



Nature is in crisis
Together we can save it

Centenary of a Living Legend

Tony Cummins

I received an approach in April from the Surrey branch of Age Concern about marking the 100th birthday of Sir David Attenborough on 8 May, an event the imminence of which has passed me by. His towering status as an advocate of the natural world certainly warrants recognition as he passed an immense milestone in his life. His career spans over seven decades and stands as one of the most influential in the history of broadcasting and natural history. His early work on *Zoo Quest* set the tone for a lifelong mission to connect humanity with the natural world. After a long period as a senior executive at the BBC where he was instrumental in the development of colour television, his passion for nature and exploration drew him back to filming the natural world.

From the late 1970s onward, Sir David has become synonymous with landmark documentary series. *Life on Earth* in 1979 revolutionized the genre, combining scientific depth with storytelling. This was followed by a succession of acclaimed series including *The Living Planet*, *The Trials of Life*, *The Blue Planet*, and *Planet Earth*. These productions were groundbreaking not only for their educational value but also for their technical innovation, showcasing never-before-seen animal behaviours and ecosystems with extraordinary clarity. What distinguishes him is not just the breadth of his work, but the way he communicates. His calm, authoritative voice and genuine sense of wonder make complex scientific ideas accessible and compelling. He does not merely present facts; he tells stories that foster emotional connections between viewers and the natural world.

In recent decades, he has also become one of the most prominent voices on environmental issues, particularly climate change and biodiversity loss. His documentaries increasingly carry a message of urgency, urging global audiences to recognize the fragility of ecosystems and the consequences of human activity. Films such as *A Life on Our Planet* serve as both a witness statement and a call to action.

Sir David is considered a legend because of his unparalleled contribution to public understanding of nature, his role in advancing television as a medium and his enduring commitment to conservation. Few individuals have had such a profound impact on how we see the planet. His work has inspired generations to appreciate, study, and protect the natural world, securing his place as one of the most respected and influential figures of our time.

Returning to how we plan to mark Sir David's birthday, the group is supporting a walk led by Surrey Age Concern at Newlands Corner on 8 May starting at 10.15am; details were circulated in my email of 16 April. Our role will be to point out wildlife features and identify birds. I hope that some of you will be there ensuring that the group is properly represented as we mark the centenary of an icon.

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.

AGM 2026

Tony Cummins

The last indoor meeting of the 2025/26 season is the AGM at Onslow Village Hall on 27 May 2026, starting at 7.30.

The agenda for the AGM is below. The other AGM papers (minutes of 2025 AGM, leader report, financial report) are being circulated to all members by email. Copies are also available on the website. Any member who does not have access to the internet is invited to phone me on 07454 726747 and request printed copies. Any other business to be considered for the agenda or nominations for Committee posts should be notified to the leader in writing by Monday 4 May 2026.

Please put the date for the AGM in your diary; the formal business will hopefully be brief and will be followed by the reinstated photographic competition and award of the Koniotes Trophy. The deadline for entries is approaching and more are needed!

As usual the annual plant sale will be held before the meeting starting at 6.00pm. Do come with plenty of money and boot space to stock up on plants and veg for your garden.

Guildford and District RSPB Local Group: Calling notice and Agenda for Annual General Meeting

The Group AGM will be held 27 May 2026 at Onslow Village Hall 7.30 pm.

Agenda:

1 Welcome and apologies for absence

2 Adoption of minutes of last AGM 28 May 2025 and matters arising other than on the Agenda

3 Group Leader's Report

4 Treasurer's Report

5 Election of Group Leader

Tony Cummins proposed Christine Shawyer, seconded Ray Rogers

6 Election of Treasurer

Richard Morris proposed Kirsten Osa, seconded Steve Boyce

7 Appointment of Independent Examiner of Accounts

Richard Cheeseman proposed David Lane, seconded Malcolm Tyrrell

8 Re-election of Committee Members

Below proposed for re-election en-bloc by Tony Cummins, seconded David Lane

- a. Membership Secretary Christine Shawyer
- b. Minutes Secretary Ray Rogers
- c. Communications/web site Kirsten Osa
- d. Field meetings Malcolm Toyer
- e. Indoor meetings Malcolm Tyrrell
- f. Coach trips Sue Losson
- g. Sales Steve Boyce

9 Any other business notified by 4 May

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

Folklore of a 'weather forecasting bird'

Len Walker

Birds have long been credited with supernatural powers. For centuries the nocturnal Nightjar was nicknamed The Goatsucker – due to its mythical ability to steal milk from goats. India is a land renowned for its Fakirs, ascetic holy men who are possessed of miraculous powers such as the ability to walk on fire.

