

SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY

Reg Charity No 1046124

December 2015



**PAUL MATHEWS SUPREME CHAMPION
2015**

Message from the Chairman

Congratulations to Paul Matthews on his grand win at the National Hedge Laying Championships at Chew Valley Lakes, Bristol in October. What a wet day but a wonderful end with Paul as Supreme Champion.

What a great surprise and bonus two trainees had, when they turned up to the training day in Hampshire, to find out they were being trained by the National Champion. Thank you Paul and to all the trainers for making the training days a great success.

2 positions to fill,

Thank you for all the excellent work achieved by Mike Parrott & David Crouch, but unfortunately we are now looking to fill the position of Treasurer & Shows Officer at our next AGM. If you have the skills and the enthusiasm to help, please get in contact with either Mike, David or myself to discuss the role.

We now have a great opportunity to train Novice Hedge Layers aged 16 to 26 with some free training and a fantastic opportunity to attend a prestigious event in Gloucestershire in February. 10 places have been allocated for Novice Hedge Layers in the South of England Class at the National Hedge Laying Society's Patrons Competition. If you are in the right age bracket or know someone who is, please get in contact to attend one of our training days to be in with an opportunity to be selected for this event. See the news item later in the new letter.

Wishing you all a happy Christmas & healthy prosperous New Year,
Phil

Kind regards, **Phil Hart.**



Message from the Editor

Well done Paul on his success and all members of our society who took part in the National in the decidedly inclement conditions. An interview with Paul follows with plenty of tips from the Champ. Don't forget to cut out and send your entry form for the annual competition

Ian Runcie

PAUL MATHEWS
Interview with the Supreme Champion

Doubts

Facing a new hedge Paul Mathews always has self-doubts and questions his ability to get it down satisfactorily but feels that without this self doubt he would not win anything. He has a need to satisfy himself that he can do it and do it well. Coupled with an understated but steely competitive edge we have the psychological profile of a Supreme Champion.

He is known for the speed with which he deals with a hedge and puts this down to the fact that he tries not to communicate with anyone else while he's working. Once he's finished a competition hedge to his own satisfaction he prefers to walk away and not stand around comparing his efforts with the other competitors. These revelations surprised me as, away from a hedge, he is a jovial talker, very happy to give this interview and the sort of interviewee you can just leave to talk.

During the summer he works as an assistant gardener at Titsey Place near Oxted. An Elizabethan Estate, open to the public, with much praise for the quality of the gardens on Trip Advisor. During the winter he lays himself off to do other things, mainly hedge laying, usually for the local authority.

Hedge laying experience and The Nationals

He prefers SOE style but often does Midland commercially and a blackthorn is favourite to cut. His grandfather got him interested in hedge laying by taking him to ploughing matches, which he says Peter Tunks always won. He had his first training day in '94. His influences, over the years, were Peter Tunks, Nigel Adams, Dave Truran and it was Fred Mouland who first persuaded him to go in for competitions. He won his first open class at the East Grinstead ploughing match in 2000. The making of him from novice to expert and his first commercial venture was a 800m hedge that he got down over more than one season for the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Given the 18 foot trees he usually has to deal with, the competition hedge must have seen an easy prospect but his self-doubt got him

through and he “gave it all he's got”. He used only hand tools and spent some time side pleaching the lower branches to cover the stems for a neat finish. He reckons that, by the time he had finished, only one of his stems could be seen. It was a very wet day and he wears a Ridgeline smock-style anorak, which he describes as completely waterproof, windproof and very warm. However, despite the rain, he was too hot and had to take it off and just got wet. He thought he was in a good chance of winning the SOE style competition, which he has won twice before. After he won that he went out to ring his father to tell him the good news. He broke off the phone call to go back into the tent to see who had won the Supreme Champion. You could have “knocked him over with a feather” when the winner was announced and he had to turn to his companions to say “Did they just say my name”. It is a remarkable achievement because it is rare for a non-Midland layer to win. The cup stands on his mantelpiece along with a black and white certificate: small and modest in appearance but with SUPREME CHAMPION typed across it's centre.

