



Bay News January 2025

The Newsletter of Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust



Snow Bunting by L. Sole

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Chair's Chat

A very happy New Year to everyone.

December saw changes in our staff and trustees. Greg, our assistant warden, moved on and will take up an Assistant Warden post at Bardsey Island Bird Observatory in March. Our best wishes go with him.

We had a pleasing number of applicants for the residential Voluntary Assistant Warden post and Jonathan Bull will be joining us in February.

Pam Worrall stepped down as a trustee and we would like to thank her for her hard work. Gary Stewart has joined us as a trustee. Kaye Draper has taken over the Treasurer post and we thank Bo Beolens for his stand-in work in this role over the last few years.

I hope some of you felt able to join us in submitting a response to Sea Link about their proposed "improvements" to the Pegwell Bay and Minster Marshes scheme.

In January the programme of Thursday evening talks and weekday walks resume. Once again it is a fascinating variety of talks.

I am very pleased to mention John Buckingham will be resuming his Wednesday evening presentations at the end of the month.

Ian Hunter

Sad farewells

We have just learned that Peter Laslett sadly passed away recently, aged 89, following a period of ill health. Pete was an active member of the Observatory from the early days. He will be missed. There will be a full obituary in next month's issue.


We also say goodbye to Vanda Martin, another long-standing member from more recent years. Her family has kindly named us as the recipient for any donations in her memory.

Upcoming Events

The Life of Birds and How They Work

We are delighted that John has recovered from his heart attack and is able to offer the remaining online talks in this series.

**THE LIFE OF BIRDS
and HOW THEY WORK**



*A Wednesday evening ZOOM Course Spring 2025
with John Buckingham Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory*

We will look at how birds live in an ever-changing world, their specially adapted life-styles, survival strategies, annual cycle, anatomy, evolution, classification and ecology. The course will be illustrated with John's superb quality and detailed images.

This is the resumption of **PART TWO** of the first half of this course following John's incapacity and will now take place on 22nd and 29th January and 5th and 12th February - **Starting 7.30pm for 90 minutes.**

Fee £22.50 per person (if you hadn't already booked) - 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

Activities for Young People

Thursday 13th February: Home Ed: For the love of Nature.

Join us for this event for Home Educated children to explore and celebrate nature at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory. Details on Tickettailor. <https://sbbot.org.uk/book-events/>

Wednesday 19th February: Family Explorers: For the love of Nature.

Join us for this half term to explore and celebrate nature at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory. Details on Tickettailor. <https://sbbot.org.uk/book-events/>

Midweek Walks

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

Wed 22 Jan 2025 Owls on Sandwich Estate 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM GMT

Led by Steffan Walton (Warden) and Faye Kavvadias-Large (Education Officer).
Meet at the Field Centre, CT13 9PF.



This walk will start with a brief talk in the Field Centre by Faye on the Owls that frequent Sandwich Bay Estate. Steffan will then lead a walk in the direction of Restharrow Scrape and the adjoining fields looking for Short-eared Owls that over-winter in the adjoining fields, with the possibility of also seeing Barn Owls and hearing Little Owls.

Fri 31st Jan 2025 Shellness, Isle of Sheppey 8:30 am - 12:00pm

Leaders Rob Rackliffe and Ian Searle.

Meet 8.30am at Neptune Cafe, Leysdown-on-Sea. ME12 4RR.

This walk is timed to walk from the Neptune Café along the sea-wall to Shellness Point as the incoming high tide brings in large numbers of waders to roost at the Point. We may also find Geese, Divers and Sea Ducks, in addition to raptors hunting over the saltmarshes. Previous winters have also brought in good numbers of Finches and Shore Larks.



Wednesday 5th February – Morning Walk – Denge Woods – 8:30am

Led by Phil Poole

Potential birds will include Marsh Tit, Brambling, Siskin, Redpoll, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Woodpeckers.

Friday 14th February – Morning Walk – East Blean Woods – 8:30am

Led by Rob Rackliffe.

We will venture into East Blean Woods looking for woodland birds, in particular, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, but we could also see Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Treecreeper and Nuthatch as well as feeding flocks of Tits and, potentially, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll.

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

Our weekly Thursday evening talk programme has re-started after the Christmas/New Year break. The first two great talks are about the Red-billed Cough project near Dover, and then the Wild Flowers of South Africa.

Details of the next few talks 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.

Please remember that everyone (members and non-members) is welcome, and you pay on the door.

16th January – Wild Flowers of South Africa by Sue Buckingham



South Africa boasts the richest temperate flora in the world with nearly a quarter of a million species. It is home to many of our best-known garden plants including Pelargoniums, Nemesias, Gazanias and a multitude of colourful flowers from bulbs. Guaranteed to bring a big splash of colour and sunshine to a winter's evening Sue's talk introduces some of the big families of plants including the Daisies, the Mesembryanthemums, the fabulous Proteas, Heathers, Peas and so many glorious bulbs all growing in their natural habitat.