India's wildlife can, according to local legend, hold extraordinary powers:

In rural Rajasthan in northwest India, the Red-wattled Lapwing has a reputation for forecasting the rainy season weeks in advance, based on its nesting behaviour.



Red-wattled Lapwing – photo by Wikipedia

The bird is found across most of Asia and is part of the bird family Charadriidae, which includes the plovers, dotterels and lapwings.

Key features include a distinct red fleshy wattle in front of each eye and a red-and-black bill. This long-legged wader prefers well-watered open country ploughed fields, grazing land and margins.

Superstition has it that that when this ground-nesting bird picks low-lying ground to make its nest (no more than a shallow scrape) and lays its eggs lying horizontally the subsequent rainy season will be poor. If the bird nests on higher ground and the eggs stand upright then plenty of rain during the monsoon can be expected.

Older farmers have long used the bird's behaviour to decide which crops to grow, planting maize, sugarcane and other water-tolerant crops in fields with good drainage when the birds forecast plenty of rain; when the birds forecast low rainfall the growers plant hardy, more drought-tolerant crops.

An Indian university survey carried out over eight years found that the birds' behaviour matched modern metrological forecasts, opening a generational challenge for older and younger farmers to match ancient customs with modern metrological forecasts to decide which crops to grow.

But how the Lapwings make these decisions remains a great mystery.

Local superstition also credits the bird with sleeping on its back with its legs in the air – to prevent the sky from falling on its nest and fledglings.



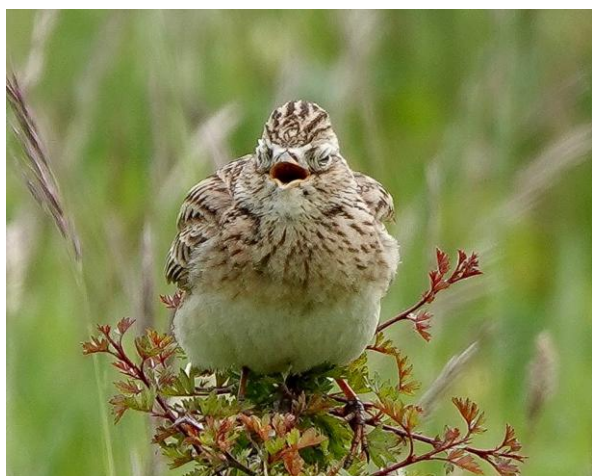
Help protect the
wildlife you love

Group walks – Winter 2025

Malcolm Toyer

Eleven intrepid members braved intermittent showers, mud and flooded paths at **Papercourt**. At the start a Sparrowhawk sped along the towpath ahead of us. There was a distant flock of Siskins feeding in the alders across the canal and a Kestrel was perched nearby. Black headed-gulls had abandoned the lake in favour of the flooded fields, joined by Canada, Greylag and Egyptian geese. A Little Owl suddenly flew in to the willows and perched long enough for views through telescopes. A male Reed Bunting sat on a bush. A Song Thrush serenaded us and a few Redwings were seen. The lake was quiet, but there were a few ducks including Tufted and Pochards plus Great and Little Grebes and a Grey Heron. Heavier rain forced us back to the cars, but 38 species was a good total given the conditions.

Eleven of us met in the car park at **RSPB Pagham Harbour** and enjoyed a good days birding. At the Ferry Pool hide there were assembled flocks of Lapwing, Black Headed Gull, and ducks such as Teal, Mallard, Wigeon, Shoveler, Shelduck, and Gadwall. A couple of Avocet and a single Green Sandpiper completed the picture as a Marsh Harrier flew low over the ground and a few Skylarks took to the air.



