



Bay News February 2025

The Newsletter of Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust



Sparrowhawk by D Elliot

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Chair's Chat

Many of our members and donors who are UK taxpayers kindly help us further, at no extra cost to themselves, by signing a Gift Aid declaration form.

As we have changed from a Registered Charity to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) we must now obtain new Gift Aid declarations from those members to cover membership fees and donations since early 2022.

You will have received an email from us with the new form attached. If you cannot download the form, there will be hard copies available to complete when you collect your 2025 membership cards later this month.

Can I encourage everyone who can donate in this way to do so as it gives us an important extra income. If you do not qualify to donate or do not wish to please indicate this on the form so we do not follow up for a form later.

I would also draw your attention to the article about the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This is out now for public consultation so everyone can add their voice. Given the headlong rush to develop Kent, any opportunity to recognise the value of our wild areas is worth supporting.

I am pleased to draw your attention to our young persons' wildlife group - Bay Explorers. Tickets for the first meeting on February 22nd are available on Ticket tailor.

Please note your membership cards for 2025 will be available to collect from the Obs or sent once our treasurer and membership secretary have been able to review all the renewals for 2025. You won't need it to enter the Estate just yet as your current Estate pass is valid until the end of March. We will send out an email once your cards are ready to collect. Thank you for your patience.

Ian Hunter

Welcome Jonny

Jonathan Bull is our new Residential Voluntary Assistant Warden. He started at the beginning of February for one year. Jonny comes to us from Gloucestershire where, amongst other things, he volunteered for the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust at Slimbridge.

I will leave Jonny to introduce himself further.

HELP with Fundraising

Dear Members,

We really need someone with fundraising experience to help us as we try to access the various funding opportunities that are available. Although we have had some success with opportunities picked up by Trustees and Staff, we do need more help. We have lots of ideas to further the aims of the Observatory but

we need money to put them into practice. So, if you have expertise or willingness in this area please contact us at admin@sbbot.org.uk.

Easy (Free) Fundraising Opportunity

Benefact Group

Next week for one week only you could nominate your favourite Wildlife/Animal charity for a donation from the Benefact Group – that could be SBBOT. Please consider nominating us and promoting this fundraising opportunity on your social media platforms and among your friends and family.

For mor information, go to <https://animal.movementforgood.com/>



Our first £5,000 draw of 2025 is nearly here!

To support the incredible work that so many charities do to support **Animals and Wildlife**, our first special draw of the year will award **£5,000 to 10 charities** working in this area.

The nomination window opens next week for seven days only – **Monday 17th to Sunday 23rd February**, so please mark your calendar and come back then to get your favourite charities in the running.

Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Public consultation is now live



To have your say head to: www.kent.gov.uk/naturerecovery

The draft Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been published for public consultation and is available on the following website: <https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/nature-recovery>.

The LNRS sets out the county’s priorities for nature recovery and the recommended actions to deliver these. This Strategy also identifies where in the county this action should be targeted to deliver the greatest outcomes for the county’s habitats and species. This “first of its kind” Strategy for the county has been prepared by Kent County Council, appointed by Defra as Responsible Authority. It is one of 48 strategies across England, with the shared aim of halting and reversing the decline of nature. The LNRS for Kent and Medway has been developed with extensive input from partners and stakeholders, including input from some SBBOT Trustees and Members, with over 1,000 individuals attending events designed to enable full participation in the process. The public consultation provides a further opportunity to input into the Strategy’s finalisation ahead of publication later in 2025.

The intention of the Kent and Medway LNRS is to direct action and investment to areas where it is needed, and will achieve the most. The aim is also for the LNRS to steer losses and impacts away from the county’s most valuable natural assets.

The Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy has **ten ambitions for nature recovery**. These are:

1. Connectivity	6. Successional habitats
2. Nature-based solutions	7. Woodland, trees and hedgerows
3. Land management and land use	8. Freshwater
4. Species	9. Urban
5. Grasslands	10. Coast

Under these headings, are a further 53 detailed priorities and their associated potential measures.

The Local Habitat Map for Kent and Medway is a key part of the LNRS, comprising of the “Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity” (APIB), areas already afforded protection, and the “Areas that Could become of particular Importance for Biodiversity” (ACIB), the target areas identified by the LNRS as the focus for the delivery of the strategy’s potential measures. Many of the potential measures identified in the LNRS have also been mapped, targeting their delivery to where they would best be implemented with a focus on greatest need or opportunities for greatest benefit.

The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy is presented in two documents and online mapping.

Part 1 provides the background to the Strategy and Part 2 sets out the Strategy's ambitions – the priorities, potential measures and areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity. Part 3 of the Strategy is the online map, where the potential measures mapping can be viewed alongside the areas of particular importance for biodiversity and areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity. This can be found at https://webapps.kwtg.uk/lhrs_measures_webmap/

As expected, Sandwich Bay, Pegwell Bay, Worth Marshes etc. appear as *Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity* but we should also note those adjacent areas that the LNRS flag as being important for connectivity. The LNRS should provide a valuable reference and support tool as we seek to protect these areas.

The LNRS is a lengthy and detailed document. Nevertheless, we encourage you to read it and submit your comments as directed on the websites before the Consultation closes on 12th March 2025.