23rd January - Local nature photography by John Draper



John's talk focusses on how to use light, his experience of having photos critiqued and what it taught him to look out for when taking photos to make them better. The first hour focusses on bird photography and includes lots of action shots. The second part looks at woodlands/flowers/insects/a few humble attempts at being vaguely arty(!) and on what to do with all the photos gathered.

30th January - Easter Island to Cape Horn - Birds and other Wildlife by Richard Collins

Richard's talk will describe a sea trip that he took over nearly 3 weeks in February 2024 across the Pacific and will illustrate some mystical birds.



6th February - Bitterns at Stodmarsh – me and my obsession by David Lodge and Birty



David has lived in Stodmarsh or Wickhambreaux for 70 + years and from a very early age had always appreciated what happens in the natural world. He remembers his father calling him out in the garden one spring evening and saying that foghorn sound is a bittern booming probably in the late 1950s or early 1960s. At the time it didn't seem that important and he didn't realise what an obsession they would become in later years to him.

13th February - South Africa: food, wine and some sport and lots of birds. Birding on family holidays and without getting divorced by Brendan Ryan

South Africa is a wonderful country with great food & wine, stunning scenery and some spectacular birds and animals. Brendan describes four trips he has made to the country in which he has combined targeted birding with the requirements of family holidays.



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

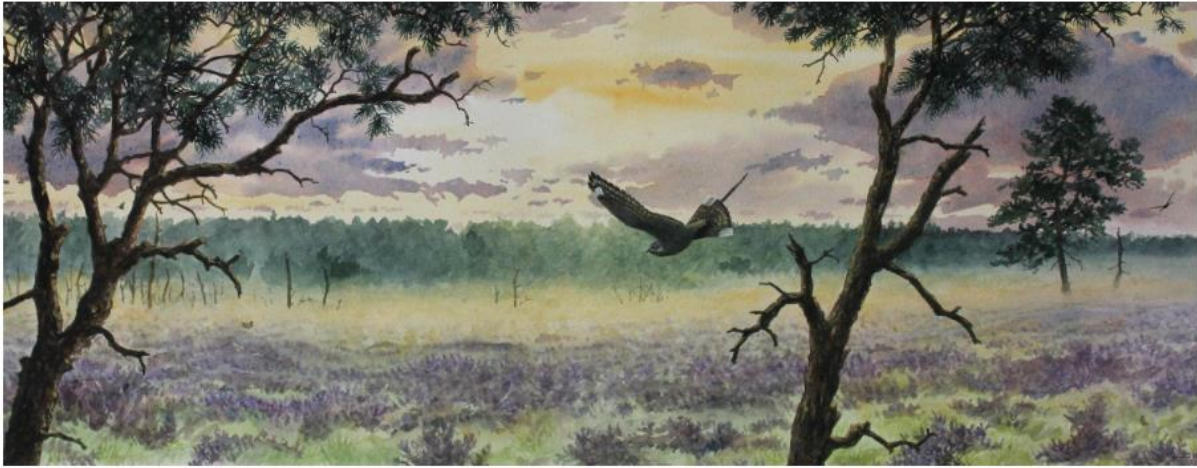
We are thrilled to announce that we have been able to arrange an excellent Two day Art Course with Steve Cale, a well known bird artist.

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

Priced at only £85, we hope that we will get a very good response so book early to avoid disappointment. Head to Ticket Tailor to buy your tickets now as places are limited.

<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! 🎁

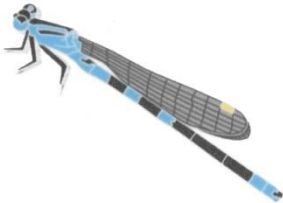
SBBOT Five Year Plan 2023-28 – Year 2

How Your Trustees See the Future of the Observatory

Making SBBOT Better for Science!

SDP Area 1: Studying, Recording & Monitoring the Natural Environment

The reason we record and monitor the natural environment is to keep an eye on how things are going and then try to help conserve it where we can.



For example, we knew we had Dainty Damselflies on the original Dragonfly Field Pond because we record the dragonflies in our recording area. Our expert knowledge and some research revealed how precarious was the population of this species in the UK and the uniqueness of the population on our reserve. So, with the help of many members and others, we did something to help conserve the species – we bought and developed the Fields Reserve.

We cannot always make such a direct contribution to the conservation of our environment, but we can make sure things don't go unrecorded and therefore lost before we have tried to make a difference.

Some years back the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), who oversee bird ringing in the UK, (in a move they came to regret), decided that it was no longer necessary to ring House Sparrows as we knew all about them and they didn't tend to move very far. It gradually became apparent through other surveys that this species was declining at an alarming rate. The BTO now have in place some special surveys to check to see how they are doing now (including our own RAS project). This decline would have been detected earlier if we had continued to collect the data on their population through ringing and this may have meant we were able sooner to do the research that explains why they were declining and give some sort of idea of actions that could be taken to reverse the trend.



