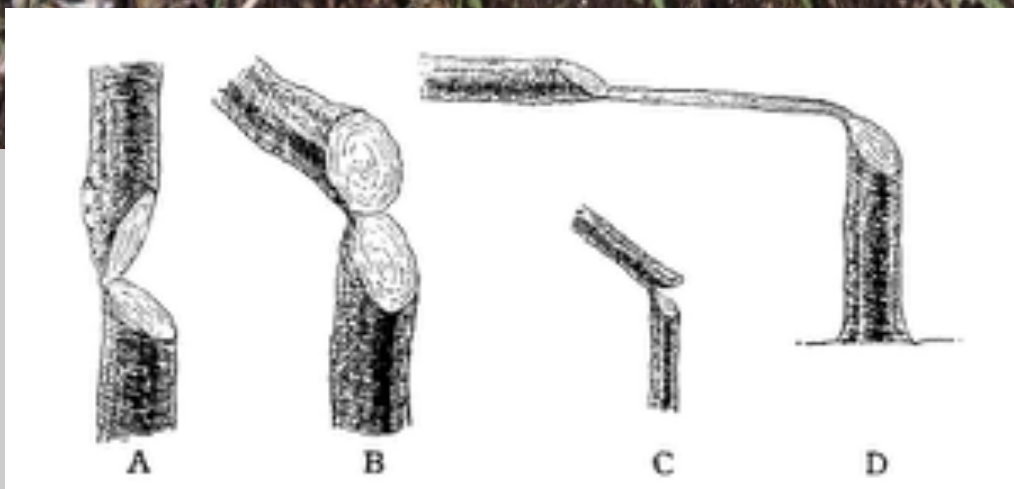


SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY

Reg Charity No 1046124



April 2018



Pleaching then and now

Message from the Chairman

Welcome to the Spring newsletter, thank you for re electing me as chairman, Thank you to the committee members who have continued. Mike Parrott is retiring as treasurer, he has done an excellent job, ably assisted by his wife Pat, thank you to both. We welcome Matthew Beard as our new Treasurer, I am sure he will do a good job.

We also welcome to the new committee Darren Hulbert.

It has been a fantastic season with a lot of training, thank you to Frank Wright for setting up the hedges and venues. This season we put on an extra day Training in the Midland style of Hedge Laying which has proved very successful. Thank you to Peter Tunks, Alan Ashby for taking the lead, with Paul Matthews and Gary Moore proving valuable input. Thank you to Mark Moore & David Dunk for the stakes & binders.

The committee has been working on the criteria & judging of the hand tools section of our annual competition, this has highlighted the appetite for more training & information, this will be in place on the training days in the new season.

Finally thank you to Ian Runcie for bringing together another quality news letter.

I look forward to seeing you at the summer shows and in the autumn for the start of the new season.

Phil Hart – Chairman.

Editors Interjection

I thought I would add my bit to the debate about not allowing pruning saws to be included as ‘hand tools’ on the grounds that they were not used traditionally. One argument I have heard is that “Silkies” were not previously available. This is true but a glance at the cover of the April ’17 newsletter will show that very effective pruning saws were around, at least from the 16th century. However, looking through old descriptions it seems that they were rarely used for hedge laying. Perhaps they were expensive.

Now take a look at these quotes:

“On Plashing (pleaching) such as will not stoop (bend) without breaking, should be nicked with an *upward* not *downward* stroke that, if properly done, gives a tongue which conducts the rainwater from the wound.”

William Marshall planting and ornamental gardening 1795

“Wherever practical the wood should be cut with an upward stroke, as the cut is then smooth, so the water runs off easily---a downward stroke -- causes the wood to splinter, so the rain and frost cause considerable decay-- where thicker, an upward cut should be taken, after which a downward cut may be made without splintering.”