Mike Witty, SBBOT Planning Committee

An Introduction to Our New Residential Voluntary Assistant Warden, Jonny Bull



Hi folks I'm Jonny and I'm writing this at the end of my first week as Assistant Warden. I've been lucky enough to bump into a few of you already but for those I've missed this is a little bit about me!

I've come down from Gloucestershire where WWT Slimbridge has been like a second home to me for, essentially, my whole life, as my parents took me there almost weekly since I was in a pushchair. I feel I wouldn't be where I am now without that constant exposure to nature. By the age of 11, I was having my first inklings of twitchery; I became obsessed with seeing an overwintering Bittern, and eventually succeeded, having subjected my parents to many weekends freezing away in the hides. At the time I had obviously decided this would be the peak experience of birding and fell out

with it for most of my teenage years, not picking it back up until I was about to start uni.

My time at Bangor University was my most important period for birding. I started as an incredibly inexperienced birder with a friend group that was leagues ahead of me. I was in a part of the world with a fair bit more on offer than Gloucestershire. There was certainly a lot of pressure, but these were also the perfect conditions to really improve my knowledge. I left Wales with so many memorable experiences: I saw massive tern colonies; passage Dotterels that would walk up to you; and Twite with a backdrop of Cuckoos and Grasshopper Warbler in the Snowdonia valleys. Then there was the ever so slightly unusual day when I saw my first ever day-roosting Nightjar in the middle of a reedbed on top of a plastic heron!

Despite all of this I somehow didn't forget that I was there to get a degree and graduated in 2021 with a BSc in Zoology. Covid had shaped a lot of my post-uni life, mostly due to the wait times with getting driving lessons. It took me 3 years from the first call to finally getting my licence, so I was pretty stuck in place for a while!

Before starting here, I was splitting my time between a retail job and volunteering at Slimbridge, where I had been working as a visitor engager since 2019. Then, in 2022, I started joining the practical team work parties, helping with habitat management.

It should go without saying that I am very, very excited for my time here. I've never been to Kent, I've never been to a Bird Observatory and I've never had a role like this before so I've got a lot to learn. I'm hoping to shy away from twitching things and to really try and find my own birds, Bee-eater and Wryneck would be dreams come true but I'll take anything really!

Outside of the bird life, I'm looking forward to expanding my surveying skill set - especially so when the time comes for dragonfly and pollinator surveys. I've been really getting into dragonflies and have done pretty well on the west coast; my life list sits at 26 currently, but I cannot wait for what's to come in the summer! I haven't spent a great deal of time mothing before now and a lot of the rare species are lost on me - the one I want to see most is Garden Tiger!

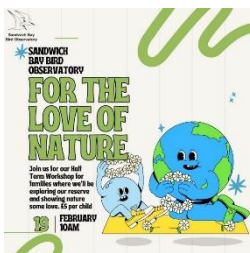
It has been a very pleasant week exploring the recording area, learning all the sites and meeting so many new people. A big thank you to Steffan and all the volunteers for making me so welcome here, I am really looking forward to what's in store this year!

Jonny Bull


Upcoming Events

Activities for Young People

Wednesday 19th February - Family Explorers - For the Love of Nature



Please note that this event is best suited to children aged 6 and over. Our session takes place in areas of uneven terrain and involves quite a lot of walking, with the terrain being unsuitable for buggies and long distances between our Field Centre and reserve areas. It will also involve the use of equipment such as binoculars.

Chillax! Winter – it doesn't have to be boring. Even though we're in what some call the bleakest months of the year, there's no need to feel bleak on the inside. Better still, we can fix these winter blues by getting ourselves outside and showing nature some  LOVE! We'll be heading outdoors exploring our wide range of habitats, getting the best of nature's 'wow factor', learning new skills, being creative, playing games and maybe even make some new friends!

Even in the wintertime, the stunning Sandwich Bay Estate is alive with birdsong and flushed with vibrant colours. Tracks in the mud reveal the trails of nocturnal mammals meandering in the night, hardy fungi species can be found on deadwood. Our wetland - Restharrow Scrape - comes to life with over-wintering birds and are full of hidden charms ready to be discovered!

Please be aware:

- Children must be **accompanied** by an **adult** who is **able to encourage and help them** with the activities.
- Our session starts at 10am and end at 1pm so **please arrive in good time.**
- **All activities take place outdoors** and we recommend appropriate clothing for all weathers.
- This event is **suitable for children and families** but activities are aimed at 6 -13 years. *(Adults are free.)*

NEW! Bay Explorers Club

Launching on 22nd February

We are delighted to announce the launch of this NEW club. This is a drop-off Saturday club for children aged between 8-16 years old costing £5. Due to child to staff ratios, we cannot accommodate children under the age of 8.

Bay Explorers

a youth nature club for children aged 8+

**Discover Your Next Adventure with
Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory!**

- Session focus: Owls
- Pellet Dissection
- Owl Prowl
- Fun!

Saturday 22nd Feb

1.30pm-5pm

£5 per child

More info & booking



See details on next page.

Bay Explorers has been designed to provide children with hands-on experiences in nature, fostering a deeper connection with their environment and emphasising the importance of caring for local wildlife.