In general, the studying, recording and monitoring of the natural environment of our recording area is an area that many of our members already help us with. You go out in all weathers and record much of what you see. You also record colour rings. Thank you to those of you who contribute your observations to our databases. However, we are very aware that not all that you see gets into our records.



One of our main aims for 2025 under this area of the SDP, as Mike Witty shared last month, is to broaden the quality and range of recording and encourage members to record all sightings (not just birds) in Field Centre log books.

Therefore, I am hoping this article will serve as a reminder to all our members to please make sure you add your observations from our recording area into our log books. These are kept at the back of the main hall and the sightings from them are regularly added into our main databases. It is not just unusual things we need to record but also the everyday wildlife. ANY thing you see when out and about around the recording area is worthy of adding into our log

books. Our wardening and regular observation volunteer team cannot be everywhere, all the time, so PLEASE help us by letting us have your very valuable sightings.

Later we will be offering some training in the recording of various species including the use of free digital tools that help us to record the natural environment. These include Birdtrack (which SBBOT use as the main database for bird records in order to feed our data into the national picture via RSPB and BTO), iRecord and eBird amongst others.

One of the other goals in this area of the SDP is to “Encourage volunteer participation in the digitisation of non-avian data”. We would be grateful for help in inputting data from our log sheets into the databases for various taxa. It is not difficult, and we would give training and support where required. If you could spare the odd moment to input data then please contact me at admin@sbbot.org.uk.

Let’s make 2025 the year when more of your valuable recording area records are entered onto our log sheets and even more of our long-term data is digitised.

Thank you

Sally Hunter

Reflections of a Departing Assistant Warden

By Greg Lee

Three years! It has been three years since I have arrived here at Sandwich Bay, fresh from a busy autumn season spent at Spurn Bird Observatory and excited to spend more time at a place I had very much enjoyed as an intern in spring 2019. It feels like it has rushed by and yet also been a very long time. Sitting back and reflecting on my time here, though, I realise it is a huge task to condense what has been a hugely formative three years for me, but I shall try and avoid rambling for too long!

Sandwich Bay is and always will be a special place, it was my first experience into what a career at an Observatory looks like and set me on the path to expand my knowledge greatly in the time spent between my internship and arriving back as Assistant Warden. I realised that an interest in birds was just scratching the surface of what Sandwich Bay and the rest of the UK has to offer; butterflies, moths, dragonflies, orchids - there is so much out there! I like to think that I’m a pretty competent all-round naturalist, although I’d be foolish to deny that there is still so much more to learn and there always will be. Likewise, as a birder there is a huge difference in my level between my time in 2019 and arriving in 2022, but also between my knowledge now in 2024 and when I started as Assistant Warden. I hope to be saying the same thing in another three years!



Birding at Backsands Point. One of my favourite vantage points in the Recording Area

Arriving in 2022, I had some big shoes to fill to follow on from the outstanding work performed by Becky Downey in 2020 and 2021, particularly with the outreach and engagement work. Fortunately, I've been able to work with a very committed and hard-working team which has allowed the Observatory to thrive and continue the foundations laid down by my predecessor maintaining good relationships with various youth groups, schools and Universities. One of my fondest memories coming during the University of Kent Field Course where I had explained the "gull alarm system" as a way to look for raptors, only for this to be demonstrated perfectly ten minutes later with an Osprey heading north along the beachfront. It is pleasing to see that we have had several dedicated young ringers coming to Sandwich Bay as part of the Field Course.



Successful Beach-combing!

Likewise, sharing my knowledge with visitors on guided walks around Sandwich Bay and other parts of Kent has been thoroughly enjoyable and I hope those that have taken part in my walks and talks have also enjoyed themselves. My thanks go to Faye, Sharon, Juliet, Ivan, Angela, Pam, Simon, Karen, Janet, and John for their dedication to this important aspect of Sandwich Bay during my tenure. I should also mention the three brilliant interns I had the pleasure to work with over the years in Carla Hill, Katie Ansell and Charlotte Middleton and I hope the experiences they've had at Sandwich Bay will aid them in their future careers.