WJ Malden, RASE Journal 1899, Hedges and hedge making

The latter includes the diagram inserted on the front cover. The point is that the technique used is different from today. The tongue (heel) being preferentially made with the same upward stroke as the pleach but, when the stem was too thick, an upward stroke was still used to begin with, producing the result shown in diagrams A & B. All this was possible because the hedges were regularly laid and stems much thinner than those we often have to deal with today.

So my point to those concerned is. **Yes pruning saws were not used BUT the technique used and the hedges themselves were different.** Hope that’s useful.

Ian Runcie

South of England Hedge Laying Society

Reg. Charity NO 1046124

Promoting the craft of hedge laying, training, competitions and countryside management

Training in Hedge Laying



The following training days for Coppicing & Hedge Laying are planned for the 18/19 season. They may be subject to change

Date	Event	Venue
13 th October 2018	Training day 1	Bolney, West Sussex
10 th November 2018	Training day 2	Dallington, East Sussex
8 th December 2018	Training day 3	Magham Down, East Sussex
5 th January 2019	Improvers Day	Isfield, East Sussex
26 th January 2019	President vs Chairman	Venue T.B.C
17 th February 2019	SEHLS Annual Competition	Venue T.B.C
16 th March 2019	Charity day	Venue T.B.C
23 rd March 2019	Additional day of hedge laying	Venue T.B.C

Note that dates and locations may be subject to change

Coppicing days are FREE to all Members

Fees

Hedge Laying the course (days 1 to 4 below) is £150. **1 “taster day” is £60**

Tool Sharpening is £10

Coppicing days are FREE to all Members

If you are unable to attend a training event please let us know, re-booking fees apply as follows

Over 1 week – no fee

Between 2 days and 1 week - £10

Less than 2 days – £20

No show / the night before / on the day - £30

Experienced current members

A section of hedge will be allocated for experienced current members wishing to lay hedge, please contact The Training Co-ordinator Phill Piddell for more details.

More details for all events will be published nearer the time.

Please note to take part in any of these events you need to join the society so you are covered by the Society's insurance. Membership is £15 per annum. Please bring your membership cards to all events.

To get booking information for these events, send a completed membership application form to Phill Piddell.

The Membership Secretary, Phill Piddell.

1 Hope House Farm Cottage, Crouch Lane, Sandhurst, Cranbrook, TN18 5PD 01580

850768 phill.piddell@bt.com

South of England Hedge-Laying Society



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (or RENEWAL) April 2018 to March 2019

PRESIDENT:

Peter Tunks
The Coach House
Waltersville Way
Horley
RH6 9EP

Tel: 01293 784826 / 07836 757570

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:

Phill Piddell
1 Hope House Farm Cottage
Crouch Lane
Sandhurst
Cranbrook
Kent TN18 5PD
Tel: 01580 850768

Annual membership of the Society	£15 per person	
Lapel Badge	£5 per badge	
Total		
Please treat my membership as a Gift Aid donation (YES / NO)		

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for the current tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for the current tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I have given.

PLEASE USE CLEAR BLOCK CAPITALS

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Post Code: _____

Tel: _____ Mobile: _____

Emergency Contact (Name and Number) _____

Email: _____

Age (if under 18): _____ Occupation: _____

It is your responsibility to ensure that the Society is informed of any changes in your communication details.

Please return the completed form to Phill Piddell You will receive a Membership Card in the post.
Alternatively please email the above details to phill.piddell@bt.com and transfer the money directly to our bank account: SORT CODE **20-49-76** Account **90867381** (South of England Hedge Laying Soc)

Renew online - www.sehls.co.uk

COMPETITION RESULTS

34th Annual Hedge Laying Competition. Sunday 18th February 2017. Angmering Park **PRIZES**