He will still carry on competing, especially in ploughing matches, but he has now put himself forward to be a competition judge. He notes that, over the years he's been cutting, the SOE style has changed and that in the past the “lovely stems” would be exposed. He makes the point that judges vary in their preferences and feels it would be better if these were made clear at the beginning. If you do get him as a judge, he doesn't like unnecessary dead wood and feels that the lower branches should be left on as much as possible, seeing little point in cutting them off only to stuff them back into the hedge. From this you can see that he is the sort of hedge layer who likes to get right inside the hedge. This may stem from being left handed and being pretty useless with his right hand. Older layers, such as myself, who have dodgy knees and tend to cut off the lower branches to get a good axe swing may not get much sympathy. Perhaps we should keep him away from judging the veterans. He also feels that a good judge, when looking at the quality of the cutting, should walk around whilst the layers are working, rather than poke a stick in the hedge afterwards. He is a great one for smooth cuts.

Tools

His main tip for novices is to get a 3 lb side axe, which gives a smoother cut in the hedge and is great for sharpening stakes. He holds his right at the top of the shaft with his index finger on the blade. One of the prizes for Supreme Champion is the offer of a personalised tool made by a blacksmith and he has ordered up a left handed side axe to his own size and weight specifications. He is also very fond of his red-handled, lightweight Yorkshire which he bought on eBay. He will not use round handles as the grip you can get on them will sooner or later slip. For sharpening he uses 600 and 300 grade diamond graters with just water for lubrication, following up with a leather strop and using his fingernail to gauge the sharpness. Commercially he has to use a chainsaw all the time and considers that a large powerful saw is not necessary for hedge laying. He uses a 12in blade with a steel chain.

He makes beadles and walking sticks and remarks that he “finds” beadles in the hedge. Each one is different and he will make them to order. Between 4-6 lb is his favourite weight. He'll use oak, hawthorn and yew (“a bit soft”) and, surprisingly, sycamore. He likes to varnish the wood quickly to seal the sap in. He'll shape them with a chainsaw and may knock a depression in the face with a hammer. He smooths them off with a flappy disc and then an initial coat of linseed oil, followed by a few coats of outside or yacht varnish with a matt finish. The length of his beadle stems vary but he suggested having one that is 18 in long so it can be used to measure out the distance between stakes. He likes to give each stake 3-4 taps as he goes along before putting on the binders. Another example of dual use is his 4ft 6 inch measure, which has a hook on the end for pulling out brambles.



A Mathews Beadle

He's also a hurdle maker and very dismissive of pre-formed commercially made hurdles. This activity has given him the sort of hands that can twist a knot in a substantial binder to finish off the edges of a cant. He does this round the last stake rather than on the floor with his foot, which he says does not give the same finish. I'm not sure that the rest of us will be able to emulate this. He has helped other folk in competitions by finishing off their binders in this way for them and they have gone on to win (I'm not mentioning names but you know who you are).

Tips.

We've mentioned: side axes, lower branches and a few taps on the stakes prior to binding. He also mentioned the importance of loosening up a tree before starting to cut it and said that if two trees are very interwoven why not cut them both and get them down together rather than cut one up unnecessarily. One mistake that novices working together can make is for one to pull on the stem over-enthusiastically as the other is cutting. This can give a false impression of when the stem is ready to give and it may ride up afterwards. He tends to use a billhook to cut off the heel but is happy for less experienced folk to use a pruning saw or loppers. He prefers this to inexperienced cutters using a billhook and creating a frayed heel. He suggests placing a stake in the ground between the heel and the pleacher on the other side before you swing to stop the heel from being too flexible and advises an initial down cut in the heel before the upswing needed to get the final shape. He recommends side pleaching the lower branches near the main stem and pushing them under the established hedge and advises over rather than under-trimming.

Reminiscences

He recalls standing by a hedge taking a rest and drinking a cup of tea when he heard a loud squeaking sound, which went on for some time. Eventually a couple of weasels emerged, chasing each other and ran right over his boots. Later in the same hedge he found a complete fox cub skeleton. Clearly a good day.

South of England Hedge-Laying Society



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (or RENEWAL) April 2015 to March 2016

PRESIDENT:

Peter Tunks
The Coach House
Waltersville Way
Horley
RH6 9EP

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:

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

Tel: 01293 784826 / 07836 757570

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.

More From the Nationals



SOE Veterans in the rain.