On the wildlife aspect, I feel quite fortunate to have been present and contributed to two record years at the Bay over the past three years, with 2022 being a record year for moths and 2023 being the highest year-list total for birds in Sandwich Bay history (so far). According to my calculations, my total list for the SBBOT Recording Area is sitting on 245, which is not a bad haul for three years, although there is still time for additions to be made. Amongst that list are some exceptional birds with Eleonora's Falcon, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-winged Black Tern, Isabelline Shrike, Pallid Harrier, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Black Stork and Caspian Tern being some of the standouts over the past three years. Admittedly, missing a certain Bunting still stings, that's a risk of Observatory life - you will never see it all. Additionally, I've also seen a good number of scarcities which are hoped for in southern England such as Temminck's Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper, Pallas's Warbler, Spotted Crake, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Red-footed Falcon, Black-winged Stilt, Smew and Rosefinch. My thanks go to Neil Davies, Keith Ellis, Alastair Henderson, Andrew Lipczynski, Ian Searle, Martin Sutherland and Rob Rackliffe for their help in birding the Recording Area with such dedication.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper (September 2022), a smart little wader from North America and one of the biggest surprises at Sandwich Bay during my time as Assistant Warden.

I've also had the pleasure of finding some nice birds on my travels including Richard's Pipit, Purple Heron, Black Kite, Night Heron, Kentish Plover, Marsh Warbler, Bee-eater, Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Serin and (adult) Glaucous Gull to name a few. Of course, though, it absolutely isn't all about the scarcities and rarities and indeed my fondest birding memories consist of days of big falls. For example, watching thousands of



Swallows go to roost near the Observatory, or experiencing a vast fall of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs in the Recording Area, seeing kettles of Red Kites and Buzzards soaring over the Observatory and counting big numbers of Red-throated Divers moving offshore. The seasonality aspect is also something I very much enjoyed, and I found myself fine-tuning my internal calendar to the birds I'd expect so see at different times of the year. Of course, you never knew what could turn up on a census, which was an aspect that always made stepping out the Field Centre and into the Recording Area palpable with excitement.

This Hoopoe in April 2023 was a nice discovery and well enjoyed by local birders.

I maintain there were few greater pleasures in the job than waking up on a misty, summer dawn in early-mid August, a slight coolness still in the air before heat rose, crossing the road to the Haven and seeing lemon-yellow Willow Warblers moving through the bushes on their migration interspersed with Reed, Garden and Sedge Warblers with maybe a Pied Flycatcher tagging along. On one occasion, I was watching a party of Willow Warblers working their way through and suddenly had a Wood Warbler slink its way into my binoculars - migration magic and something that kept me smiling all day. Then again, a rainy day in July/August, when everyone else is staying indoors, heading down to Pegwell Bay for the tide and being greeted with a myriad of Terns including Black and Roseate whilst the first flocks of migrating *Calidris* waders including elegant Curlew Sandpipers and minute Little Stints are feeding on the mud, that is something I will really miss. Though sea watching is more of a miss than a hit at Sandwich Bay, I had some good times watching offshore with the afternoon spent during Storm Ciaran in November 2023 taking the top spot with Leach's Petrels, Storm Petrels, Long-tailed Duck, Great Skua and Grey Phalarope passing offshore.

I particularly adopted New Downs New Pool and Pegwell Bay as my two "mini-patches" over the past three years. Under-watched, I knew the Observatory would benefit from having more consistent coverage so I essentially birded Pegwell Bay every day through the key wader passage seasons from mid-April to early June and early July-mid October, with only the occasional break if I knew somebody else had covered the tide on that day. Though demanding, the results are worth it and the data we have on the wader and tern migrations during both spring and autumn is fascinating and very satisfying to see. Indeed, a dawn visit to Pegwell Bay in May was always magical with spring waders in breeding plumage dropping in before heading on their epic journeys to the high Arctic. New Downs New Pool also delivered some good moments with birds such as Golden Oriole, Garganey, Hoopoe and Wryneck all occurring in that small area. Though by far my



Wood Warbler at New Downs New Pool, a good spring record for Sandwich Bay.

favourite occurred in May 2023, when I took Katie down to the area to do some birding and picked out the “spinning coin” song of a Wood Warbler before getting excellent views of the bird low down in some Sallows (*low-growing, shrubby willow trees*).

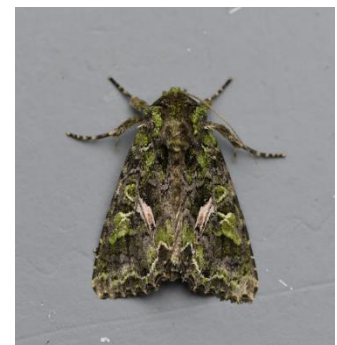
Survey work was also very rewarding, despite the early starts and it was pleasing to get good results at Ham Street for several woodland species including Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Likewise, helping the RSPB conduct BBS surveys on Worth Marshes was an excellent way to start a spring morning, particularly when Steffan finds a buzzing Savi’s Warbler on his walk! The Blue Pigeons Flood was always my section of the survey so it was a busy job logging all the breeding ducks and waders down. My thanks go to Vicki and Izzy for the brilliant work they have undertaken on the reserve over the years. This year’s BBS surveys on Royal St George’s Golf Course were also great fun and helped discover that the Grey Partridges and Corn Buntings are doing quite well out on the Golf Courses.



