



A million voices for nature

The

Observers

Lisburn Members Group News

September 2010



Our Eleanor on a volunteering day with the Lagan Valley Regional Park

Welcome

Welcome to our first meeting of the new season. If you haven't already got a programme of events then please take one before you go. Tonight we welcome our Regional RSPB Director, Dr James Robinson to our group and I hope you will enjoy what he has to say. Stay behind for a cup of tea and a chat afterwards.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076,
Scotland no. SC03765

Red kite returns as breeding bird:

Red kites have successfully reared chicks in Northern Ireland for the first time in over 200 years! In total, four pairs of these threatened birds have raised a total of five chicks between them. This has happened only two years after the red kite became the first ever species to be re-introduced to our shores. All the proud parents are birds which were released in the first year of RSPB Northern Ireland's re-introduction project in 2008 and have made history once again.

Nests were located in copses and woodland throughout South County Down proving that this is ideal habitat for kites to thrive. However this would not have been possible without the support of farmers, landowners and the local community who have championed the kites as their own. Indeed, local schools had already adopted many of the new parents. 'Issy' and 'Sparky' raised one fine chick between them; and 'Paprika' and 'Dobbin' also paired up and successfully reared a single chick.



The proud Dad
Photo. Clive Straughan



Photo. Dr Jon Lees



photo. Kevin Mawhinney

Last of the new arrivals: The final stage of releases have been completed. This year we collected a further 27 kites from Wales with the help of Welsh Kite Trust, Golden Eagle Trust and the use of facilities at Gigrin Farm. After about one month in aviaries here in County Down they were ready for release. They joined some of the 53 birds released over the previous two years. This brings the total released throughout the project to an impressive 80 and will provide an excellent base for a healthy kite population to flourish in future years.

This year's birds are fitted with blue tags on the right wing and brown on the left; all can be identified individually by numbers displayed on the upper side of the wing on each tag. Most of the new faces have stayed close to the aviaries, benefitting from the supplementary food which is provided immediately following their release. This enables the kites to survive until they adapt to their new surroundings and begin foraging for their own food. One adventurous kite with wing tag '25' went to Ardglass, a village on the coast about twenty miles away. However after a two week break it has returned to find its former cage buddies around Castlewellan.

Bird sets record as UK's oldest Arctic tern

The previous UK age record for an Arctic tern was 29 years, 10 months and 11 days. A sea-bird has officially become the UK's oldest recorded Arctic Tern. It was ringed as a chick on the Farne Islands on 28 June, 1980, making it at least 30 years, two months and 23 days old. The birds typically live 13 years.

This bird's record-breaking status was confirmed after it was recaptured this summer on the islands, located a few miles off the Northumberland coast.

Arctic terns' 44,000-mile (70,000km) pole-to-pole migration is the longest known annual journey of any animal.

The previous UK record was 29 years and 10 months, although the typical life expectancy is about 13 years - primarily as a result of the terns being prey for other predatory birds, lack of food or being caught in storms while at sea. The bird was originally ringed by John Walton when he was a seasonal warden for the National Trust, which owns the Farnes.

'Brilliant shape'

Mr Walton, now property manager for the islands, told BBC News he was delighted when he heard the news that the chick he ringed three decades ago was still going strong.

"This bird would have flown close to one million miles, raised any number of chicks, survived predators and storms and still looks in brilliant shape."

The new record only came to light after the information was entered into a database managed by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Mr Walton explained, "then this figure pinged out saying 30 years and I thought wow!

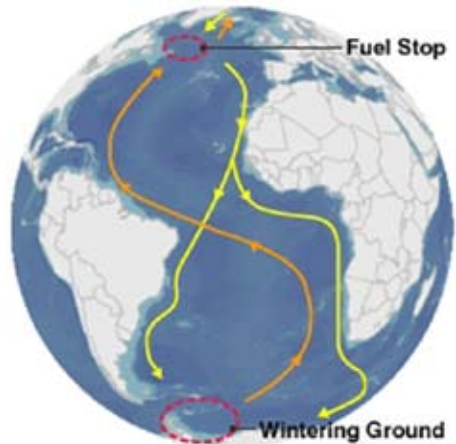
Although the tern, known as CE60645, has set a new UK record, it is still some years away from claiming the title of the world's oldest Arctic tern that is currently held by a bird ringed in the US and reached the age of 34 years. "Fingers crossed, this bird is good for another four or five years, which would allow us to take the world record from the Americans," Mr Walton joked.



