Nature is in crisis
Together we can save it

Guildford and District Local Group

Website: rspbguildford.org.uk

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2026

Persecution of raptors

Tony Cummins

Since my late introduction to the wonders of birding one thing has continued to make my blood boil, the persecution of raptors. Sadly persecution has a long history in Britain. For centuries, many species including mammals such as foxes were regarded as vermin because of threats to livestock such as gamebirds and poultry. This attitude became particularly intense during the expansion of sporting estates in the nineteenth century, when gamekeepers were employed to maximise populations of pheasants, partridges and red grouse for shooting. Raptors were consequently shot, trapped, poisoned or had their nests destroyed to such an extent that extinction became a reality for some.

Legal protection was introduced sporadically during the twentieth century until eventually the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provided comprehensive protection by making it illegal to kill or injure protected birds, take their eggs or destroy their nests. Despite these measures, illegal persecution has continued, particularly in areas managed for driven game shooting.

The scale of the modern problem is demonstrated by RSPB records. Between 2015 and 2024, 921 confirmed incidents of raptor persecution were recorded in the UK. At least 55 per cent occurred on or near land managed for gamebird shooting. The principal methods include shooting, poisoning, trapping and nest destruction. Because many incidents occur in remote areas, the recorded figures are considered to represent only a proportion of the actual level of crime.

The Hen Harrier provides perhaps the clearest example because of its particular association with upland grouse moors. Between 2015 and 2024, 49 confirmed Hen Harrier persecution incidents were recorded in Britain. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2024, 112 satellite-tagged Hen Harriers disappeared in suspicious circumstances, most transmitting for the last time on or near grouse-shooting land. Such disappearances are especially significant because satellite tags allow researchers to identify where birds were last known to be alive, although the absence of a body means that not every disappearance can be conclusively classified as a crime.

Persecution is not confined to Hen Harriers. Golden Eagles, White-tailed Eagles, Peregrines, Goshawks, Buzzards, Red Kites and other raptors have also been illegally killed. Some species have nevertheless made remarkable recoveries because of legal protection, habitat conservation and, in the case of Red Kites and White-tailed Eagles, successful reintroduction programmes. Even Hen Harriers seem to have made a modest comeback in the last few years.

Enforcement remains difficult. Between 2015 and 2024, only 24 people were convicted of bird-of-prey persecution offences despite hundreds of recorded incidents. Two-thirds of those convicted were connected with the gamebird industry, while more than half were working as gamekeepers when the offences occurred.

So what to think? Britain's raptors certainly enjoy theoretical legal protection but illegal persecution remains a significant conservation problem. Commercial estates do have concerns but it is difficult to sympathise with them when the law is being so plainly flouted. Cooperation with conservation bodies might be a way of finding acceptable mitigations such as distraction feeding.

In the end, though, resolution is showing no signs of coming from the weight of public opinion when it faces entrenched interests.

Greater comfort may be felt from the recent decline in grouse shooting resulting from poor breeding seasons and the introduction of mandatory licensing in Scotland. Long term problems rarely have easy solutions.

Volunteer needed: a small but important role — Tony Cummins

Kirsten Osa has had sole responsibility for our IT needs for a long time, both for our distinctive website and our email system. She and the Committee feel that we should ensure that there is cover for her role in case of unavoidable absence or emergency. The role would be limited and take a minimal amount of time. Its main responsibility would be to hold the means of access to the group systems for use in Kirsten's absence and perhaps performing a few basic tasks to ensure ongoing familiarity. No in depth knowledge or computer skills are necessary. If you can spare a little time please contact Kirsten (admin@rspbguildford.org.uk) who will explain the job more fully.



Coach trip to Slimbridge: 24 January 2027 — Tony Cummins

For our winter coach trip we are returning to the iconic WWT reserve on the banks of the Severn. There we can confidently expect to see masses of wintering waterfowl including Bewick's Swans and White-fronted and Barnacle Geese, as well as Common Cranes with a good chance of rarer species. There will also be a host of wintering waders and ducks. And of course the warm café will be available as a refuge from chilly temperatures.

Because of low attendances at recent trips we have reserved a small coach so that places will be limited and early booking is advisable. The coach will leave from Guildford Spectrum at 8.00am prompt with the return journey starting at 3.30pm. The cost is £30 per person. Please reserve a place by email to Sue Losson (coachtrips@rspbguildford.org.uk) and make payment by bank transfer into the group account:

RSPB Guildford Group - Sort code 30 90 79 - Account no 33358860

WWT members should bring their membership cards with them to secure free admission to the reserve. Others will have to pay the admission charge, but there is a 10% reduction if you pay on-line in advance.