Skylark – photo by Roger Beck

There were some Redshank in the channel opposite the Ferry Pool and moving on along the path we saw some Grey Plover, Curlew, and a lone Bar Tailed Godwit. Vast flocks of Brent Geese, Lapwing, Golden Plover, and Dunlin swirled in the air further out in the harbour. We opted to drive to Church Norton where Siskin and Goldfinch were spotted in the Alder trees by the moat, and a male Linnet stayed visible as we headed to the beach. On the beach we were able to pick out distant Gannets, a pair of Red Breasted Merganser, and some Turnstone working the shoreline close to us. As we ate

our lunch we watched Grey Plover, Lapwing, and Dunlin before us in the harbour. A distant Buzzard soared around at one point creating panic among the waders. Looking over the field behind the hide we added Green Woodpecker to our list for the day. Some of our party chose to head for home at this point but a smaller group of us had a wander around the Churchyard. A group of Starling buzzed and chatted away in a tree, and a chirpy Robin hopped around the gravestones. An adjacent field contained a Buzzard, a Kestrel, and a couple of Mistle Thrush. Along with the usual commoner birds we had seen a grand total of 50 species for the day.

A group of thirteen of us braved blustery and rainy conditions for the walk at **Farlington Marshes** but saw around 40 species over the course of the day. From the car park, the tide was out, and scanning the mud groups of gulls including Herring Gull, Common Gull, Black Headed Gull, and some very smart Mediterranean Gulls were visible.



Brent Geese – photo by Mike Grimshaw

One or two Curlew, Oystercatchers and Shelduck were also on view. The car park Robin popped up on some bramble bushes to say hello. Arriving at the lake the main highlight was the large number of Pintail ducks gathered on both the freshwater and the nearby sea channels. Smaller numbers of Teal, Shoveler and Mallard were also present. The usual flocks of Canada Geese and Brent Geese were grazing in the fields, and a Little Grebe was diving in the lake. Walking around the sea wall

there were hundreds of waders on the exposed mud, mainly Dunlin, along with one or two each of Grey Plover, Turnstone, Ringed Plover and Curlew. A couple of Rock Pipits were active along the shore. On the land side, half a dozen Meadow Pipits ran around in the grass and a pair of Stonechat flitted around the hedgerow. We were able to pick out the long-staying Barnacle Goose amongst the other Geese. At The Deeps we added Wigeon and Tufted Duck to our growing list. The rain had become more insistent and so we headed for the cover of the visitors hut to have our lunch. From there, most of the group opted to return to the car park and call it a day. A smaller contingent decided to walk back across the grass, on the way spotting a Cetti's Warbler in some scrub and a couple of Lesser Black Backed Gulls. A Kestrel was also hovering over the fields as the rain eased up briefly. Back at the lake the group added Great Crested Grebe and Red Breasted Merganser to the list, all out on the high tide water. There was also a large group of Redshank resting by the lake.

Conditions were dry and pleasant for our walk at **Horsell Common**. Throughout the woodland areas we heard numerous Robins, Nuthatches, Wrens, Great and Blue Tits and a few Chaffinches. Several Firecrests were heard at close quarters, but remained elusive for some. Great Spotted Woodpeckers drummed and later a small flock of Goldfinches were heard and a Blackbird seen. On the heathland Greenfinches could be heard and Buzzards and Red Kites showed well. A few Stonechats and Dartfords were seen briefly, despite the at times blustery wind. Further on across the heath were Coal Tits and a small group of Siskins feeding actively in the conifers, along with Long-tailed Tits and a Chiffchaff, and a brief snatch of both Dunnock and Blackcap songs were heard. Corvids and a few Parakeets were present throughout. At McLaren Park, there were several more Red Kites, and Meadow Pipits and Skylarks were displaying and singing, coping amazingly with the increasing wind. Returning to the fields and water meadows of Heather Farm, Starlings, Stock Doves, Black-headed and Herring Gulls, and Canada and Greylag Geese, were all seen. A Green Woodpecker taunted us with its yaffle. A Kestrel, a couple of Coots, and a solitary Egyptian Goose added to the total of 40 species seen and/or heard.