Class	1 st		2 nd	3 rd
Champion	The Society Cup +	£50	£25	£15
	Tony Gallow		Gary Moore	Paul Matthews
Senior	Westward Plaque +	£50	£25	£15
	Phil Hart		David Dunk	Mike Bentley
Novice	Westward Plaque +	£50	£25	£15
	Matthew Beard		Johnny Adams	Phill Piddell
Veteran	The Society Trophy +	£50	£25	£15
	Mark Moore		Clive Gilligan	Frank Wright
Best 1 st Year re-growth	The Whittington Shield +	£25	£15	£10
	Roger Taylor			
Best Veteran re-growth	The Fred Mouland Memorial Trophy		£25	Roger Taylor
Best length of bindings (Novices only)	Presidents Prize - kindly donated by the Society President		£20	Matthew Beard
Most improved Novice	The Bill Truran Memorial Trophy		£25	Matthew Beard
Best work on a poor length	The Joan Streete Memorial Shield		£25	not awarded
Best staking & binding	The Jim Vantassel Tankard		£25	Tony Gallow
Best work with hand tools - Novice			£50	Matthew Beard
Best work with hand tools - Novice Pairs			£50	
Best work with hand tools - Veteran			£50	not awarded
Best work with hand tools - Senior			£50	Mike Bentley
Best work with hand tools - Champion			£50	Nigel Adams
Points Trophy	Gary Moore		Bob Whitaker	David Dunk

Now Des Whittington who was judge for the novices competition is a hard man to please but he says he was very impressed by the quality of the novices' work: a great compliment to them and their teachers. He was particularly pleased by the absence of dead wood in the novices' cants. Not something he could say about the other classes!

Cant	Competitor	Class	Cut and Pleach	Stakes and Binders	General Appearance	Total	Position	Steward	Judge
			35	35	30	100			
6	Marcus Broome	Novice	26	27	20	73		Roger Ferrand	Des Whittington
8	Phill Piddell	Novice	25	29	25	79	3		
5	Mandy Woodham	Novice	24	19		43			
9	Natasha Stonestreet	Novice	22	28	24	74			
7	Graham West	Novice	22	25	23	70			
11	Matthew Beard	Novice	25	28	29	82	1		
10	Jim Jones	Novice	20	23	22	65			
1	Andrew Bigwood	Novice	21	19	20	60			
2	Chris Burchell Collins	Novice	25	20	22	67			
4	Gwyn Alford	Novice	25	21	23	69			
3	Johnny Adams	Novice	26	27	28	81	2		
35	John French	Veteran	20	20	17	57		Mike Parrott	Alan Ashby
29	Frank Wright	Veteran	23	21	21	65	3		
34	Tim Hughes	Veteran	15	18	16	49			
30	David Crouch	Veteran	20	15	22	57			
33	Mark Moore	Veteran	22	23	24	69	1		
32	Clive Gilligan	Veteran	25	22	21	68	2		
31	Geoff Pitt	Veteran	21	14	20	55		Bob Hunt	Peter Tunks
17	Phil Hart	Senior	24	23	24	71	1		
18	Russell Woodham	Senior	24	22	22	68			
19	Darren Hulbert	Senior	22	21	20	63			
15	Mike Bentley	Senior	25	22	22	69	3		
14	David Dunk	Senior	24	26	20	70	2		
16	David Droscher	Senior	23	24	20	67			
21	Hans Taylor	Senior	20	20	21	61			
20	Martyn Schippers	Senior	21	25	22	68			
13	Peter Ceelen	Senior	20	25	21	66		Roger Taylor	Dave Sands/Dick Foulgar
24	Tony Gallow	Champion	29	32	28	89	1		
23	Gary Moore	Champion	30	31	27	88	2		
28	Paul Matthews	Champion	30	30	24	84	3		
22	Terry Standen	Champion	24	28	23	75			
26	Stephen Mockford	Champion	26	30	24	80			
27	Nigel Adams	Champion	28	28	25	81			
25	Bob Whitaker	Champion	28	29	25	82			

Captions



Previous: an enigmatic
response from Frank Wright
“The Stihl small voice of
calm”



Firecrest see p 14

Coppicing Turners Hill

Before we can go hedge laying we need to gather stakes and binders, which is why we have coppicing days.