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

Speyside 24/7 Christine Shawyer

I was in Scotland for a week at the end of April with *SpeysideWildlife*. Thankfully 24/7 didn't mean non-stop wildlife-watching every minute of the day, rather a list of local specialities we might hope to see during the week. We didn't learn which these species were until the last evening, when I was surprised to find Red Kite was included. (We didn't see one!)

We were based in a delightful country house hotel in Dulnain Bridge with red squirrels in the garden (one mammal species ticked.) The weather was warm and sunny throughout and the daily soundtrack was supplied by Chaffinches and Willow Warblers. On a trip to the west coast two loo stops proved very productive.



Nethy Bridge loo – photo by Christine Shawyer

At Black Water Falls off the A9 a Dipper was plunging into the waterfall, then flying back upstream to repeat the process. At Altbea in Gruinard Bay the leader of another tour group spotted a Short-eared Owl across the water and we watched through 'scopes as it quartered a small island. As we were returning our equipment to the minibus, the same guide called us back and there was a male Hen Harrier flying back and forth across the same small island.

The afternoon on Cairngorm was disappointing.



Cairngorm – photo by Christine Shawyer

There was still snow on the tops, being enjoyed by skiiers and snow-boarders, so access was limited. The clear weather meant there was a fantastic panoramic view all the way from the Moray coast in the east and Ben Nevis in the west. It was a surprise to find two Water Voles in a tumbling mountain stream, both jet black in colour like their famous counterparts in Glasgow.

There were many highlights. Luckily Roy had found a Crested Tit's nest hole near Loch Garten and we waited patiently until we saw its rear-end disappearing into the hole. After a lengthy wait its head poked out and it flew off again. Some time elapsed until the process was repeated, then the bird perched briefly on a nearby twig. 6am wasn't too early to be standing in a layby watching seven Black Grouse lekking with the morning sunshine bringing out the greenish sheen on their backs, their white tails prominent and their strange calls drifting across to us. The females would have been on eggs by this time, but the males were still strutting their stuff. On the nearby moorland we spotted two summer-plumaged Golden Plovers.

Loch Avie had two pairs of Slavonian Grebes resplendent with their golden ear-tufts and we saw a pair of Goldeneyes mating, the female almost under water enjoying (?) the male's attentions. We missed out on some of the mammals – notably Pine Marten and Mountain Hare. An area in the Findhorn Valley which used to be a good site for the Hares had been over-visited by photographers, so they'd retreated higher up the hillside. But we saw plenty of Brown Hares and three re-introduced European Beavers and the reliable Bottle-Nosed Dolphins performed close to shore off Chanonry Point in the Moray Firth.

It was a great trip, just about worth the ten hours spent on trains travelling home afterwards.

New Members — Christine Shawyer

A very warm welcome to the following new members :

Jill Cobbett	(West Byfleet)	Elane Vass	(Hindhead)
Tom and Sue Smart	(Guildford)		

Group walks — Malcolm Toyer

Eleven of us met in the heat of a sweltering day for a walk around **Sheepleas** focusing on flowers and butterflies. Just a few of the wild flower highlights were: Three types of Campanula, Nettle leaved Bellflower, Clustered Bellflower, and Harebell. We stopped to look at a patch of Hemp Agrimony which was quite a contrast to the smaller Agrimony with a yellow flower. Further along the path there was some flowering Deadly Nightshade. In places there were fragrant patches of wild herbs such as Marjoram, Wild Basil and Wild Thyme to be enjoyed. We studied some Wild Clematis, or 'Traveller's Joy.'A total of 47 different plants and flowers were recorded - a full list is available from the 'walks' email. Despite the heat and recent lack of rain, the flower meadows looked lush and were alive with butterflies. We saw Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver-Washed Fritillary, Green Veined White, Large White, Brimstone, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Ringlet, Small Heath, and Common Blue. At the end of the walk a single White Admiral flew very close to some of us in the group giving close, if fleeting, views. Birds as expected were few and far between, but we did see a circling Buzzard in the sky, and a Kestrel. A singing Stock Dove could be seen on a tall tree. As we made our way around our circular route, we saw a Robin and, pausing to admire the butterflies on a Buddleia we spotted a Chiffchaff. At this point there were also numerous fledgling Great and Blue Tits in their 'washed-out' juvenile plumage.