Sixteen members began their journeys to **Titchfield Haven** in thick fog but on emerging from the Hindhead Tunnel found bright sunshine that promised an excellent day's birding. Viewing from the seawall revealed about 100 Sanderlings at the water's edge. Other waders included Oystercatchers and Turnstone. In mid Solent a Common Scoter could be identified and then closer in a drake Eider was spotted displaying. The morning was then spent on the east side of the reserve. The feeders had a Reed Bunting, House Sparrow and Greenfinch.



Meadow Pipit – photo by Alan Rines

The woodland was alive with birdsong; identifiable were Robins, Dunnocks, Blue, Great and Coal Tits, very vocal Wrens, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Nuthatch. Warblers were also evident, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Cetti's. Less expected were a couple of Siskins and a Redpoll feeding at the top of an Alder. The Meadow hide provided many more species. A Curlew and two Lapwings were feeding on the grass. Mute Swans and Teal occupied a nearby pond. A more distant lake held both Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Gadwall, Shelducks and a surprising drake Goosander. At the edges were a Grey Heron, Little Egret and Cormorants plus Canada, Greylag and Egyptian Geese. Overhead Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzards jostled and were later joined by a Red Kite. On a smaller scale a couple of Stonechats perched on bushes. After lunch the Meon Shore hide was the next destination. On show were overwhelming numbers of noisy Black-headed Gulls interspersed with more Mediterranean Gulls than expected. There were new ducks in the form of Wigeon and Shovelers. Avocets were scattered around in small groups as were chestnut plumaged Black-tailed Godwits. Other waders were confined to singles of Redshank and an elusive Snipe. The Pumfrett hide provided much closer views of the Goosander, which was eagerly photographed, and the Snipe. A Marsh Harrier flypast seemed to bring proceedings to a fitting conclusion; but in fact, that came on return to in the car park where a Sparrowhawk belatedly appeared. A wonderful walk produced a species list of 68.

Fifteen of us had a lovely day up on the South Downs for the walk on 'The Burgh.' Conditions were mostly sunny but with a cold wind at times. We started to see Chiffchaffs and Chaffinches almost immediately in the car park. Once up in the open countryside Skylarks were our constant soundtrack and could be seen ascending and descending. One or two Herring Gulls were on the wing. It was not long after setting off that the first Yellowhammers could be seen in the hedges and trees along the paths. Also in evidence were Grey Partridges, mostly in pairs. We probably saw about eight of them in total throughout the walk. Red-Legged Partridge and Pheasant were added to our growing list, and corvids such as Magpie, Rook, Carrion Crow and Jackdaw were busy looking for food all around us. Lots of Dunnock, Blue and Great Tit, and Blackbirds flitted around the hedgerows and Buzzards, Red Kites and a Kestrel entertained us with aerial acrobatics. A pair of Raven called to each other and flew overhead. We spotted a Buzzard sitting on top of a hedge and three Red Kites in a field, one clearly eating something. Looking towards Arundel Castle in the distance one or two Marsh Harriers were seen drifting low over the dramatic landscape. They were causing havoc amongst the Lapwing in the fields, putting them all up in the air. There was some excitement when some of the group caught sight of two distant White Tailed Eagles but, unfortunately, they had drifted away before most of us could see them. Hares represented the mammals and could be observed chasing each other around the field margins. Just before we stopped in a suitably sheltered and sunny spot for lunch a Green-Veined White butterfly was spotted and we all had good views of it eventually. We speeded up as much as we could on the walk back to the cars due to the appearance of some ominous black clouds and a brief hail shower ended the day as we arrived at the cars. Other birds seen on the way round were Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Wren, Robin, Song Thrush, Long Tailed Tit, Greenfinch, Goldfinch. By the end of the walk, we had seen a total of 32 bird species in all.