A typical early autumn dawn with the Ringing Team

Another skill I was keen to undertake whilst at Sandwich Bay was bird-ringing and this is something I have very much enjoyed doing. Of course, the excitement of an autumn day with a fall of warblers or when a cloud of hirundines descend into the Ringing Area is always an electric feeling, though perhaps one of my most unusual ringing-related memories is having a Honey-buzzard sat in the Oasis before giving me a flypast and glance with its bright, yellow eye. I’ve been very lucky to ring a wide range of birds at Sandwich Bay and hope to continue to develop these skills long into the future. My thanks go to Ian, Sally, John Buckingham, Eugene, Graham, John Tomlinson and Steffan for helping to train me as well as the other dedicated volunteers that constitute such an active ringing group.

Of course, moth-trapping is another activity I was very much excited to do at Sandwich Bay and I’ve been very lucky to see some excellent moths in the trap and in the field. Highlights include Crimson Speckled, Death’s Head Hawk-moth, Bedstraw Hawk-moth, Orache, Flame Brocade, Fiery Clearwing, Hornet Moth and Striped Hawk-moth plus many others. My Gloucestershire garden is not quite so productive but I will continue to keep trying at home. I should also mention the dragonflies, butterflies and wildflowers, having tried to see all of the Sandwich Bay specialties that I could before I left. I’ve done pretty well though inevitably there will be something that I have missed.



Orache Moth, a luminous green and striking migrant moth that graced the car park trap in 2022.

Naturally, this entire experience couldn’t have been summarised properly without praising everybody else. The organisation is blessed to have such an active community and volunteer base from welcoming and friendly shop volunteers to passionate and dedicated local birders. I am pleased to have met you all and will cherish my time here greatly. Lastly, my thanks go to Steffan, Faye, Dawn, Lauren and all of the Trustees for this experience, the skills I have learnt here will come to great use and I hope to remain in contact with Sandwich Bay long into the future.

I'm sure many of you are wondering what the next step is for me post-Sandwich Bay. Well, I'm delighted to say that I'll be at Bardsey Bird Observatory as one of the Assistant Wardens for the 2025 season. Having heard all the stories from Steffan on his time there as Assistant Warden, I'm very excited to be spending time at an island Observatory gaining new skills, but also utilising the ones I've gained and developed here at Sandwich Bay. Of course, one of the major differences is the number of seabirds that'll be surrounding me, my night walks back to my hut near the lighthouse will be sound-tracked with the calls of c.50,000 Manx Shearwaters! It is a seasonal position from March-October so I will be spending some time at home in Gloucestershire to prepare myself for a busy season. You may expect me as a scarce winter visitor to Sandwich Bay when I'm off the island! I hope to see you all again soon.



I never thought I'd be seeing the Northern Lights twice over the Observatory this year!

By Greg Lee (Assistant Warden 2022-2024)

From the Archives

Pioneering Days in the 1950s

While endeavouring to resolve some queries from the 1960's, I have, in the last few weeks, been reading through the Observatory's collection of old Logbooks which date back more than sixty years. While doing so it occurred to me that we have a whole generation of members who at best will have but a hazy recollection of how things were in those early days. Were there more or fewer birds, how many members were involved, how good were the facilities? A host of similar questions could be posed. I'll be trying to answer such questions in a series of occasional articles for the Newsletter.

It all began back in 1951 when, following their autumn visit to some of the east coast 'hotspots' in a successful search for migrants, Dennis Harle & Phil Redman sought permission from the Estate owners to construct a Heligoland Trap in the derelict sea-front garden at the top of Kings Avenue, once owned by the Slazenger family. Many of the wire panels were actually put together during the winter in Dennis Harle's house with the on-site construction taking place the following spring.

Readers should note that this was just a few years after the end of WW2; anti-invasion obstacles along the shoreline had not long been removed, some food rationing was still in place, Health & Safety had hardly been thought of, and rules and regulations were there to be ignored. Not quite anarchy but close to it. From August to October 1952, ringing saw a modest 146 birds ringed. A Hobby was among the notable captures and a freshly dead Leach's Petrel was found on the sea-front. Corncrake, Temminck's Stint & Shorelarks were seen at the estuary. Plans were made to erect a second much larger trap in the 'Big Gully' (Waldershare Gully) as it was then known in time for autumn 1953. It was at this period that George Dunkling and I joined the half-a-dozen others who were involved. In August of that year, we had done our regular tour to Grove, Stodmarsh

& Sandwich on our way back to Thanet. As we cycled along Strand Street Dennis Harle emerged from his house and, recognising us from a brief meeting we had had some months previously, asked if we would like join him in *'trying to catch a few birds at the Bay'* Looking back that was a life-changing decision for both of us. 730 birds of 41 species were ringed including a Barred Warbler and 41 Lesser Whitethroats - the first indication that this species moved through the area in good numbers. Our very first Willow Warbler was recovered at Avila, Spain just 15 days after being ringed. Further proof that Sandwich Bay was indeed a site to study migration came with the capture of a Redstart that had been ringed at Ottenby, Sweden. A further highlight was watching a Red-breasted Flycatcher trying, in vain, to enter the new Heligoland trap. Our first Hoopoe was seen and at the Point Kentish Plover & Black Tern as well as a January roost of 1,000 G.B.B. Gulls.