Today's "Christmas fat burner" attracted 19 members, who managed to cut 580 binders and 350 stakes - all good quality.

A special mention goes to Terry who tied up AND carried virtually the lot, from the top of the wood to the car park, across some extremely muddy / slippery ground.

Well done to

Tim Hughes, Mike Parrott, Dave Droscher, Bob Taylor, Dave Truran, Pete Tunks, Tom and Terry Standen, Matthew Beard, Mike Mason, Roberto Grilli, Kevin Jefferies, Grace Clements, Alan Miller, John French, Charlotte Tennant and David Phillips, Natasha Stonestreet, Steve Thorns.

pictures as always....

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm8uepBm>



Details from Tim Hughes, pictures from Matthew Beard

Another intrepid team (Chris Burchell Collins, Roger Farrand, and Frank Wright) were at Small Dole and collected 190 stakes and 60 binders.

Improvers Day

We were back at Nodes Farm for our annual "improver's day", focused on getting our recent trainees to lay a section of hedge in teams of two (or on their own if they fancy), they still get hints and tips, but are generally left to make their own choices on tackling the hedge.

The hedge was alongside a footpath and was getting a little overgrown, the improver's were given 6 pretty consistent sections and the rest of the hedge was split between the other members. To make it a little more of a challenge there was a wood fence behind the hedge, which meant it was a left hander day, and the right handers got a taste of how hard the lefties have to usually work.

After almost a week of rain it was a little soft under foot, but because the foot path was up a slight hill it was dry enough to make a nice day.

Everyone struggled to get started as there was very little room for laying off because of the fence, a few people opted for using the rest of the footpath.

The more experienced cutters didn't face any real problems and were progressing well, but most of the trainees were struggling a bit for time, so to ensure they had a chance to get the stakes and binders completed we gave them a bit of a nudge / helping hand. They were able to learn something at this point, watching the speed and accuracy of the experts at work. Sharp tools guys!

By the end of the day each of the trainees had made a pretty good section of hedge, and I think by making a lot of their own decisions actually picked up a lot of new skill.

Alan Ashby was good enough to judge for us, and the final results were
3rd Jim Jones and Sarah Dolomere
2nd Natasha Stonestreet
1st Laura Ogilvie and Alexandre Gagnon

At the end of the day we had improved the footpath and tidied up the hedge which was looking much better. Special mention must

of course go to Sarah Dolomere who traveled all the way from Canada.



Pictures of course....

<https://flic.kr/s/aHskzY9sWn>

President's v Chairman's competition 27 January 2018 at David Heasman's farm Fletching

Around 20 cutters of all ages and abilities took part in this fun event held at David Heasman's farm just north of Fletching. It was clear from the start that the Droscher family had been hard at work, with a marquee already set up, complete with power and cooking facilities. Their efforts really helped make the day.

This got the day off to a good start with teams being drawn out of seeded hats to ensure that the teams were well matched. It was good to see a number of this year's trainees make the event.

The hedge itself was a right mixture of hazel and hawthorn which had spread to quite a width with a ditch on the road side. Barbed wire and significant amount of brash was removed to leave enough stems for hand tools users and chainsaws alike.

Trainees and novices were able to get stuck in, and where necessary given a helping hand by more experienced cutters; the spirit of co-operation and collaboration was present along the hedge length. This was greatly aided by lashings of tea and coffee from the Droschers, along with some marvellous home made cake.

Although the day started clear and frosty, the frost was going out of the (muddy) ground very quickly, a sure sign of impending rain which started just before lunch which was taken in the much welcomed marquee. More bacon rolls, cakes and hot drinks followed as cutters sat on hay bales swapping stories of awkward pleachers and sharpness of axes.

The day was brought to a close by our Chairman Phil Hart who thanks all those who had contributed to the success of the day and asked David Heasman to act as judge.