Sixteen of us attended the walk at **RSPB Farnham Heath**. Those first to arrive were treated to a pair of Crossbill which were perched in the hedge in the car park and then flew down to forage along the bottom of the hedge. Quite unexpected, and spectacular to see them at such close range! It was just a shame that they did not stay long enough for entire the group to see. The first of a couple of Red Kite flew overhead as we waited to start the walk. Moving into the woodland, Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Robin, Dunnock and Chaffinch were very busy. On the more open heathland there was a Chiffchaff singing perched high in a birch tree, and the start of a Willow Warbler's song was heard. The next birds to be seen were a small flock of mixed Siskin and Redpoll. Linnets were singing, flying, and feeding near the heather patches along the path, joined by additional Siskins. We could hear more Redpoll, and they were eventually located in a nearby pine tree. Dartford Warblers were singing occasionally but keeping a low profile until one did a remarkable flight high up in the air and 'parachuted' back down to the ground only to disappear. The occasional Stonechat perched in usual style on top of small trees. We paused at a drinking trough known for attracting Crossbills in addition to watering the cattle. Alas, no Crossbills were there so we moved on. We soon had good views of a couple of Treecreeper and a pair of Coal Tit. The distinctive drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker could be heard, and a Goldcrest was working its way through the branches of a Larch sapling. Blackbird, Song Thrush and Jay were added to the list. We also had flypasts from Sparrowhawk and a female Mallard. The morning had remained surprisingly cold with a chilly wind at times, however, we finished the morning with a respectable total of over 30 species before making our way home or warming up with a hot drink in the museum café.

New Members

Christine Shawyer

A warm welcome to the following new members :

Andrew Darley..... (Hounslow)

Duncan Gwyther(Godalming)

Julie & Phil Sloper.....(Godalming)

Rob Smith.....(Guildford)

Guildford Group garden bird survey

Paul Hicks

Results: Winter 2026 (December 2025 to February 2026)

A very warm and wet winter with average sunshine meant that our gardens had not too much to offer versus the countryside.

There were just 18 submissions this winter. We seem to be losing a couple each year, probably reflecting our demographic of smaller or even no gardens. Bird sightings were down six from last year to 49, just two above our winter low. The average per garden was 21.7, down 1.8 from than last year and just 0.3 above our winter low of six years ago. The lowest was 11 and the highest 33 with two more gardens above 30.

As usual, for our more regular visitors there was very little change in levels versus previous winters with the top five omnipresent. Notable changes were:

- Coal Tits plunged to a low for winter of just above half, having been at a normal level of 90% last year, after recovering from three-quarters in the previous three years.
- Sparrows are normally seen in half our gardens but this winter were only in a third and that is as low as we have seen in any season.
- Similarly, Jays were at just half versus normal levels of three-quarters, and as low as we have seen them in any season.
- Mistle Thrushes are usually seen in about a fifth of our gardens but were absent for the first time in winter.
- Starlings have been at three-quarters in three of the last four years but declined to a more normal level of 61%.
- We usually get the odd redpoll but this year they were seen in five gardens and some lingered.
- Similarly, we had a normal level of redwings in half our gardens but some stayed for several weeks.

The less common visitors included a firecrest and a kingfisher.

