighting was of two Great Black-backed Gulls, nearby Herring Gulls appearing diminutive beside them. On the seawards side a few Turnstones moved restlessly among the seaweed. The first of several Rock Pipits flew past. On the water a Shag was feeding, constantly diving and resurfacing. Further along an adult Mediterranean Gull was perched displaying its white wing tips. By the derelict jetty we found three Grey Seals hauled out; one was nicknamed Bear, so called because the loss of two of its claws had resulted in the growth of two others to enormous length. Sadly, the

breakwater failed to deliver our target of Purple Sandpiper, another triumph for camouflage. The day ended back with the Cirl Buntings near the car park, a fitting conclusion to a great day's birding.

Day two began in the quaint riverside town of Topsham. Those who took the longer walk to our destination on the Goat Road were rewarded by sightings of a Kingfisher, a Goldcrest and a Bullfinch. As the high tide reached its peak we all gathered in the recently extended RSPB hide at Bowling Green Marsh. The reserve was packed with roosting birds. The biggest numbers came from over 500 Black-tailed Godwits, 300 Teal, 200 Redshanks and 150 Curlews. More moderate numbers came from Bar-tailed Godwits, Greenshanks, Wigeon, Mallards, Canada Geese and Pintails.

There were also scatterings of Shovelers, Shelducks, Dunlin and Lapwings. Significant singles consisted of an elusive Snipe, a Curlew Sandpiper hidden among the Dunlin and a Little Stint noticed only when it joined a panic of Lapwings and became identifiable by its diminutive size. It was an enthralling spectacle that engaged us for a long time.

The afternoon was spent in Budleigh Salterton on the site of the Lower Otter Restoration Project. Largely financed by the EU the project was designed to relieve flooding in the east of the town and restore the inter-tidal habitat. The extent of the completed work was breathtaking and the potential of the site was easily imagined. The range of birds though was limited. Many gulls were perched on the mudflats, mainly Herring Gulls in varied plumages but including a couple of dozen of Great Black-backed and a single Lesser. Waders were limited to the odd Curlew and Black-tailed Godwits plus four Ringed Plovers. Two Little Egrets strutted about and for one fortunate observer a Great White Egret briefly emerged from skulking in the rushes. There were greater rewards for those with the energy to venture further up the river. A bush laden with sloes had attracted a flock of finches including Greenfinches, Chaffinches and Goldfinches. On the water were a Little Grebe and a Red-necked Grebe, surely the sighting of the holiday!

The morning of day three was spent on the extensive reserve of RSPB Exminster and Powderham Marshes, a site unfamiliar to most of us. The path took us along the railway line which seemed busy for a Sunday. Between the bursts of train noise we began to pick up the vocalisations of Robins and Long-tailed Tits which remained with us throughout the walk. The meadows held Canada Geese and Pheasants while overhead on a pylon two Ravens exchanged noisy pleasantries. Lapwings took to the sky, the only occasion on which we saw them. A Reed Bunting could be heard and eventually darted out of the rushes. Sharp eyes spotted a male Stonechat perched distantly.



Dipper – photo by Richard Cheeseman

Around were the tinkling of Goldfinches and the subdued call of a Bullfinch. Two Cetti's Warblers rattled from cover while calling Chiffchaffs added to the sound symphony. By now we were in sight of the halfway point, the magnificently sited Turf Hotel. First though a field of cattle had to be negotiated; in it were four foraging Curlews and a Grey Heron. Safely across

we had a magnificent view of the River Exe at high tide. On it were some thirty Mute Swans cruising majestically in the surprising company of four Black Swans no doubt on an away day from their usual home in the centre of Dawlish. Equally surprising was the sight of one early arriving Brent Goose. The vast majority of gulls present were Black-headed with a couple of Great Black-backed nearby. Also on the river were some Cormorants and Great Crested Grebes. On the bank near our coffee stop was a Little Egret while a surprise visitor was a Common Sandpiper. The return along the Exeter Canal towpath was made eventful by the dash of three Common Snipe across our path; also by the occupants of a pool in the middle of the marsh. They included Wigeon, Gadwall, numerous Coots and a single Shoveler. A species list of 46 was a strong indication of how productive the morning had been.