Facilities in this period were non-existent. If it rained the only shelter was on the sea-front in a war-time Blockhouse. Bird rings which came loose in small packets had to be fed onto a knitting needle and kept in place by a cork! The rings were made from a much softer metal than those currently used and had to be shaped prior to placing on the bird's leg and then overlapped - not butted - and secured with a small pair of pliers. Early designs of Ringing Pliers were being trialled at Dungeness but did not become general issue for a year or two. It was around 1956 that mist-nets first appeared, imported from Japan. Initially they were twenty feet long and made from a cotton type material which quickly perished. Although the basic principles of migration were known a lot of detail remained a mystery. The only guide to ageing & sexing of birds came from Witherby's six volume 'British Birds' What exactly would we have used to weigh a Whitethroat or Blackbird? It is important to point out that in those early years the emphasis was almost 100% on bird ringing. There was no daily routine of recording birds around the Estate. Apart from the weekend, the majority of visits took place in the evening following work commitments. How did one become an authorised bird ringer? Quite simply really: Arrange a meeting with the BTO representative for Kent who would take you on a field trip to test you identification skills. You then had to ring, as far as I can recall, 50 birds including at least two broods of nestlings, all under the supervision of an 'A' Ringer and away you went. Re-certification was required on an annual basis.

Away from the autumn Ringing efforts at the Bay, the highlight of 1952 was the attempted breeding by a pair of Montagu Harriers at Pegwell Bay. What is now the Country Park was, at that time extensive salt marsh. The pair laid a single egg but it was predated in less than 24hours.

Next time: Breeding Montague Harriers at Pegwell.

John Websper, (Vice President) January 2025



Photograph of the sea-front Blockhouse



The Garden Heligoland trap (Aug. 1952)

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

Annual SBBOT Membership & 200 Club Membership payments

Membership

Quite a number of members are continuing to pay into the wrong bank accounts, mainly those who pay by standing order.

2025 membership renewals are being processed at the moment. We would appreciate it if members can **check their standing orders** to ensure that they have been set up to pay the correct bank account, appreciating that for a number of you this will now be for your 2026 renewal - details shown below. We are hoping to close some of the bank accounts as soon as we can, so we would appreciate everyone's help in assisting us with this.

The bank account details for membership payments are -

Account Name: Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust

Sort Code: 82-11-07

Account Number: 30347182

200 Club

As this is the first month of the new year, the prize draw for the 200 club will be drawn later in the month, once it has been confirmed that all current members have paid all or part of their 2025 monies. Once a payment has been received, an email will be sent to the members to confirm their numbers.

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

NEW! 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

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.

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 December

Birds



Dartford Warbler by R. Rackliffe

The 1st of the month saw the first major winter arrival of Cormorants with just under 1,500 seen offshore. Singles of Woodcock and Dartford Warbler were on the Estate. The next day the fields between the Observatory and Restharrow Scrape were cut and so a large number of Woodpigeons and Stock Doves, Grey Partridges and Pheasants, and Skylarks were on show. Five **Tree Sparrows** in the Jubilee Field were no doubt also displaced from the fields. The previous day's Dartford Warbler was also showing again at Dickson's Corner.

The 3rd was another day of Cormorant mayhem offshore with at least 1,400 going to and fro, with smaller numbers of Gannets and wildfowl. Singles of Firecrest and Dartford Warbler were on the Estate. In other

news we also heard back from the DNA analysis of the intriguing Lesser Whitethroat trapped and ringed on 4th October. It was confirmed as being of the subspecies *halimodendri*, known as **Central Asian Lesser Whitethroat**, as suspected at the time. This subspecies is found primarily in the Kazakhstan region and is only the second confirmed occurrence for Kent (after Dungeness in Oct 2019). The 5th saw two **Barnacle Geese** joined by a lone **Pink-footed Goose** on Willow Farm.

There was brief respite on the 6th between two storms. New Downs provided an unseasonal **Swallow** around Prince's Reservoir and another 500 Cormorants were offshore. Often sea passage can be good in strong winds but despite Storm Darragh crashing through on the 8th there were fewer birds moving offshore than hoped. There were totals of 17 Wigeons, 23 Teals, one Common Scoter, 12 Gannets, 325 Cormorants, two Grey Plovers, two Knots, three Dunlins, and one Auk sp logged. Another spell on the sea on the 9th produced a drake Eider and a **Great Northern Diver**, with a flock of 61 Ringed Plovers, 74 Sanderlings, 310 Dunlins on the receding tide on the beach.