Fourteen of us met up for a summer walk around **Medmerry** on an initially cool day which warmed up considerably by the afternoon. At the Earnley car park we soon encountered the first of many showy Yellowhammer, quickly followed by a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Green Woodpecker. The wildflower margins of the fields were alive with butterflies – numerous pristine Painted Ladies, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Red Admirals and Common Blues surrounded us. We also saw a single Small Tortoiseshell. The surrounding fields held large flocks of Stock Dove and Starling, Linnets flew around the gorse and sat on top of the bushes. A Whitethroat was skulking around the scrubby vegetation. Raptors were represented by the occasional Buzzard and a Kestrel. We saw a small number of birds in a distant hedge, which were tentatively identified as Corn Buntings.



Redshank – photo by Gillian Pullinger

Approaching the Stilt Pools some of us were lucky enough to see a Clouded Yellow butterfly, and the area had a continuous stream of Swallows, House Martins, Sand Martins, as well as the occasional Swift. The pools held Mallard, Canada Goose, and Coot with some Avocet, Lapwing and Oystercatcher. A couple of Mediterranean Gulls were picked out from the Black Headed Gulls, and eventually three Common Sandpipers, a lone Dunlin, a single Redshank and one Greenshank were observed. As we approached the beach we saw Common and Sandwich Terns, and meanwhile Reed Warblers and Reed Buntings gave fleeting glimpses as they flitted in the reeds. After a much-needed lunch stop on the beach we took the path along the top of the embankment looking over the marshland. We were able to add Curlew, Shelduck, and Lesser Black Backed Gull to our growing list, and were delighted to see a Dartford Warbler at close range flying around the gorse near the path. Along with

common birds such as House Sparrow, Wren, Robin, Dunnock, Great Tit, Magpie and Woodpigeon, by the time we arrived back at the cars we had seen a total of 51 different species of bird.

On a sunny Sunday morning, eleven of us met at RSPB Pagham Harbour for the walk out to **Church Norton**. Whilst waiting for everyone to arrive, we saw a large flock of Goldfinches and Lapwings above the car park, as well as a number of House Martins overhead. Once at the Ferry Pool hide, the only birds visible were three young Shelducks and a couple of Teal, but the feeders gave us sightings of Blackcap, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, and Dunnock. In the channel opposite the Ferry Pool there was a Black Tailed Godwit along with the first of many Redshank, some assorted Mallard and Wigeon. On the way to the bench along the long pool, we sighted Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Chiffchaff, Reed Bunting and Linnets. Some of us saw a Snipe and a Cetti's Warbler that perched in full view for us. Once at the bench we were rewarded with a wonderful sighting of an Osprey, plus a lone Knot, Cattle Egret and Grey Herons. We then made our way a little further on to find Ringed Plovers, Dunlin, Curlew, Oystercatcher and Little Egrets. From the high path to the hide, three of the group had a good view of a Whimbrel, then a Curlew flew in which gave us a great comparison of the differences in size and bill length, between the two species. At the Church Norton hide we were fortunate to find two Spotted Flycatchers, a Green Woodpecker, Blackcap and probable Willow Warbler. Out in the harbour looking out to Tern Island there was a Bar Tailed Godwit, Grey Plover, and some Turnstones. Once on the beach, we observed an Arctic Skua flying low and fast over the water, and a very large flock of distant gulls which contained Gannets diving for fish. A Great Crested Grebe was also sighted. On the way back to the Visitors Centre, the Snipe was seen again, this time by the whole group. An Avocet was the last bird to be seen, which brought our count for the day to 70 species.

Fifteen members joined the walk to **Puttenham Common**, and although the weather was fine, with no wind, many of the expected birds were lacking. While waiting at the start, Canada geese were heard but not seen. At Cutt Mill, there were views for some of a kingfisher and for others a male Mandarin duck. Three Great-Crested Grebes were out on the water (one adult and two juveniles), plus six Mallard and a Cormorant. Towards the southern end, there were three good specimens of Brown Birch Bolete *Leccinum scabrum* - near to a birch tree, helping to confirm the ID!
Walking along the road back to The Tarn, the group was treated to good, close views of a Buzzard flying along the road away from us. They are impressive birds when seen close to. The Tarn provided two Grey Herons, two Black-Headed Gulls, and a Blackbird. A large Beefsteak Fungus *Fistulina hepatica* was also seen in prime condition, bizarrely almost on the ground, but definitely attached to a tree. Warren Pond then gave us sightings of Moorhen and Coot, and a male Teal briefly visited the General's Pond.