David was very fulsome in his praise of SEHLS efforts and thought we had done a splendid job on a pretty ropey hedge. In having to make a call as to which team he considered to have done the better job, he said it was a very close run thing, but that the Chairman team just shaded it.

The result was immaterial, especially as Peter Tunks had left the trophy at home !

Thanks must go to the numerous people who contributed to the success of the day in so many ways- hedgelaying days just don't happen by themselves, it takes a lot of planning and management by many people, who give their time willingly. Particular thanks need to go to the Droscher family organised and put on the catering and marquee.

The SEHLS bandwagon rolls onto the annual competition at Lee Farm Angmering Park on Sunday 18 February. Closing date for entries is 3 February.

Mathew Beard

Midland Training day

After the improvers day there was some hedge left at the end of the footpath which needed finishing. Because the hedge was on the side of a footpath a lot of the experts were saying that a "midland style" hedge would make more sense than a South of England Style (as all the bushy stuff would be on the side with the cows. We have some pretty amazing cutters in the club, including some real Midland experts (National Champions no less), so a plan was hatched to finish off the hedge with a training session in a different style. Because the style is different we limited the day to cutters who had a reasonable idea what they were up to.

With stakes and binders organised we met at Nodes farm on a crisp but thankfully dry day. We walked to the farm and crossed a soupy boot grabbing mud section churned up by the cows and divided up in to teams of two with Alan and Peter acting as floating experts.

The first task was to cut off all the front facing branches, which seems pretty brutal, but we were just following instructions! We then started to pleach which itself was the same, but the aim here is to have a flat front side, with plenty of small fluffy bits out the back (this is the side the livestock is on, and the spikes keep them away from the new growth (in theory). After a few cuts we started to insert stakes, about 9" from the front. the tough thing was to get the stems to lay on top of each other, and keep the shape of the hedge, so lots of extra cuts were required to get everything to align. We also had to strip off any tiny bits on the front side.

The section Chris and I had was a bit thin, gappy and had plenty of wonky stems so we had to bulk up with some borrowed stems.

As we had staked (and bashed them in) as we went we were able to get a good line by looking down the line as we went. Finally we started on the Binders. Both Alan and Peter started with 3 tied together, 2 in the front and 1 at the back. These are weaved in bunches with the small one cut off after each new binder was added. Totally different to SoE, but the end result is a super strong bind which looks really good.

By the end of the day we had all completed a reasonable section, which we were all pleased with, plenty of practice still required to really get the hang of it, and we agreed that it would be much better with 1:1 training. Midland is much more technical

than SoE in that you have to build as you go (the expert SoE guys do that as well of course).

A very enjoyable day, and something we will do again

Pictures as always

<https://flic.kr/s/aHskv7qk6a>



Fun Day at Wittersham

With a forecast for snow thanks to the "mini beast from the east" the number of attendees for the fun day was lower than usual. When we arrived at Ed's farm the weather did not disappoint, it was bitterly cold.

We have been to Hope farm a few times, and it was good to see the hedges re-growing well, such a transformation from the horrible old gappy thing we started with. Ed and the team have been busy and the farm itself is looking good, they even have a small camp site.

The fun day hedge was at the bottom of the camping / sheep field and it was slightly less cold, everyone grabbed a section of hedge and to keep warm set off clearing and cutting. The hedge was mostly thorn, very brittle, and on the edge of or 3/4 way into a ditch. Some sections contained some pretty big stems. Mike Mason took the prize for grabbing the chunky section, and had a tough day of it.

We decided to swap the direction of laying in about the middle of the length and Mike Bentley's section had the cross over, and he did a super job of blending the stems and it was not obvious until you looked for it.

Further down the hedge Phil Hart had a very gappy section of trees to contend with, and it looked like he was creating some chainsaw carving art at one point.

Each section went down pretty well, although Mike and Phil were struggling a bit for time.