Join us on the 22nd February as we explore Sandwich Bay and learn all about Owls. We will be dissecting their pellets and will go on a sunset 'Owl Prowl' around our amazing reserves.

Children need nature, and nature needs future generations to take action to save it. Attendance at Bay Explorers club is a wonderful way to create memories shaped by nature that will inspire a lifelong passion for the natural world around us. Led by an experienced team of education leaders and conservationists, we are based on the private Sandwich Bay estate and home to Restharrow Scrape, an artificial wetland which acts as a refuge for many birds, as well as woodland, grassland, dunes and beach!

Spaces are limited to 20 **children aged 8 and over** per session.

Any questions? Please email educationofficer@sbbot.org.uk

Book online at <https://buytickets.at/sandwichbaybirdobservatory/1560807> where you will find further details.

Activities for Adults

Midweek Walks

All walks can be booked through Ticket Tailor on the website here. <https://sbbot.org.uk/book-events/>

Monday 10th March – Morning Walk – Godmersham Estate

Led by Ian Searle and Ben Palmer (Estate Manager)

We will explore the Churchyard and then various habitats on Godmersham Estate, including river meadows, the River Stour, and pastureland. We will be looking for Little Owl, finches (possibly including Hawfinch) Grey Wagtail, Nuthatch, Red Kite and Raven.

Monthly Sunday Morning Walks from the Field Centre

1st Sunday of each month 9.00am start at the Field Centre. Free but donations always welcome.

Next walks are **Sunday February 2nd** and **Sunday March 2nd**.

These walks will centre on our reserves nearby and the greater recording area (Worth Marshes, Green Wall, New Downs etc.) and will develop censusing skills while recording the changing populations of birds, butterflies, dragonflies, orchids and other wildlife through the year.

Wear boots/wellies and bring your binoculars, notebook and pencil. (We have binoculars you can borrow if you don't have your own).

You don't need to book, just turn up. Under 16s should be accompanied by an adult.

Thursday evening talks

We have some great talks coming up with the first two focussing on important wildlife projects in the UK; namely Knepp park and its White Storks, then the White-tailed Sea eagle reintroduction by the Roy Dennis foundation.

After them, we welcome back John Buckingham who will enthral us with his talk on the Birds of Greece and its islands (**important - please note this talk includes Greek food and wine and therefore tickets for this talk must be purchased on Ticket Tailor via the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory website**).

The following week we then have a great talk about Bermuda and its bird life.

Details of these are below, but don't forget that the full list is on the website and we look forward to seeing you coming along to enjoy them with us.

Everyone is welcome - the talks start at 7.30pm and you pay on the door **except for the special talk on March 6th when tickets must be purchased via the website**.

20th February - White Stork Project: Reconnecting with a wilder Britain



Laura Vaughan-Hirsch, White Stork Project Manager, Knepp Wildland Foundation

The talk will cover the methods used to reintroduce storks at Knepp as well as their partner sites, the ecology of the birds and the lessons they have learnt about their behaviour, breeding and migration. Laura will also cover the community engagement that the project has been working on and aims to achieve in the future.

27th February - The return of the White-tailed Eagle to Southern England by Zoe Smith, Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation

Prior to being reintroduced, the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) had been absent as a resident breeding bird in England for over 240 years. Like many birds of prey, the White-tailed Eagle suffered relentless persecution from the Middle Ages onwards. The last known pair in southern England bred on Culver Cliff in 1780 on the Isle of Wight.



6th March - Birds of Greece and its Islands by John Buckingham

This is a themed evening including cheese and wine so tickets must be purchased online at www.sbbot.org.uk

From the snow-capped Pindos mountains of N.W. Greece, we travel east past bird-rich forests, lakes and marshes as far Alexandroupolis sitting close to the Turkish border. From here we overlook the Evros Delta which divides these two countries and was once one of Europe's richest wetland sites.

Greece is famous for its many islands sitting around the sparkling Aegean. Five of these are featured in John's talk. Springtime migrants move north along the coast of Turkey in huge numbers where we have an exciting time birding in Lesbos, Samos, Kos and Rhodes. Finally, our visit to Crete, the country's largest island, enables us to enjoy deep gorges and fabulous mountain views, carpets of wild-flowers and encounters with more of Eastern Europe's bird specialities.

BIRDS OF GREECE & its ISLANDS *with John Buckingham*



A themed fund-raising evening including a glass of sunny Greek wine and tasty finger food.

SANDWICH BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY
Thursday 6th March at 7.30pm

Tickets **£10** per person (advance booking only on the SBBOT website)

Why not come along, sit back and enjoy John's super photographs while he takes us on a spectacular spring tour of Greece from the snow-capped Pindos Mountains, past lakes, forests and marshes to the Evros Delta and then around five stunning islands with their flower-rich meadows and a huge list of birds including all of the eastern specialities.

13th March - Bermuda's birds: 400 species in 21 square miles by Andrew Dobson

Andrew will explain how an isolated island of only 21 square miles and with 20 breeding species can have recorded 400 bird species. The reasons for the relatively large number of species will be discussed, including Bermuda's isolation from other land areas, its situation in relation to the Gulf Stream, migration routes and weather patterns experienced in the autumn months. Andrew will highlight the remarkable story of the Bermuda Petrel or Cahow – a great conservation success.



