



# Bracknell Forest Natural History Society

A society for everyone interested in nature and its conservation

## MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER – Autumn 2022

We finished our 2021-22 Membership year with a splendid outdoor event at South Hill Park, with a demonstration by Berkshire Birds of Prey. **The birds did their best to show off in the grandest of scales...** entertaining, educational and hands on! Although bred in captivity it's still probably the only way that these rare and precious species can survive for future generations. This gathering was well attended and popular - a great finish to our year!



There is always evidence of climate change, it's all around us and progressing at an alarming pace. We are now encouraged to think about '**Rewilding**'. What does this really mean and how would it affect us, as residents of Bracknell and people who have concerns for the environment? This year's 'Best in Show' garden at Chelsea Flower Show demonstrated how to create a 'rewilded' area, including a beaver dam and a trickling stream.



Possibly because it represented such a trendy subject it won, but to produce such a 'garden' would have been costly in expense... and to the environment. Promises of rebuilding the garden in a place of safety would entail large amounts of resource. And would people really like the countryside to be transformed by the action of beavers damming rivers and streams, causing natural lakes and floods? Possibly not!

After one of the hottest and most dry UK summers on record we now have plenty of evidence around us to see the effect of climate change upon our local environment, where many of our favourite plants and vegetables struggled to survive. However, exotic species have flourished everywhere; even in my own Bracknell garden my ornamental pomegranate has set fruit. It may not be very long until it becomes the norm for us to grow lemons and oranges outside in southern England... Earlier varieties of native orchids fared well, and later helleborines took the full impact of hot sun.



At our woodland restoration project **Nightingale Triangle** we are endeavouring to remove invasive and damaging growth and at the same time replant with British natives, wherever possible. Are we rewilding? The true cost of doing so would be astounding, as much of our precious woodland and its underbrush would have to be removed. Maybe we should accept the fact that Britain has been invaded by alien plants and species since Roman times. These are accepted as natural and have become part of our biodiversity - and should stay as such?

With best wishes to everyone.

*Gill Cheetham, Chairman – October 2022*

# Why do birds migrate in autumn?

We could call this version of our Newsletter 'The Bird Migration issue', with grateful thanks to the RSPB for their help in compiling this big feature. You can visit their website yourself, of course, at [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

Most of the species that migrate to the UK in autumn and winter come here to avoid the harsh winters of the Arctic circle and Scandinavia. Having spent the summer raising chicks, as temperatures drop and the days shorten, these winter migrants head in this direction, where the weather is milder and the food easier to find.



Most of these visitors arrive from the north and the east. One exception is the [water pipit](#), which travels north to winter in the UK.

Flying from the Alps and Pyrenees as they become harsh, snowy landscapes, this bird spends the winter in southern and eastern England.

## Birds to see over autumn and winter

### UK winter waders

With milder temperatures and an abundance of food across our mudflats and estuaries, many wading birds head to our coastal regions for the winter months. Visit one of the RSPB's [coastal reserves](#) and you'll often find flocks of knots and dunlins foraging for food in the rich mud.

- [Knot](#): Orange-red in summer and dappled grey in winter, knots fly into UK estuaries to feed over winter. Many knots migrate from Canadian islands, but they're also joined by birds travelling from Siberia to South Africa.
- [Dunlin](#): The most common of the UK's three dunlin races, winter-visiting dunlins fly



here from Scandinavia and Russia every year. They arrive in autumn and form huge flocks on estuaries before heading back in spring. Females arrive first, followed by the males, and finally this year's young, which reach the UK by October.

- *Pictured left* [Black-tailed godwit](#): Confusingly, while the black-tailed godwits that breed in the UK overwinter in Africa, the birds that nest in Iceland are a subspecies that winter in the UK.

### Holing up inland

Flying further inland, and even visiting parks and gardens, these winter visitors come to feast on natural stores of berries, seeds and small mammals (in the case of the owls).

- [Fieldfare](#): A large thrush with a dark brown back, grey head, and a beige/black speckled chest. Listen out for the fieldfare's chack-chack-chack call in hedgerows.
- [Short-eared owl](#): Arriving in the UK from Scandinavia, short-eared owls can often be seen hunting in daylight (crepuscular). Head to open grassland, wetlands or moorland and keep your eyes peeled for their speckled brown feathers and bright yellow eyes.
- [Redwing](#): Similar to a song thrush, but with a vibrant white eyebrow and red underwing. Flying in from Iceland, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and Siberia,

redwings migrate at night. Look out for them in woodlands and farmland, with occasional garden visitors.

- *Pictured right* [Waxwing](#): Dressed in soft downy grey, with an elegant crest, and red and black eyebrows and beard. Generally, the UK sees a few hundred waxwings over winter, but if the winter is particularly cold or berries run low in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, we can see thousands.



## Gaggles of geese and swans

Our winter-visiting [geese and swans](#) are hard to miss, especially around reservoirs, lakes and estuaries. Frequently taking long migration journeys, species fly from as far as the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, the Russian tundra, and Iceland.



Species include [brent geese](#), [barnacle geese](#), [white-fronted geese](#), [pink-footed geese](#), [Bewick's swans](#) and [whooper swans](#).

The longest swan sea crossing goes to the whooper swan, which flies all the way from Iceland to the UK. With a wingspan of almost 2.5 metres, whooper swans can fly up to 55mph!

*Pictured:* Whooper swans

## Droves of winter-visiting ducks

The arrival of overwintering [ducks](#) in the UK makes lakes, ponds and other wetlands a great place to visit through the chillier months.

Joining our resident ducks, many migrate from the colder regions of Europe for our milder winters.



## Number-boosting migrant birds

And finally, many of our resident species will have their numbers boosted by migrant birds of the same species from Europe. Seeing an increase in [starlings](#), [chaffinches](#) or [robins](#) in your garden or nearby park? Partial migration could be the answer.

## Saved for posterity



Bracknell moth recordings by **Michael Dumbleton**, taken in the years 1985 to 1992 are now available online - it has been decided to add them to our website archives. These documents are lengthy and only of very specialist interest, but information of this sort is in danger of being lost forever once Societies such as ours cease to function. It is important that data of this nature is preserved for future reference.

*See over*

Here is our reminder of some websites which we think may interest you

<https://www.growwilduk.com>  
<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>  
<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org>  
<https://bbowt.org.uk>

**TVERC** collects, analyses and shares geodiversity and biodiversity information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to help people make sound decisions about how to develop and manage land sustainably and where to direct wildlife conservation work. See more at [tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk)



This is your Newsletter, so if you have anything you would like to be included in our next issue, please send it to your Editor Gill Cheetham:

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