Persistence paid off as seawatchers were rewarded with a **Little Auk** seen flying north along the shore on the 10th. At least 1,200+ Gulls fed in the surf and included a 1cy **Little Gull** and two 1cy Caspian Gulls. There were at least five **White-fronted Geese** and three Brent Geese in a flock of 230+ Greylag Geese between the Observatory and the Worth track, whilst further inland there was a brief **Bittern** at Roaring Gutter.



Little Auk by A. Lipczynski

A calm but very chilly walk around the Estate on the 13th found the Dartford Warbler still present with Stonechats at Dickson's Corner, two Firecrests chasing each other in The Elms, and three Kittiwakes following a local fishing boat offshore. Ten **White-fronted Geese**, one Brent Goose, four **Barnacle Geese**, three Green Sandpipers, and five Water Pipits were the highlights across RSPB Worth marshes on the 14th whilst in Pegwell at least seven Caspian Gulls and one Yellow-legged Gull were seen on the incoming tide and a flock of seven Snow Buntings were present. The following day there were lots of waders in Pegwell including an

excellent local count of 380 Grey Plovers. The flock of seven Snow Buntings were still viewable (just) across the Bay on Shellness Point.

Two **Pink-footed Geese**, three **White-fronted Geese**, and four **Barnacle Geese** were on RSPB Worth marshes on the 16th. The seven Snow Buntings seen again from Pegwell Bay and nine Caspian Gulls and two Yellow-legged Gulls were present. New arrivals on the 17th included ten Fieldfares, six Siskins, and a Bullfinch on the Estate. The seven Snow Buntings were reported again from Pegwell Bay.

Torrid conditions early on the 18th but gradually the drizzle lifted (though it remained windy). There were two **White-fronted Geese** in the Greylag flock between the Observatory and the railway. Meanwhile there was a very impressive count of **16** Caspian Gulls in Pegwell Bay, a record count for the area, whilst the seven Snow Buntings were still present. There was a switch in the wind to north-westerly the next day and it brought a chill to the air. A little activity offshore was livened up by a **Black-necked Grebe** drifting south mid-distance. After four years without any sightings this was our third of the year for this bird. A **Hawfinch** was the highlight on RSPB Worth marshes. A Dartford Warbler was in Restharrow Dunes opposite the entrance to Restharrow Scrape the following day. A real mix of weather on the 21st with bright sunshine interspersed with heavy downpours. Two **White-fronted Geese** were in with the Greylag flock between the Observatory and the Worth track. A chilly and blustery 23rd saw at least 600 Cormorants offshore and a northward passage of a few hundred Gulls along the shore included three Caspians and two Yellow-leggeds. The two **White-fronted Geese** were seen again on RSPB Worth marshes. The two **White-fronted Geese** continued on RSPB Worth marshes the next day whilst a **Lapland Bunting** teetered on the edge of the SBBOT Recording Area along the cliff top at Pegwell Bay.

Four **Barnacle Geese** were on RSPB Worth marshes on the 26th. Most people were either still full of Christmas turkey or out looking at Yellow Warbler/Scops Owl on the 28th, but a **Black-throated Diver** was noted offshore. Four Black-tailed Godwits were new in on RSPB Worth marshes on the 29th with two Egyptian Geese, three Marsh Harriers, a Great White Egret, and a Raven also seen. And finally, a **Cattle Egret** was at the Observatory on the 31st.

Invertebrates

Winter Moths were on seen on the windows of the Observatory on the 4th and the 13th. The promise of a mild, settled, night tempted the trap out on the 15th/16th. It was worth it despite the fact there were only two moths. One was the first December Moth for two years and the second was an Oak Rustic. Further Winter Moths were also seen on the 24th and 29th. Just when we thought the season was over, a Peacock butterfly was seen flying strongly around Waldershare Avenue on the Estate on the 30th, our latest ever record.