The Arctic tern's extraordinary pole-to-pole migration has been detailed by an international team of scientists.

The researchers fitted the birds with tiny tracking devices to see precisely which routes the animals took on their 70,000km (43,000 miles) round trip. The study reveals they fly down either the African or Brazilian coasts but then return in an “S”-shaped path up the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

“The new thing is that we’ve now been able to track the bird during a full year of migration, all the way from the breeding grounds to the wintering grounds and back again.”



The avian world is known for its great migrations.

Albatrosses, godwits, and sooty shearwaters all undertake epic journeys. But none can quite match the Arctic tern's colossal trip.



Starting in August and September, this small bird - which weighs little more than 100g (3.5oz) - will head away from Greenland with the intention of getting to the Weddell Sea, on the shores of Antarctica. It will spend about four or five months in the deep south before heading back to the far

north, arriving home in May or June.

The first surprise is that the terns do not make straight for the Antarctic when they leave the Arctic, but make a lengthy stop-over in the middle of the North Atlantic, about 1,000km (620 miles) north of the Azores.

Here, they feed on zooplankton and fish to fuel themselves for the long journey ahead.

This is probably my poorest bird watching summer ever!

With so much to do and so little time or energy I only had one little skirmish into the realm of birding since my last outing with the group.

I would normally go searching for raptors at known breeding areas and watch them hunting to feed their young. At a popular area in the Antrim Plateau great views of juvenile Merlin can be seen most years particularly if breeding was very successful. Often young Merlin can be seen perched on the top of hedgerow calling for their parents to hurry back with more food. Hunting Hen Harrier and soaring Buzzard are also common sights most years. But alas not for poor little old me. (not that old really)

What I did see however was numerous Red Kites.

One Saturday morning as I was leaving a young friend off at Dundrum, I made the impromptu decision to go to Castlewellan and bag myself a view of the Red Kites at the viewpoint at the back of the park. Amazingly without much waiting about nine to a dozen came into view.



There were at least nine as I got them all in one shot through my bins. No long distance views through the spotting scope here. They hovered overhead and I feasted upon these beautiful birds (metaphorically of course) until my neck hurt so much I had to stop. Most likely because I was out of practise. I did see a red kite earlier in the summer when I was visiting my mum and younger sister in Bradford. On the way home from Ilkley Moor driving towards Bradford a kite flew over the road in front of me and landed in a tree beside the road.

I nearly caused an accident as it was 'chock-a-block' traffic behind me so I had to drive on, that and the less than complementary mutterings from the 'non birding loving but definitely cat loving passengers' in the back of the car.

Did you know ...

... the large scale study of bird migration in Britain began with lighthouse keepers, as they regularly reported migrant birds being attracted by the lights. After a visit to Heligoland in 1874, the Ornithologist John Cordeaux enlisted lighthouse keepers around the entire coast of the British Isles into a survey of migrant birds - the keepers often reported large numbers of birds being attracted to the lights. This developed into the Bird Observatories of today.

What do you get when you remove an eye from a bird ? a brd

There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before.

Birds are indicators of the environment. If they are in trouble, we know we'll soon be in trouble.

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.

**This year's BTO conference will take place on Saturday
6th November 2010 at:**

**Lough Neagh Discovery Centre
Oxford Island
9am – 5pm**



As always this conference is open to everyone – you do not have to be a member of the BTO.

The stars of the show this year will include shearwaters, terns and Buzzards, and of course, you lot that watch them!

There will be a chance to view and test the latest birding optics, and indeed to win two pairs of Opticron binoculars. The second hand book stand will be tempting. Put 6th November in your diary!!

Lisburn Members Group Committee Members

Group Leader.....Peter Galloway contact no 02892 661982

Treasurer.....Eleanor Anderson

Secretary.....Richard Crothers

Brian McKee

Beryl Dean

Mark Killops

David McCreedy

Chris Sturgeon

If you have an interesting article or anecdote, an interesting sighting, or even a humorous story or joke that can be shared with the group members, then please contact **Peter Galloway**, the editor of the news letter, or **Richard Crothers** the group Secretary. All submissions are welcome.

Email enquiries@rspblisburn.com



Juv Black Tern (photo Mark Killops)

Lisburn **RSPB** Group sponsored by



Design and print

16 Artabrackagh Road,

Portadown

Craigavon

BT62 4HB

Tel : 028 3939 1536

email : info@sparksincolour.co.uk