Great White Egret – photo by Mike Grimshaw

Various Tits were seen and heard on the pines as we walked up to the Hill Camp, but foliage stopped proper views. Jackdaws were seen and a Raven heard cronking (along with numerous Nuthatches making their presence known), as we climbed the hill. A brief drink stop sitting on the WW2 excavations showed how important these are for *Aculeate Hymenoptera* (solitary bees and wasps) which were flying in and out of lots of holes in the south facing slopes of the lumps and bumps - maybe Ivy Bees *Colletes hederae*? Swallows were also seen swooping over the Hill Fort. Continuing the walk, a Carrion Crow was seen, along with an unidentified single Thrush high up in a tree on Hill Brow - most likely a Song Thrush. We then made a surprising discovery of an uncommon Wild Service tree *Sorbus torminalis*. The final part of the walk across the gorse and heather-dominated area gave us a good view of a Great-Spotted Woodpecker working a silver birch, plus good views of two Woodlark. Curiously, no Stonechats or Dartford Warblers were seen here. Although overall species numbers were low at eighteen species seen and six heard, we had some good sightings of birds with some bonus Fungi.

Sixteen of us met in the car park at **Thorney Island** on what turned out to be a lovely sunny and warm October day. Standing in the car park we could already see a Little Egret flying over and a Marsh Harrier patrolling the fields. In the bushes on the walk to the sea wall, we saw Robin, Chiffchaff, Stonechat and multiple Cetti's Warblers singing but not showing. Arriving at the reedbeds at the Little Deep, we could

immediately hear Bearded Reedlings and also heard the laughing calls of Little Grebes and whistles of Wigeon. Ascending to the top of the sea wall allowed us to see the birds on the water more clearly and Tufted Duck, Mallard, and Coot were added to the list, and we had good views of the Little Grebe and Wigeon. Looking over to the channel to Emsworth Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew, three Greenshank, three Black Tailed Godwit, Turnstone and Oystercatcher were spotted out on the mud. A couple of Cormorants were fishing in the main channel.



Willow Warbler – photo by Alan Rines

Mute Swans were seen flying up the channel. Kestrels, Buzzards and Marsh Harriers were active over the marsh and grass on the inland side. A large group of Greylag Geese were grazing the fields. As we got closer to the Great Deep we watched a Kingfisher flying along the ditch and fishing, at first unsuccessfully, for its lunch. Eventually it flew off with a prize fish. There was a Grey Heron in the main lake and quite a few Little and Great White Egret. There were a couple of Shelduck out on the water. At one stage a Little Egret stood next to a Great White Egret allowing direct comparison of size and identifying features. Two Raven could be heard 'cronking' to each-other and performing their flight displays. After retracing our steps and having lunch we walked out along the coast path where we could view the Prinsted Channel, spotting two Great Crested Grebe and House Sparrows around the houses and gardens. After much searching out on the mud, we added Ringed Plover and Grey Plover to the list. A number of Ringed Plover flew over chased by what at first we thought was a Merlin. However, it was later mobbed by a Kestrel and there did not seem much difference in size, so it may have been a Kestrel all along. Three Sandwich Terns were observed diving for fish and at times perching on the buoys out in the water. Along the way we had picked up Goldfinch, Linnet and Reed Bunting, and common birds such as Blue Tit, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Starling, Woodpigeon, and Blackbird. Also Black headed, Lesser Black Backed and Herring Gulls. At the end of the day we had seen a total of 48 species and three heard.

Subscriptions for 2027 — Christine Shawyer

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

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.

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.

Guildford Group garden bird survey — Paul Hicks

Results: Summer 2026 (June 2026 to August 2026)

Summer 2026 was the hottest since records began in 1884 as well as being very sunny. There was virtually no rain in Surrey. Wisley recorded a record 62-day dry period. Several of us hid indoors from the heat or drew curtains so observations were restricted. Many also followed RSPB advice on limited or no feeding and provision of water. Gardens still provided food, however, and birds sought out water features. While there were reports of lower numbers, species sightings only fell to a low we have had twice before at 20.6, with ten gardens reporting falls but eight gains or no loss. Counts ranged from 12 to 36.

Across the 18 surveys received the number of species was a normal summer level of 53, the same as last year and just two below our summer high of 2017. The count was enhanced by no fewer than 13 single sightings! Our regulars were well represented as usual with the top five present in all gardens, but blackbirds were absent from two gardens as they were two years ago.

Most species were close to their normal levels but there were significant increases:

- Feral pigeons recovered from last years 30% to an equal high of two years ago of half our gardens
- Goldcrests were at a third, up from around 10% for the past six years and just below our previous summer high of 37%

And some notable decreases:

- there were no reports of Swallows in summer for the first time in the 15 years we have been doing the survey, with unusual weather apparently impacting migration and food sources
- Goldfinches were down to a new low for all seasons of 61% from last year's low of 70% and have been omnipresent in previous summers
- Greenfinches were down to a third as low as we have seen them in summer; 14 years ago they were at 90%
- Green Woodpeckers were down 17% from last year,
- House Sparrows down 16%,
- and Jackdaws down 15%.