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/>



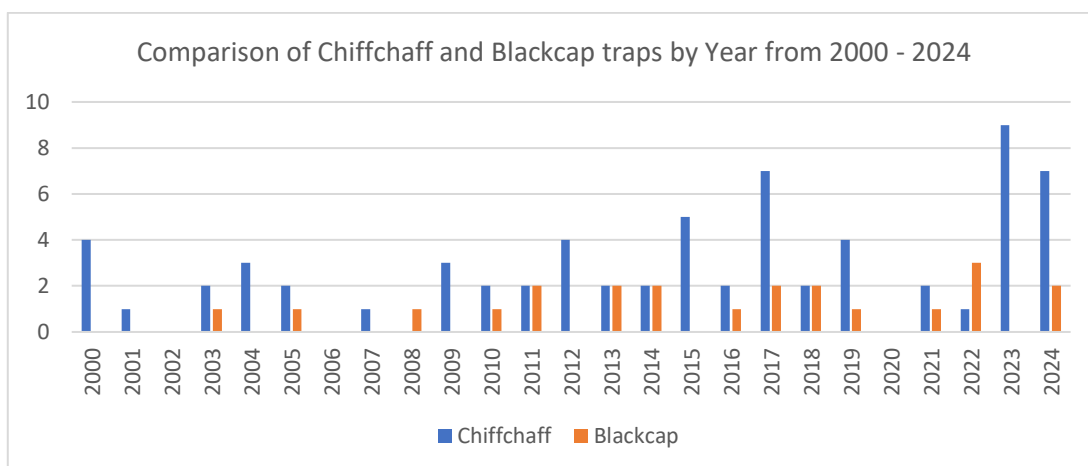
Ringling Report for December 2024

December continued the pattern of very changeable conditions. Some ringling was possible and 99 birds were ringed. The most numerous were 38 Redpolls. Ten new House Sparrows plus 11 retraps gave some hope as this species has been scarce around the Observatory since mid-summer and we are not sure of the reason for this change.

The overwintering of species such as Blackcap and Chiffchaff is now well recognised. Out of interest I looked up the number of these species caught by us in December this century.

Year	Chiffchaff	Blackcap
2000	4	0
2001	1	0
2002	0	0
2003	2	1
2004	3	0
2005	2	1
2006	0	0
2007	1	0
2008	0	1
2009	3	0
2010	2	1
2011	2	2
2012	4	0

Year	Chiffchaff	Blackcap
2013	2	2
2014	2	2
2015	5 + 1	0
2016	2	1
2017	7	2
2018	2	2
2019	4	1
2020	0	0
2021	2	1
2022	1	3
2023	9	0
2024	7 + 1	2



These results indicate a small increase in numbers for each species, particularly Chiffchaff but there remains variation. The birds appear to be just passing through as can be seen by only two retraps. A lot of this is probably down to our coastal bush patches being very much a fringe habitat, particularly once the leaves fall.

Looking at information from other sources particularly BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) it can be seen that changes in behaviour have benefited these species. The presence of Blackcaps at garden bird feeders is well documented as is the use by Chiffchaffs of warmer micro climates provided by sewage works which support invertebrates. The generally warmer winters in the UK means that these birds do not have to travel further south.

This is a basic, non-statistical, look at a bit of our data. If anyone is of a curious and ideally statistical mindset then our computerized data can be made available.

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.

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>

The banner features a light yellow background with a blue border. At the top, the Easyfundraising logo is followed by the text "Jumpstart your January". Below this, the headline reads "WIN a share of £1,000 for Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust". A central text box states: "Sign up new supporters before midnight February 2nd and you'll earn a **chance to win a share of a huge £1,000 donation for Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust in our Jumpstart your January giveaway*!**". Below this, it says "Four £250 donations to be won!". The bottom section includes the Easyfundraising logo, the text "Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust has signed up", a yellow badge with the number "70" and the text "supporters so far", a trophy icon with the number "1", and a small square logo of a bird with "SBBOT" written below it. At the bottom, there is another Easyfundraising logo, a blue arrow pointing right, and a yellow "Sign up" button.

easyfundraising | **Jumpstart** your January

WIN a share of £1,000 for Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust

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Four £250 donations to be won!

easyfundraising

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust has signed up

70
supporters so far

easyfundraising → **Sign up**

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.

The reference - Surname Initial e.g., Bloggs M

The bank account for the receipt is: -

Account Name - Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust

Sort Code:- 82-11-07

Account No.:- 30347182

For sale or wanted

This advertising service is to help members sell unwanted items or ask members if they have particular items for sale. If you wish to use this service, please send your advertisement (with photo, asking price and contact details) or request to sbbotnews@gmail.com

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: -

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust

Sort Code:- 82-11-07

Account No.:- 30347182

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.



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

**Saturday 8th February Wine and Wisdom Quiz Evening start 7pm
PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE**

10 th February	Ben Morris Beaver Trust - Senior Field Officer	Beavers in Kent
10 th March	Murray Orchard	State of Birds in Kent
14 th April	Brian Short	Kaziranga, Assam, India revisited
12 th 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.



[Get reminders about our events](#)

[Like us on Facebook HERE @SandwichBirdObs](#)



[Look at photos & videos taken at #SBBOT](#)

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[Regular sightings from our Warden](#)

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[Connect with us on LinkedIn HERE](#)



Encourage people to visit SBBOT

[Leave a review on TripAdvisor HERE](#)



www.sbbot.org.uk



info@sbbot.org.uk

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust
 Guilford Road, Sandwich Bay
 Sandwich, Kent, CT13 9PF
 Tel. 01304 617341

Registered charity no. 1197743

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