Other Events

New Online Course by John Buckingham – The Life of Birds: Bills & Food, Nests, Eggs and Young

LIFE OF BIRDS (new course)
BILLS & FOOD - NESTS, EGGS & YOUNG



**A new Wednesday evening ZOOM Course
Feb/March 2025 with John Buckingham, SBBOT**

We cover two subjects during the course. Bill structure and feeding techniques and then the breeding cycle, including territories and display, plus a study of the huge diversity of of nests, eggs and young. All will be illustrated with John's superb quality and detailed images.

FIVE WEEKS – 19th & 26th February, 5th, 19th & 26th March 2025
Start time 7.30pm for 90 minutes.

Fee £25 per person for the course - Each session is recorded and sent automatically to everyone, so that you will never miss the opportunity to see every presentation.

Please see Sandwich Bay Bird Obs. website for booking details

And Further in the Future ... An excellent Two-Day Art Course with Steve Cale

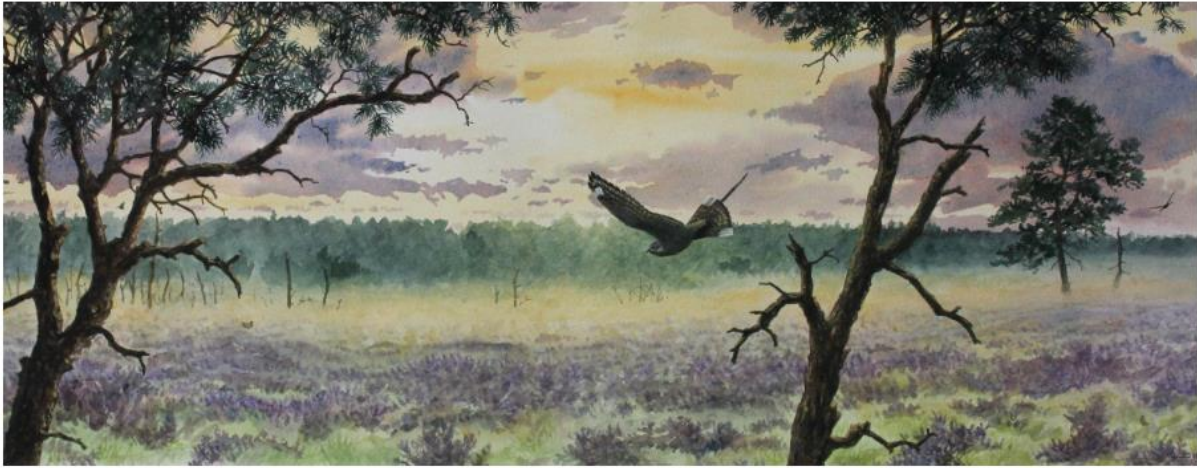
We still have a few places left on this excellent art course priced at only £85!

The course will run from 10am to 3.30pm and will be for a maximum of 15 participants.

Head to Ticket Tailor to buy your tickets now.

<https://sbbot.org.uk/2-day-art-course/>

Please email Rob Rackliffe @ robbirder@icloud.com with any questions or queries!



LEARN TO DRAW AND WATERCOLOUR BIRDS

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory is pleased to offer a Two Day Art course with **renowned bird artist Steve Cale**. Tickets only **£85!**

Friday 19th & Saturday 20th September 2025



The course will be held at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Field Centre from 10am to 3.30pm each day with a break for lunch at 1pm.

- Day One will teach you how to draw and sketch birds , whilst on Day Two Steve will show you how to watercolour your drawings and sketches
- Suitable for all abilities!
- Places are limited so book soon to avoid disappointment.
- Accommodation can be booked at the bird observatory if required see www.sbbot.org.uk/accommodation
- Tea and Coffee making facilities

Tickets can be bought online at Ticket Tailor by visiting <https://sbbot.org.uk/book-events/>

This course is an ideal gift! 🎁

From the Archives

1958 A Year of Trial & (many) Errors

Last month, John told us about the beginnings of Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory when Dennis Harle, Phil Redman and a few others built the Heligoland trap and started trapping and ringing birds in the early 1950s. This month, he picks up where he left off.

By the late 1950s, most of the group had progressed from cycles to scooters which meant we were able to roam further afield. In particular, we made a number of visits to Grove which at that period was given over to cultivated turf fields - ideal for breeding Lapwing – and, in autumn, migrant waders. The highlight was the ringing of two young Little-ringed Plover, one of which was controlled three weeks later in the Camargue, Southern France. The downside was sleeping in a rat-infested barn! A much favoured second site mid-way between Stodmarsh & Littlebourne proved ideal for wintering thrushes & finches. Large numbers were ringed here over a two- or three-year period. Closer to Sandwich many summer evenings were spent on the Ash levels ringing Lapwing chicks and the occasional Redshank. This required a lot of patience and a small team of `spotters` whose task it was to pinpoint the exact clump of grass or reed where the young birds had taken refuge, then, with a combination of hand signals, direct the Ringers to the spot. Nest finding was stepped up at the Estate & marshes; Dennis Harle & George Dunkling became expert and were able to pinpoint secretive nesters such as Stonechat. It was much easier to find the many pairs of Swallows beneath the bridges along the Sandwich to Deal railway, although this was more hazardous for the ringers who had to climb down to catch them.