For the afternoon we decided that the rigours of our activities had earned us some rest. Recreational adventures included visits to Exeter Cathedral and a successful twitch in Dawlish in search of the resident Dipper. Overall it was an excellent holiday in accommodation of a high standard and fine company.

For your diary:

Dates and venues for indoor meetings and walks are listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

24/25 January 2026 - Big Garden Birdwatch

13 March 2026 – Quiz and social evening Onslow Village Hall

31 March 2026 – Garden bird survey results to paulhicks2006@yahoo.co.uk

9 April 2026 – Deadline for items for the next newsletter to Len Walker editor@rspbguildford.org.uk

10-17 May 2026 – Guildford Group birding break to Herzegovina

31 May 2026 - Coach trip to RSPB Wallasea

Guildford Group garden bird survey

Paul Hicks

Results: Autumn 2025 (September 2025 to November 2025)

Autumn 2025 weather was fairly normal overall, though November was notably wetter and milder than usual. This led to late migrations, both out and in!

From the 21 surveys received we saw 55 species, three more than last year and just two below our autumn high, boosted by twelve individual garden sightings. The average per garden was 20.6, one half below last year and almost as low as we have seen in any season. This is likely due to a combination of more smaller gardens in our survey mix, late arrivals of migrants and some missing regulars. Numbers ranged from 10 to 37. Most birds were at their normal levels but just the top five species were omnipresent and there were some significant declines.

- Blackbirds are being affected by Usutu virus. This is reflected anecdotally in observed absences, lack of numbers and our statistics with sightings in just 81% of gardens instead of 100%.
- Jays are consistently at around 80% but fell by a quarter to just 57%.
- Similarly, song thrushes were down to 29% from last year's more typical 56%.
- Goldfinches were nearly omnipresent three years ago but declined further from last year's 83% to just 71%. They flit about in large flocks so this may just be less observation rather than a real population decline.
- Feral pigeons collapsed from last year's high for any season of 61% down to a more normal 33%.
- Similarly, ring-necked parakeets fell from last year's high for any season of 50% to a more normal 38%.
- Our total species count was boosted by sightings of less usual visitors including Merlin, Wood and Willow warblers, Firecrest and Raven. Redwings arrived late, if at all, and were only seen in three gardens in this period and have been as high as 40% in previous years.

The next period is Winter 2026, running from December 2025 through February 2026 with submissions due by the end of March. You can contact me on paulhicks2006@yahoo.co.uk or at Hobsons Choice, The Marld, Ashted, Surrey, KT21 1RW.

Species	%	Species	%	Species	%
Blackbird	100	Song Thrush	53	Goldcrest	11
Blue Tit	100	Blackcap	47	Mallard	11
Dunnock	100	Greenfinch	47	Mandarin	11
Great Tit	100	House Sparrow	47	Mistle Thrush	11
Magpie	100	Siskin	47	Moorhen	11
Robin	100	R-necked Parakeet	37	R L Partridge	11
Goldfinch	95	Pheasant	32	Tawny Owl	11
Woodpigeon	89	Red Kite	32	Brambling	5
Collared Dove	79	Sparrowhawk	32	Common Redpoll	5
GS Woodpecker	79	Green Woodpecker	26	Fieldfare	5
Long-tailed Tit	79	Grey Heron	26	Grey Wagtail	5
Wren	79	Buzzard	21	Herring gull	5
Carrion Crow	74	Stock Dove	21	Kestrel	5
Chaffinch	74	Chiffchaff	16	Little Egret	5
Jay	74	Lesser Redpoll	16	Pied Wagtail	5
Starling	74	Raven	16	Reed Bunting	5
Feral Pigeon	63	Redwing	16	Rook	5
Jackdaw	58	Swift	16	Swallow	5
Nuthatch	58	Bullfinch	11	Whitethroat	5
Coal Tit	53	Cuckoo	11		