Among the single sightings were Spotted Flycatcher, Whitethroat and the return of a pair of Hawfinches.

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

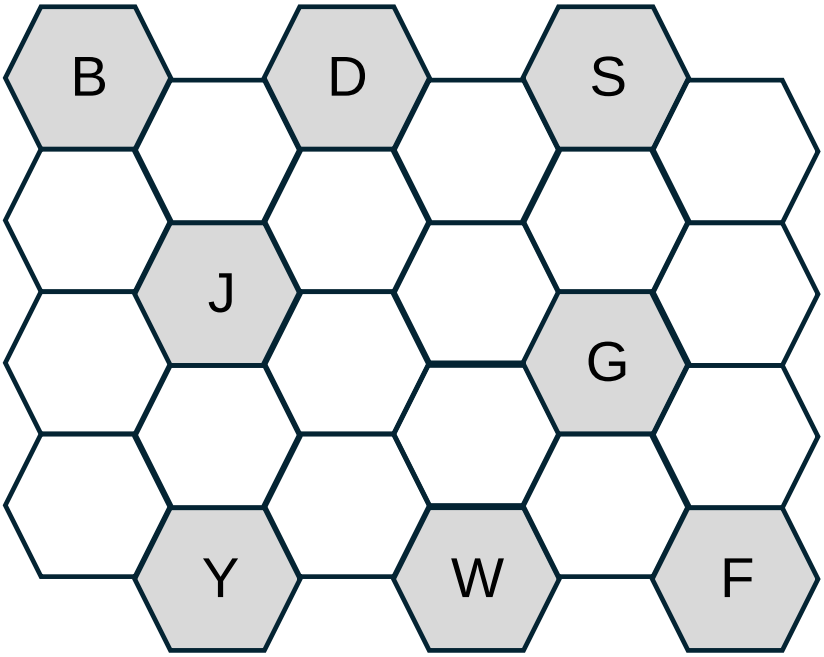
Species	%	Species	%	Species	%
Blackbird	100	Nuthatch	58	Mistle Thrush	11
Blue Tit	100	Pheasant	32	Moorhen	11
Dunnock	100	Red Kite	32	Red Legged Partridge	11
Great Tit	100	Sparrowhawk	32	Tawny Owl	11
Magpie	100	Green Woodpecker	26	Brambling	5
Robin	100	Grey Heron	26	Common Redpoll	5
Goldfinch	95	Buzzard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

Puzzle Corner number three ……PETER BRYANT

The grid below has 24 letters (with 8 already filled in). The task is to fill in the blank hexagons with 16 different letters of the alphabet (only “Q” and “Z” are excluded). The letters must be placed in such a way that each of the words to the right of the grid can be spelled out; these include five bird names (that have been emboldened). Cross each letter off the set below the grid as you fill that letter in.

General tips: If you can see in the word list a letter that is next to both “B” and “J”, then that letter must be placed in one of the two hexagons at the top left of the grid adjacent to those two pre-filled letters. If you can see in the word list a letter that is adjacent to both “B” and “D”, then there is only one hexagon at the top of the grid where that letter can be placed.

Specific tip: The key to solving this particular puzzle is placement of the letter “N”.



BUMPY
CHAT
DOVE
FINCH
JOB
LINK
SHAG
STARLING
VEX
WINE

A C E H I K L M N O P R T U V X

Answers to Puzzle Corner number two:

						A						B				
b	a	f	f	l	e	F	f	a	b	l	e	B	L	E	A	F
r	e	l	e	n	t	L	e	n	t	e	r	E	T	E	R	N
a	r	c	a	n	e	A	C	R	A	N	E	E	n	a	r	c
a	g	l	e	a	m	M	E	A	G	L	E	E	g	a	l	e
a	i	r	b	e	d	I	b	e	a	r	d	A	b	r	e	d
G	A	N	N	E	T	N	a	g	e	n	t	T	g	e	a	n
G	A	N	D	E	R	G	a	n	d	r	e	E	r	a	n	d
O	S	P	R	E	Y	O	y	p	r	e	s	R	e	s	p	y

For your diary:

Dates and venues for indoor meetings and walks are listed separately.

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

1 January 2027 – RSPB Guildford Group subscriptions are due

9 January 2027 – Deadline for items for the next newsletter to Len Walker editor@rspbguildford.org.uk

27 January 2027 - Coach trip to Slimbridge

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