Amazingly we had a visitor! Guy MacNaughton who lives in Goudhurst and had shown an interest in hedge laying came along, and saw the process involved and to keep warm we put him to work with a little tidying up and popping on some binders. He was keen to get some training, hopefully he was not put off :-)

Ed and Gemma put on a BBQ in the warm of their hay barn and everyone tucked in.

Two go mad in Devon

Some of you will know that Gary Moore is keen to try his hand at every regional style, so a few months ago Gary roped in David Dunk and they decided to venture over to Devon to learn their style of hedge laying.

Their training was under the expert eye of Roger Parris (Chief Steward for the Nationals), so they were in good hands, and soon picked up the style. The main difference is that most of the time is spent clearing out the unwanted material, and the stems are horizontal rather than at an angle, and secured with crooks cut from the hedge.

Having got the hang of the style they were keen to enter some competitions, so back they went for the Cotley hunt and hedge laying competition
<http://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/cotley-hunt-holding-hedge-laying-competition-at-meet-306302>

They put in a respectable performance with Gary getting 2nd place in the intermediate competition.

34th Annual Competition

34 cutters met in the middle of Angmering Park estate at early o'clock on a chilly dry day, and wow what a superb hedge the guys picked for us. Pretty consistent across the whole length, and very little clearing out was required. The hedge was on a slight bank, but the Right handers were working from the field, so they had it pretty easy.

Our set up team did a superb job of getting everything measured out and stakes and binders distributed amongst the sections. Parking was easy, right next to the hedge.

The theatre which is the draw for cant took a little longer than usual, so we were a few minutes late starting.

There was a lot of chainsaw action going on everywhere other than the Novices, all of who made a pretty good job of sticking with hand tools, which with a couple of reasonable stems here and there got a few people sweating.

A few people were struggling for time, but by lunch time everyone had managed to get their sections down.

Our judges had their work cut out sorting the good from the very good. A few awards were not issued this year.

LOTS of pictures, so thank you very much to our team of "pap's"

<https://flic.kr/s/aHskwnEpu5>



A few prizes were not awarded this year. Regrowth - only 1st place was awarded as there was very little in evidence
Novice Pairs - no entries
Best work on a poor length - hedge was judged to be pretty similar
Hand tools (Veteran) - Judges have super high standards and did not feel the quality was good enough.

More on the competition

Tony Gallow pipped Gary Moore by one point to win the Champions class

We limit the Champion class to seven, and the lowest score each year sees someone relegated to Senior class and they have to battle their way back by winning. This year our senior winner Phil Hart who moves Champion class, well done Phil. David Dunk was a close second, and managed the whole thing with just hand tools.

Gary did however easily win the "Points Trophy" (points awarded for three ploughing matches and our annual competition)

In Veteran's Clive Gilligan lost by one point to Mark Moore

In the Novice section Matthew Beard managed to hoover up all the prizes and next year moves up to Senior class (and from 8 yards to 10 yards on average)

The regrowth from last year was disappointing so we only awarded 1st place which went to Roger Taylor, who's section was slightly better than anyone else managed.

Our new novices did well, they all finished their sections, with a little help from our chainsaw steward. Well done as a competition as an individual is a big jump from a training day. The trick is sharp tools and more practice, and most important to ask someone to critique your work after every section.

Thanks to all those who helped out, our wonderful judges and stewards who were all offering advice to the novices to help and encourage. The setup crew who did a superb job, and our team of photographers who provided pictures of everything and seemed to appear (often en mass) every-time we made a mistake!

Thanks to the landowner for providing a great hedge, with great access

Phil Piddell



NOTICES

Show season – help needed

Within a few weeks of putting the last binder on and trimming the stakes and hedge, then the summer shows start.

The season starts in May at Plumpton College Open Day and finishes at Ardingly in October with the Autumn Show & Game Fair.

These shows are an important shop window for the Society; it is an opportunity for us to educate the public about hedge laying, show them what it is all about and what we can do for them.

As well as providing the Society with a chance to encourage people to sign up for our training, it is one of the most popular ways in which we get enquires for hedges to lay or coppice to cut.