Bird Themed Crossword Number 68

PETER BRYANT

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8
9														
		10				11								
														12
13		14						15						
								16						
17				18				19						
						20								
	21									22		23		
24														
25														
26										27				

Be warned!
Many (but by no means all) of the answers are the names of birds or birding terms

Across

- Some birding paperback literature illuminated on the rear (7)
- Tropical bird, one that never stops vocalising (7)
- Butcher sponsored by the Communist Party? (3-6,6)
- Is this type of ruminant juicy snack for fish hawk? (3)
- Cardinals, bishops etc (8)
- Porker is long time near railway, where passengers used to find a home? (8)
- Kelvin negative about wader (4)
- Gamebirds need to be stored for a while to become like some crabs (6)
- Arboreal tiddler may be a hermit (4-4)
- Holiday option: take flight and be noisy on a bird hunt (3-5)
- Perhaps fathom binocular's technical parameter concerning field (5)
- Have a peep knowing that it is not rare (6,9)
- Our preferred kind of world - without Artificial Intelligence (7)
- Birding locations - might they be green fields? (5)

Down

- Victim's coarse girl could be merlin (4,2,4)
- Waxwings graced a reserve but only in part (5)
- Release one fly then another (5,2)
- Join bird race or the cast (4,4)
- Smugglers in the swimwear department (naturally only available in yellow)? (6)
- Hotspot where white-eared bulbul is acclaimed (7)
- Sheep where tigers play (9)
- Egg-parasitism first observed in scarlet buntings (4)
- Staggered singing competition that has an early start (4,6)
- Auk suffering terribly with mole guilt (9)
- Something that regulates supply to big fish (8)
- Relaying old fen at Bournemouth reserve (7)
- Cavorting linnets (with no central character) usually only seen at Christmas (6)
- More than one goose provides drugs (5)
- Onomatopoeic bird may be red-throated (5)
- Carefully search amongst greylags, canadas etc (4)

	G	R	E	A	T	S	K	U	A		G	L	O	W
	O		G		I		I		N		A		R	
T	S	A	R		G	E	N	E	T		M	O	T	H
	H		E		R		G		W		E		O	
M	A	N	T	L	E		H	O	R	N	B	I	L	L
	W				S		A		E		I		A	
S	K	A	G		S	E	R	I	N		R	U	N	T
			Y				R				D			
S	C	A	R		S	T	Y	L	E		S	I	C	K
	U		F		Q		R		A				O	
I	M	M	A	T	U	R	E		G	A	G	G	L	E
	B		L		A		D		L		O		L	
	R	O	C		C	A	C	H	E		O	T	I	S
	I		O		C		A				S		N	
B	A	R	N		O	X	P	E	C	K	E	R	S	

1 down – reference to ‘*H is for Hawk*’ by Helen Macdonald

3 down – local name for Goldfinch in Midlands (ref *Birds Britannica*)

Any advertisements enclosed with this newsletter are not specifically endorsed by the RSPB or Guildford Local Group

London Camera Exchange

Guildford's main stockist of binoculars and spotting scopes

You won't find a more comprehensive range of spotting scopes or binoculars anywhere else in Guildford ranging from Hawke, RSPB, Steiner, Opticron, Nikon, Zeiss and Swarovski.

We are sure to have something to match your budget and passion with competitive pricing and part exchange is always welcome.

8/9 TUNSGATE
 GUILDFORD
 SURREY GU1 3QT
 Tel: 01483 505040
 Fax: 01483 538216

Walks and Talks for February 2026 to April 2026

Note: For Walks, the 'how to get to venue' directions are condensed. Full details will be on the website.