Between times, botanical trips were made to a number of East Kent locations to record the local flora. To the best of my knowledge some of the places where rare orchids were found remain secret to the present day.

Bird migration was not neglected. The Heligoland traps were visited most days, usually in the evenings, and, at weekends, mist nets were used. We also made regular walks to the Point and marshes. It was here, on the 3rd August 1958, that a Curlew-Sandpiper-like bird was found which allowed an approach to within four or five yards. A full description can still be found in the 1958 Log. Eventually Ken Williamson, head of the BTO, Migration Studies & former Warden at Fair Isle thought we had seen a Red-throated Stint, a new bird for Europe. For a variety of reasons, lost in the mists of time, that particular bird remains unknown. Not content with one mystery bird, two weeks later, a second was caught in the Little Gully trap. At first, it was thought to be a Reed Warbler, but with an extremely large head and massive bill and green blue legs. The bird was re-trapped two days later which allowed three new observers (Don Worsfold, John Hollyer and myself) to examine the bird. The bird was released un-ringed. *(I believe that with a full description still available it is worth another look at this record.)*

Because of the decline in many species of passerine, current bird-watchers can only read of the classic days of visible migration (viz-mig) which occurred in the 1950`s & 60`s. One such day was October 22nd 1958. To paraphrase Dennis Harle`s notes of that day: `With conditions ideal (*I had*) an air of expectancy as I cycled towards the Bay. I saw the first of many parties of Chaffinches passing in a Northerly direction. During the morning, there was a continuous stream of birds; I don`t think I have ever seen so many Chaffinches with quite a few Brambling. The totals are of all birds from 0730

to 1230 with the peak around 10.00, though birds were still passing in the afternoon. It is quite probable that well over 10,000 birds passed by in five hours`.

Chaffinch 7,000+; Brambling ca 100; Starling 850; Skylark500; Meadow Pipit 80; Redwing 3; Unidentified 400; *(These are numbers recorded by DFH the only observer on the day)*

November: An attempt to catch Starlings within a roost near Wingham containing at least 50,000 birds failed miserably - smelly ... unpleasant and wet. We had a similar result with our efforts to catch waders at the Point although not so smelly. Finally, in mid-November, we were advised that a local farmer had rented the whole area now known as the Rest Harrow Reserve to graze his cattle but would fence off the gullies for a knockdown price of £12. However, we did have the highlights of the autumn to look back on; our first Pallas`s Warbler – a new bird for Kent; as many as 15 Pied Flycatchers & 10 Redstarts on several days; a Hoopoe; at least four Red-backed Shrikes & three Wrynecks (1 trapped); and many Tree Pipits. The year closed with a visit on Boxing Day to the Littlebourne apple dump which produced just eight birds before the 60` net fell into a bramble bush.

John Websper (Feb. 2025)

If you have a particular memory from the past at SBBO that you would like to submit for possible inclusion in a future edition we would love to see it. Please send to sbbotnews@gmail.com

Member's News

200 Club

Going forward, I plan to run the draw near the end of each month to ensure payment for the relevant month has come through from those who pay monthly.

For those who pay a single amount for the year, it would really help us if you could arrange for your annual standing orders to be paid (and received by us) at the start of the year. Currently there are a few members whose payment does not come through at the start of the 200 club year. If that is you, it would be great if you could review your standing order such that, in future, annual payments are received by us at the start of the year. This will ensure that prizes are paid to those who have definitely paid for the whole year.

For example, if you are due to pay in April 25, please change your standing order to cover the payment for the 9 months to the end of the calendar year 25 and then set up a new standing order from Jan 26 to cover the complete calendar year 2026. This change would be much appreciated.

200 Club Winners for January 2025

Amount Won (£)	Winner	Numbers
60.00	Clandillon-Baker J	46
25.00	Sutton T	73
15.00	Ellis K B	228
10.00	Grieves S	8
10.00	Baltera B	289

Are you getting the most of your membership?

As a member of Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, the membership area of the website “reaches those parts others don’t get!” However, you do need to get there first, so here goes...

Step 1 Type the following address into your search engine:- <https://sbbot.org.uk/membership-signup/> which will take you to the login button set out below...

Restricted Page

This area is for members only.

If you are a full SBBOT member you can login below with your credentials.

[Member Login](#)

Step 2 Type in your username or email address and password, together with an authorisation code, which is the postcode* of the Observatory (without a space) *CT139PF

Step 3 Complete the pictures squares and check the box confirming you are not a robot!

Step 4 You should be logged in now. If this does not work for you scroll down and click the membership@sbbot.org.uk button, which takes you to our membership secretary, who can help.

Once logged in your access should remain until you log out or you have not visited the membership pages for two weeks. My handy tip is to bookmark the log in page so that you can access the sign up page without having to type in the address.

Volunteering Opportunities

Social Media Help Needed!

There are a number of ways to connect with different audiences via social media, not only the platforms where SBBO is present already.