Of the three current coppice sites which SEHLS is working, two of them came via enquires at shows at Ardingly in the last year.

A good deal of the hedges which we lay come in through enquires at shows, with the Heathfield show in May proving a productive one for the Society.

What would be good is if we could see some new faces helping out at these events, as it helps spread the work out. If enough people commit and turn up for the events it means we can take it in turns to have time away from the stand and visit the rest of the show.

Listed below are the dates and shows, see if you can make any of the days and want to come along to help then please contact Shows Officer Chris Burchell Collins on 01273 495026 or e-mail him on thesouthofenglandhedgelayers@googlemail.com

Plumpton College Open Day – Saturday May 12th 2018

Heathfield & District Agricultural Show – Saturday May 26th 2018

South of England Show at Ardingly – Thursday 7th, Friday 8th & Saturday 9th June 2018

Connect with the Countryside at Ardingly – Thursday July 12th 2018

Bentley Wood Fair at Bentley – Friday 28th, Saturday 29th & Sunday 30th September 2018

*

Autumn Show & Game Fair at Ardingly – Saturday October 6th & Sunday 7th of October 2018 *

At the last two events marked * we hope to have a live hedge to work on, so get some early season practice in.



Above is the SEHLS display at the Heathfield Show. Note - hopefully the sun shines at these days, not true hedgelaying weather.

Chris

Bird Watch OCT 17

The end of the breeding season proved to be disappointing as both of the late Swallows and the Barn Owl didn't succeed in rearing any young. Perhaps the season was wrong for them and they abandoned their efforts knowing it was a lost cause. Strange really as Swallows in the past have successfully fledged young in mid-September but of course each year can be very different.

Now, in mid-September, there are signs that autumn is fast approaching and already many of our summer visitors have gone south. At the same time others are passing through and some arriving for the winter months. There were reports that the resident breeding population of Starlings was in decline until this year but by the number of noisy fledglings feeding on the farmland, they must have been more successful. Already in the moist grass fields large flocks of these and the first arrival of Starlings from the Continent are foraging for worms and Leather-jackets, the larvae of the Crane fly.

They also come into stockyards and plunder the cattle feed especially where the maize kernels form part of the ration. Years ago I used to ring over a hundred each winter as they came into the buildings. I put some meal at the far end of a large cage trap that shut when one of them stepped on to the trip bar and sometimes I caught half a dozen at a time. They are one of the few species of bird that give off a smell. Some of them were later recovered in Eastern Europe and this was well before the Berlin Wall came down. Particularly rewarding was one of mine ringed in February that was caught by an East German ringer in June, showing their breeding area and also how international the wonderful hobby of studying birds can be whatever culture or regime one happens to be in. Others recoveries I received were from Poland, Russia (3) and Finland so when you see flocks of Starlings fly over in the winter, give them perhaps more than passing glance and realise how far they will have had to travel to get here with no border controls!

Also arriving now to our part of the country are large numbers of the tiny Goldcrests. I have written about them before but they are so fascinating that anyone unfamiliar with this delightful little bird may be pleased to identify it. They are often to be found on evergreen trees where the local population breeds. Olive green below and darker on its back with light lines on its wings, the bright crest of yellow/orange shows well. People younger than I am will pick up their thin high pitched call notes that are often the first indication they are close by. Years ago their closely related Firecrest was quite a rare find as a bird passing through, but increasingly more are breeding in Britain especially in the south. Very similar to the Goldcrest they can be distinguished by a striking black eye-line and white above. They are also quite a possibility to see. Good luck.

NOV 17

At the end of September we spent our usual twice yearly few days at Portland Bill Bird Observatory which is a wonderful place for birds. You might see from the weather forecast maps that it projects well into the Channel thus being one of the last places departing migrants leave and one of the first where any incoming birds arrive.