February	WALKS
Sat 7 th 9.30am	Church Norton. PO20 7NE. Meet at RSPB Pagham harbour car park on B1245 for walk to Church Norton and back. All day, bring lunch. Led by Roger Beck. 01483 282417
Thurs 12 th 10 am	Warnham Local Nature reserve RH12 2RA. Meet at reserve car park off B2237. Small entrance fee (card payment only). Visitors Centre selling hot drinks and snacks with toilets. Half day walk. Led by Malcolm Toyer 07808123723
Sun 22 nd 9.30am	Farlington Marshes PO6 1UN (takes to Holiday Inn, nearby). From the A27, keep in left lane signed Southsea exit (A2030). At roundabout, immediately after 1 st traffic lights, take sharp left turn into car park. 3 parking areas - park at the far end if room. All day, bring lunch. Led by John Curtin 07919 446473
February	TALKS
Thurs 5 th Shalford 2:00pm	The life cycles of British and Irish butterflies. Peter Eeles. Butterflies are infinitely fascinating', a quote from an introduction to Peter's book. An engaging speaker, Peter is an expert on the subject.
Wed 25 th Zoom 7:30pm	The Lost Fens – England's greatest ecological disaster. Prof. Ian Rotherham. Ian's talk will describe the massive historical loss of the vast wetland ecosystems in Eastern England (Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Yorkshire Fens) due to drainage and conversion to intensive farmland.
March	WALKS
Thurs 12 th 9:30am	Horsell Common (Heather Farm) GU21 4XY. Meet at Waters Edge Cafe, Heather Farm, Horsell. Take A320 from Woking towards Staines. Continue on the A245. Bear right onto A3046. Heather Farm is about 400 yards on the right. Half day walk. Led by Margo Scott. 01483 767546
Sat 22 nd 9:30am	Titchfield Haven PO14 3JT Meet in car park by Yacht Club . Extra parking on seafront. Car parking is £1.10 per hour. Entrance charge for reserve of £5.50 for senior citizens. Bring Lunch, all day walk. Led by Tony Cummins. 07454726747
Sat 28 th 9:30am	The Burgh South Downs RH20 4HW. Take the A283 Pulborough to Storrington, then B2139 towards Amberley. After 1½ miles take lane to left marked Kithurst Hill. Use car park at top of hill. Bring lunch, all day walk of 5 miles. Led by John Curtin 07919 446473
March	TALKS
Thurs 5 th Shalford 2:00pm	A birding adventure in Rwanda. Gary Prescott, the Biking Birder. Gary has recently returned from a birding adventure in Rwanda, touring by bike, in keeping with his green credentials. Gary is renowned for his 'biking birder' adventures.
Wed 25 th Onslow 7:30pm	Thursley – our local nature reserve. James Giles. Manager, Thursley Reserve. Thursley, a heathland reserve, but with ponds and bog, is home to many species of birds, dragonflies and damselflies. James will tell us about this popular reserve.
April	WALKS
Thurs 9 th 9:30am	Frensham Little Pond GU10 3BT. Meet in reserve car park (Nat. Trust fee if not member). Half day walk around pond and heathland areas. Led by Christine Shawyer 01932924423

Sat 11 th 10am	RSPB Farnham Heath GU10 2DL. Use the car park for the Rural Life Centre in Reeds Road Tilford for walk around the reserve. Led by Malcolm Toyer 07808123723
Sat 18 th 9:30am	Oare Marshes ME13 0QA Meet at reserve car park at end of track from Oare village. Car park charge payable. All day walk–lunch to be carried. Led by Tony Cummins 07454726747
Sun 26th 9:30am	Tice's Meadow GU12 4BP. Take the A31 towards Farnham. At the Farnham Shepherd and Flock roundabout take the third exit (A325). At the 2 nd roundabout turn right onto the B3208 towards Badshot (not Bagshot !) passing a <u>superstore</u> . Go through Badshot Lea, then turn right after half a mile into Guildford Road sign-posted to the Cricket Club and Crematorium. Park at the far end of the road in Aldershot park (not the Lido car park.) Led by Sean Foote 07450 051517
April	TALKS
Wed 22 nd Onslow 7:30pm	Bird Migration Andre Farrar. Andre looks at the amazing ways that birds migrate. Andre was with the RSPB for many years and we are fortunate to have him back



Help protect the
wildlife you love