On Facebook in particular - as well as official pages - there are also various Community Groups, such as the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Community Page. The goal of these groups is to unite communities on certain topics and they are far more open, allowing users to learn about certain topics and exchange/share their views, photos and events. There are several of these pages such as ‘Wild Sandwich’, ‘Deal for the Delighted’ etc. To widen our event reach, SBBOT would ideally post the details of our events on these various groups but are short on time to do this. If you belong to any of these groups and possibly have the time, could you share our events and news to these pages?

Faye Kavvadias-Large (Education Officer)

Shop/Reception

We still have some sessions when the shop and reception area are not staffed, and we would love to be able to have it open every day from 10am - 4pm. If you could offer a morning or afternoon slot once a week, please contact info@sbbot.org.uk for more information. As someone who has been volunteering in this role for a couple of years, I can confirm that it’s not usually too challenging, and you get to meet some interesting people who come into the field centre for information. Some of whom have never visited before. So you get to promote the work of the Observatory and encourage people to come along to more events – some even come to stay or even become members. Bring a book or craft activity though, for the quiet times.

(JW -Ed)

Our Field Centre Garden

We are still looking for someone who is willing to weed and water and keep the garden area tidy. If you think you can spare a little time regularly to help, please contact us in person or by email at info@sbbot.org.uk. If you have greater green-fingered skills that you would be willing to use to help, then that would be a bonus.

Thursday Evening Talks

As mentioned earlier in this newsletter, the Talks team would like occasional help on Thursday nights (to collect money, help with the car park or make tea) and someone who could provide some light administrative support (mainly handling a few emails each week). Contact searleian@aol.com if you could help or for more information.

Wildlife Observations January

Birds

Unfortunately, the weather did not play ball for all those hoping to kickstart their year-list with either gale force winds or torrential rain to contend with. A few intrepid souls did venture outside and they recorded 300 Cormorants and a Mediterranean Gull offshore, a Little Egret on Restharrow Scrape, and most peculiarly, a flock of 15 Ringed Plovers in the fields by the Worth track. There were much better conditions the next day and the goose flocks across RSPB Worth marshes contained four **Barnacle Geese**, four White-fronted Geese, and one **Pink-footed Goose**, plus a Great White Egret. Singles of Dartford Warbler and Firecrest were on the Estate.

The 3rd was a beautiful day once you had broken the ice off your car. The Dartford Warbler was still at Dickson's Corner and a Siskin flew north. There were now five **Barnacle Geese** on RSPB Worth marshes, plus the four White-fronted Geese, and single **Pink-footed Goose**, as well as seven Canada Geese, two Egyptian Geese, and 360 Greylag Geese. Two Yellowhammers were around the hay bales behind the Observatory and a healthy tally of 36 Grey Partridges was logged between the Observatory and the Chequers.



Assorted Geese species by A. Lipczynski

A good mix of wildfowl on New Downs on the 4th included three Pintails and 19 Pochards, the latter a particularly good count for the area (with double-figures also present on RSPB Worth marshes). A Caspian Gull also flew north along the beach. The next day adult Yellow-legged and Mediterranean Gulls were in the flooded fields by the entrance toll gate and small numbers of waders moved around offshore. The 6th was another windy and squally day. A few flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits and Knots were offshore and the goose flock on RSPB Worth marshes still held three White-fronted Geese, a **Barnacle Geese**, and a **Pink-footed Goose**. Three Caspian Gulls and two Yellow-legged Gulls were in the roost at Pegwell Bay. The Green Wall provided most of the interest on the 7th with two Coal Tits and a single Bearded Tit, plus a small influx of Blackbirds, whilst around 30-40 Pochards was a good tally spread around the various waterbodies of the Recording Area. Two Woodcocks, a Merlin, a Firecrest, six Siskins, and a flyover **Barnacle Goose** were seen in cold conditions on the Estate on the 8th.



Golden Plovers by P. Blanche

There was massive increase in Cormorants on the 9th with approximately 2,500 offshore or in Pegwell Bay. Three Woodcocks were on the Estate and two Ravens sailed over, whilst the three White-fronted Geese and **Pink-footed Goose** re-appeared on RSPB Worth marshes. The 11th was another frozen morning. Coverage on RSPB Worth marshes for WeBS produced totals of 1,450 Wigeons and 1,230 Lapwings, plus seven Water Rails, a Woodcock, and a Water Pipit. The Dartford Warbler was still in Restharrow Dunes. An attempted count of Pegwell Bay and the Point on the 12th was curtailed by the dense fog with just two Avocet viewable on the Garage Pool at Pegwell. Meanwhile ten Yellowhammers were around the hay bales behind the Observatory and farm buildings.

Though it was still cold there was much better visibility and a little less ice on the ground on the 13th. This meant a count of Pegwell Bay could be tried again and this time with success. Four Pintails, two Avocets, nine Black-tailed Godwits, 17 Turnstones, two Caspian Gulls, and two Snow Buntings were the highlights (the latter just about viewable looking at Shellness Point across the Bay). Over 4,500 Cormorants were offshore, a **Cattle Egret** was seen between the Observatory and the toll booth, and a ringtail Hen Harrier flew through the Whitehouse.