On our arrival at about midday we turned into the observatory to find the drive down to the lighthouse full of an army of khaki clad birders with binoculars, telescopes and long lens cameras scanning the tall Holm Oaks and Sycamore trees with a great degree of excitement and anticipation as earlier in the day a rare Greenish Warbler had been caught, ringed, measured and had its identity verified. It was then released and with a large company of Chiffchaffs was feeding on insects among the leaves. According to British Birds, the magazine, only six had been positively identified in Britain up until the end of 2016 so you can see the interest it aroused. We had good views of it within a few minutes which was a bonus but our main task was to ring the migrant birds.

Over the four days between us we ringed over four hundred and fifty birds of over thirty species, many we seldom see here even if only a hundred and fifty miles farther east. The bulk were Chiffchaffs and a few Blackcaps. A few Redstarts, Willow Warblers, Goldcrests, Firecrests and Flycatchers were also ringed in the large garden area while in the fields specially sown with crop seeds for birds yielded Meadow Pipits, Linnets and Goldfinches. Portland is a wonderful place that I always enjoy but this visit was the best I have known.

Closer to home the autumn is a very good time to listen out at night for Tawny Owls. During November, particularly on moonlit nights they start to claim their territories as they breed very early next year. Males call their hooting notes to be answered by the short sharper reply from his mate. Where the population of Tawnies is large and competition for territories strong it is possible to estimate the number of them in the area as when one male hoots others will reply from different directions. Tawny Owls are less subject to population fluctuations as are Barn Owl, being less dependent on the Field Voles and have a greater variety of prey. Proving this diversity of food we have found the remains of a Jackdaw and a Magpie in one of their nest boxes and on dissecting a pellet found the ring I had put on a Goldcrest the year before.

DEC 17

Little did I realise when I suggested earlier this autumn that we look out for Firecrests among any Goldcrests that they should arrive in such record numbers. Whereas a few years ago these were quite scarce birds, recorded annually in Sussex but in small enough numbers that birders would travel a distance to see one, now they are regular. A small indication of this is my ringing effort in the garden. Over the years I would capture and ring one in about every three years. This year I have already ringed three. Portland Bird Observatory had sixty-eight in one day compared with their highest annual total of sixty-seven. This will be a combination of a large influx from Scandinavia and the increased breeding population in the

south of Britain. I do hope you can identify this gorgeous little bird.

There has also been one of the biggest arrivals of Hawfinches across the whole of the U K with flocks of forty or more reported from the wooded areas of Sussex. These are the largest of the finch family, considerably bigger than the familiar Greenfinch with plumage of light tan-brown with black and white on the wings. It has an enormous bill, strong enough to crack cherry stones. The call is loud and unusual so that any passing overhead is immediately recognised as being different. Though there is a small population of them that breed in Britain, this influx most likely comes from Scandinavia. There has been a study of this species in North Wales where in winter some were colour ringed to be found in the breeding season in Norway.

Feeding garden birds is now something many of us do regularly and particularly when the weather turns cold, a great variety of species rely on this food source. With the New Year approaching, why not make a list of species coming to the feeder, feeding in the garden or just violating your air-space. It can give an added interest and assist with identification skills. Because of this reliable food supply some birds, Goldfinches in particular, are now more common than they were previously. Now as more survive the winter, more get through to breed and so the population grows. Look out for other small finches. The Siskin small and green, the males show yellow and are streaked black. The females are less showy and lighter below. You may also be lucky enough to attract a Redpoll. Again a finch this one is small and brown and has a red forehead. Each of these is as acrobatic as the Blue Tit and in a natural setting will feed on the seeds of Alder and Birch trees particularly in the early months of the year when the Alder cones open and the seeds become accessible. Look out for these especially along water courses where Alders thrive.

Reg Lanaway

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Committee Dates, 24th May, 26th July, 27th Sept. 22nd Nov

Items for next Newsletter to Ian by mid July please

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Front page: SOE annual competition and *Hedges and Hedgelaying: A Guide to Planting, Management and Conservation* by Murray Maclean