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

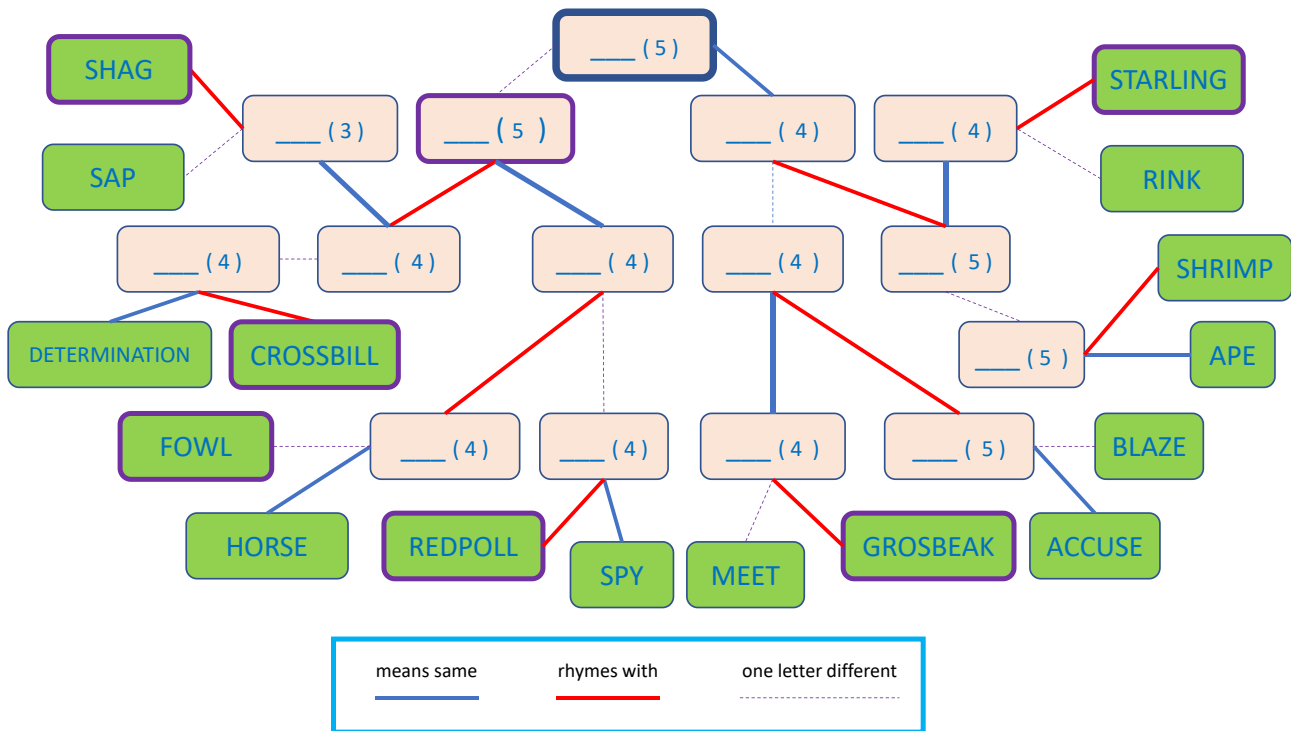
Species	%	Species	%	Species	%
Blackbird	100	Jackdaw	50	Pheasant	17
Blue Tit	100	Jay	50	Marsh Tit	11
Dunnock	100	Redwing	50	Pied Wagtail	11
Great Tit	100	Feral Pigeon	44	Raven	11
Woodpigeon	100	Greenfinch	44	Treecreeper	11
Magpie	94	R-n Parakeet	44	Bullfinch	6
Robin	94	Stock Dove	39	Fieldfare	6
Long-tailed Tit	89	Goldcrest	33	Firecrest	6
Collared Dove	78	House Sparrow	33	Herring Gull	6
Goldfinch	78	Red Kite	33	Kingfisher	6
GS Woodpecker	72	Siskin	33	Lesser Redpoll	6
Chaffinch	67	Blackcap	28	Moorhen	6
Wren	67	Buzzard	28	Rook	6
Carrion Crow	61	Sparrowhawk	28		
Nuthatch	61	Green Woodpecker	22		
Starling	61	Grey Heron	22		
Coal Tit	56	Redpoll	22		
Song Thrush	56	Tawny Owl	22		

New: Puzzle CornerPETER BRYANT

Zygolex is a fresh take on the quickie crossword. Fill in the intermediate words to reveal two birds using the instructions in the key. There are four steps from each outer word to the final answer (located at top middle).

Zygolex Three Step Guide

1. Words in Zygolex are related by three types of link: **Rhyme, Letters and Meaning.**
2. Starting from the outside, use the links to find the next related word e.g. **MONK rhymes with HUNK and is one letter different from MINK.**
3. If you are correct, move on to the next box, **eg MONK has the same meaning as FRIAR.**



For your diary:
 Dates and venues for indoor meetings and walks are listed elsewhere in this newsletter.
10-17 May 2026 – Guildford Group birding break to Herzegovina
27 May 2026 – Guildford Group AGM, Onslow Village Hall 7.30pm
31 May 2026 – Garden bird survey results to paulhicks2006@yahoo.co.uk
31 May 2026 - Coach trip to RSPB Wallasea
9 July 2026 – Deadline for items for the next newsletter to Len Walker editor@rspbguildford.org.uk

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

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