Wildfowl on a semi-frozen Restharrow Scrape by P. Blanche

There was a clearout offshore on the 14th but seven Woodcocks was a decent count on the Estate and the Dartford Warbler showed well again in Restharrow Dunes. Two Firecrests were in the Jubilee Field, a Water Rail in the Haven, and a Grey Wagtail at the Observatory the next day. A Caspian Gull was over at Pegwell Bay whilst a minimum of nine Woodcock were on the Green Wall after dark. On the 16th a flock of 19 White-fronted Geese flew over New Downs and were later relocated on RSPB Worth marshes. A flock of Greylag Geese near New Downs South Pool contained singles of White-fronted and **Pink-footed Geese**, plus at least 11 Bearded Tits on the pool. Elsewhere on New Downs there was Pintail, two Water Rails, Green Sandpiper, two Grey Wagtails, 58 Pied Wagtails, and six Chiffchaffs. A Snow Bunting was seen from Pegwell Bay again.

Two **Cattle Egrets** roamed between the Observatory and the railway line on the 17th and a Pochard was on Restharrow Scrape. The White-fronted Goose and **Pink-footed Goose** were in the same spot on New Downs and so were at least 12 Bearded Tits. A good mix of winter birds on the 19th with the **Cattle Egret** still at the Observatory, the White-fronted Goose and **Pink-footed Goose** still on New Downs, and the Dartford Warbler still in Restharrow Dunes. A Great White Egret was viewable from the Drove and seven Woodcock were recorded on the Green Wall. Best bird of the day was a **Tree Sparrow** hanging around the hay bales behind the Observatory.

On the 20th two Firecrests were in The Elms, the **Cattle Egret** at the Observatory, and the **Tree Sparrow** around the hay bales. At least three **Tree Sparrows** were around the hay bales the following day and after a quiet morning there was an arrival of 42 White-fronted Geese, two **Barnacle Geese**, and 23 Pochards onto RSPB Worth marshes in the afternoon of the 22nd. A Blackcap at Stonar was the first of the year.

A Water Rail was walking along the path between the hides at Restharrow Scrape, which was about the best before Storm Eowyn came through on the 23rd. The next day three **Cattle Egrets** were at the Observatory first thing in the morning and on the 25th most people were away helping out with wader counts across Thanet. Pegwell Bay held the usual good variety though and number of birds including two Avocets, 90 Oystercatchers, 107 Golden Plovers, 90 Grey Plovers, 880 Lapwings, 510 Dunlins, 58 Knots, 40 Sanderlings, 72 Bar-tailed Godwits, one Black-tailed Godwit, 180 Curlews, 54 Redshanks, three Snipes, and 14 Turnstones.

A distant 'white-winged' Gull offshore on the 27th was most likely an Iceland Gull, 11 Kittiwakes also went past. Meanwhile two **Cattle Egrets** were probing along the Guilford Rd and at least one Caspian Gull was seen at high tide in Pegwell.

After truly foul conditions in the morning of the 28th it cleared and allowed a little exploration. Two **Cattle Egrets** were still at the Observatory, eight Fulmars were offshore, and just outside our Recording Area at least 22 White-fronted Geese were south of the Chequers. There were still three **Tree Sparrows** around the hay bales behind the Observatory and farm buildings on the 29th, and the **Cattle Egret** flock nearby now numbered four. Two **Barnacle Geese** and 28 White-fronted Geese were on RSPB Worth marshes near Roaring Gutter. A Skylark flying in off the sea on the 30th was unusual in that there shouldn't be any birds migrating at this time of year and it is not particularly cold enough for hard weather movements. However, there has been a marked increase in Skylark activity in the last few days and are now singing across the golf courses. So perhaps it is an early bird relocating to breeding areas. Meanwhile two **Barnacle Geese** and 40 White-fronted Geese were on RSPB Worth marshes.



Yellowhammer by S. Ray

Invertebrates

A Red Admiral sunning itself at New Downs New Pool on 16th January was our first butterfly of the year and only invertebrate of note during the month.

Navigation

Find a map of our reserves <https://sbbot.org.uk/reserves-map/>

Find a map of the Recording Area

<https://sbbot.org.uk/recording-area-map/>

Read about our Recording Area

<https://sbbot.org.uk/our-wildlife-reserves-recording-area/>



Ringing Report

The weather at this time of year is often such that we get few opportunities to ring and maintenance work is more in order.

Ninety-five birds were caught of which 31 were unringed. The best bird was a Kestrel retrap. This had been ringed as a chick in 2021.

Our ringing data shows that we have retrapped two other Kestrels which we had ringed in the nest but both of these were within a year of them being ringed.

Two chicks ringed by us were found elsewhere, both sadly dead. One was three years later in Sittingbourne and the other two years later in Staple.

The British Trust for Ornithology database for all UK ringing states that the survival rate for Kestrels in their first year is 32% and the average life expectancy is four years. Once they survive the first year the survival rate is 70% and the oldest recorded Kestrel was 15 years 11 months and a day.



Adult male Kestrel. F. Kavvadias-Large.

Ian Hunter

What to look out for in the next few months

January and February

Cold spells from now on are likely to provoke movements of scarcer wildfowl, including geese, Smew and Goldeneye, though these species tend to remain on the continent unless we get a significant spell of hard weather. Short-eared Owls are present in variable numbers and big flocks of Golden Plovers and Lapwings can be present in Pegwell. In the arable fields, large flocks of Stock Doves are joined by Skylarks, Linnets, Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows. Wader numbers can be quite significant in Pegwell and there is the odd chance of a Glaucous or even possibly an Iceland Gull being picked out amongst the Gull roost at high tide. Movements of Divers offshore can also be witnessed in decent conditions and flocks of Great Crested Grebe accumulate in the Bay.

March

Spring is just around the corner and birds that have spent the winter with us know it's time to think about moving on. Starling flocks accumulate on the marshes, with large parties heading off to the NE, Redwings and Fieldfares appear on the fields, and Chaffinches, Siskins and Linnets begin to move along the coast. Great Tits become more conspicuous, particularly if there was a significant influx last autumn, and Brent Geese can be seen in large groups offshore and in Pegwell. The white rump of a Wheatear in flight may catch the eye as these early arriving summer migrants appear on the beachfront, whilst Chiffchaff numbers begin to become apparent. The first arriving Swallows and Sand Martins may also be seen in the middle of the month. Little Ringed Plovers and Avocets start to appear on the various pools and look for breeding opportunities. Whilst wintering ducks begin to drop in number, new arrivals such as Garganey can be expected on various waterbodies in the area. On a warm day, the first butterflies, such as Orange-tip, can also be observed and you may see the frenetic and colourful male Emperor Moth zipping past as it searches for a mate.

April

Summer migrants begin to arrive, mostly to occupy breeding territories locally, though occasional Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Firecrest are worth keeping an eye out for. Offshore wildfowl movement continues, and visible migration of finches and wagtails intensifies. Red Kites, Hobbies and Buzzards can be a major feature and wader passage is likely to feature Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwits, with rare species such as Kentish Plover and Wood Sandpiper always possible. Overshooting species such as Alpine Swift and Hoopoe are also worth keeping an eye out for. Spring butterflies may also be observed feeding on the early flowering species.

Contact Details for Bay News



The Bay News team would love to read your feedback. Maybe you would like to suggest content for the newsletter. Please feel free to get in touch at sbbotnews@gmail.com.

We'd prefer you to go directly to this address so that others don't have to forward emails to the team.

Thanks.

Ways you can help us raise money

Easyfundraising

We've registered Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust with #easyfundraising, which means over 8,000 retailers will now donate to us for FREE every time you use #easyfundraising to shop with them. So far we have raised almost £2000 through this scheme.

These donations will help SO MUCH, so please sign up to support us – it's completely FREE and doesn't take long.

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/sandwichbaybot/?searchSessionId=0a6de6cd-a49d-43a0-8a25-57ce500ff75f>

Just Giving

For one-off donations you can now give via our Just Giving page. Simply scan the QR code below and it will take you to the website.



Regular Donations

Some of our members make monthly donations to our funds. This is a relatively painless way to donate to us, as you may hardly notice the sum leaving your bank account each month. Such donations are, of course, greatly appreciated.

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Ads will be run for up to 3 months unless you tell us otherwise. **Please let us know if the items get sold** so that we don't advertise things that are no longer available.

We are offering this service as a way of raising funds for the Observatory, important at this particular time. To that end we would ask that you make a donation of 15% of the sale price. To do so, your donation can be made to our bank account as follows: -

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RSPB Thanet Local Group Events

To be held at

**St Peters Church Hall, Hopeville Avenue, St Peters,
Broadstairs, Kent CT10 2TR**

Hall meetings start at 7.30pm (doors open 7pm) @ £5 per person
includes tea and coffee which is served at half time.

This provides a great opportunity to meet new like-minded people.

Please note that the Wine and Wisdom Evening has been rescheduled to 8th February 2025

2025

10th March

Murray Orchard

State of Birds in Kent

14th April

Brian Short

Kaziranga, Assam, India revisited

12th May

AGM plus members Brian Short as Group leader steps down

**The 100 Club is drawn at the end of each meeting with three generous cash prizes,
if you would like to purchase a number to be entered into our monthly draw
please contact John Stapley 07548 530747**

Your support of our Raffle table is always appreciated (donated prizes are welcome)

Electronic payment is the preferred means of payment. Our bank details are:

Account name: RSPB Thanet Local Group; Sort code: 30-90-79; Account number: 34022068

Payment by cheque will be accepted by post to Anne Debling 44 Oaklands Avenue Broadstairs CT10 2SQ

Please visit our Website for contacts and group activities www.rspb.org.uk/groups/thanet plus our

Facebook page www.facebook.com/RSPBThanetlocalgroup/ Twitter <https://twitter.com/LocalRspb>

WhatsApp [Thanet Birding](#) for regular updates.

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



Sandwich Tern by Paul Coltman

Join our Facebook group [HERE](#).

Our Facebook community is the perfect place to introduce yourself, ask questions about the Observatory and share your photos of wildlife and nature.

It's also a great way to meet like-minded people and to ask for help with identification of birds, insects, plants and animals. We'll do our best to try and solve mystery species.

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