Results Of SOE Nationals Competition

Open

- 1st Paul Mathews
- 2nd Nigel Adams
- 3rd Mike Bently
- 4th Tony Gallow

Veterans

- Dave Truran
- Roger Taylor
- Clive Gilligan
- Frank Wright

Gary Moore came 2nd in the Open Derby class.

More Notes from our chairman

Who's boots are these shoes...

Trainers and trainees had an archaeological treat after lunch on the first training day in Hampshire. With an onsite visit to an active dig site.



Caption Competition Entries.

All President & correct... Vice President Gary Moore & President Peter Tunks compare notes, after the 10th annual Hedge Laying competition at Boxmeer in the Netherlands.



“Well Pete, do you think you’ll finish your 10 yards tomorrow? “



Under 26? – Hedge laying needs you!

You may know that HRH Prince Charles is a keen hedge layer, and runs an annual competition at Highgrove every February. The prince is keen to promote hedge laying and this season at Highgrove he is sponsoring a novice competition for anyone under 26. He is even offering some expense money just for entering.

We still have plenty of events this season to get some practice, and the society are keen to offer you some extra training to hone your technique.

So if you are under 26 please contact Gary Moore as soon as possible

And today's **CAPTION COMPETITION. Entries to Phil Hart**



NOTICES



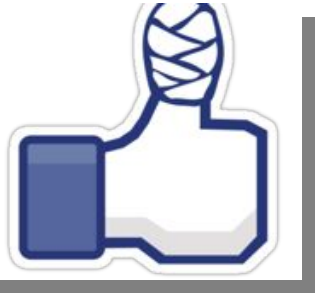
President vs Chairman comp and the fun day will both be followed by a Lamb BBQ (It's Ed Lovejoy's place - one of Phil Harts old students. Nice local organic Lamb, yummy)

Phill P.



WELL DONE EVERYONE

says Mike Parrot Again. Letter from Chailey Heritage
Dear Mike



It was a pleasure to meet you and all your colleagues yesterday and to receive the cheque for the funds that you have raised. Thank you very much. We will be writing a formal thank you and sending it to Peter in due course.

I do hope you all enjoyed your tour of Chailey. We have already produced a press release and forwarded it to our Marketing Officer for distribution. We thought you would like to see a copy of this and perhaps forward it to your members.

We are most grateful for your continued support.

Best wishes

Joan

NOTICES

Save the SOEHS Money

We would like to encourage members to receive this newsletter by e mail, please let Phil Piddell know if you would prefer this:

phill.piddell@bt.com



Hedge Laying Grants.

With DEFRA & Natural England getting the finer details out of the “New” Countryside Stewardship Scheme (not to be confused with the old Countryside Stewardship Scheme). There is money available for farmers who are in the scheme, to claim £ 9.40 for hedge laying: form BN5 and £3.40 for adding stakes & binding: form BN10. Other money is available for other hedge related work.

Visit the Natural England Website for full details and conditions.

Phil Hart



Trainers wanted

Are you willing to help the Society train the next generation of hedge layers? We are looking for volunteers who can come along to the training days and pass on your skills? If you can help with one event per season it would make a big difference.

Please let Phill Piddell know which event(s) you can help with.



Distinguished Services Trophy

Following the sad passing of John Blake, the family have left the society an ornament which is hedge laying related. The committee have decided that it should be awarded to someone within the society who have achieved a considerable amount to promote hedge laying in the South of England.

The trophy may be awarded on an annual basis, or at longer intervals, depending on the committee's opinion of the suitability of any nominations. Due to the fragile nature of the trophy it will be held in the trophy cabinet at Plumpton College and the successful person will be presented with the award at the AGM.

Therefore the committee is looking for nominations. The name of your nominated person, along with few words as to why the individual is deserving of the award, should be sent to Chris Burchell Collins via e-mail

thesouthofenglandhedgelayers@googlemail.com

Or contact him on 01273 495026

The deadline for nominations is 14th January 2016

NOTICES

Results from the Hurstpierpoint Ploughing Match Hedge Laying Competition.

- 1st Gary Moore
- 2nd Michael Bentley
- 3rd Steve Mockford
- Regrowth Steve Mockford



Before and after at Hurstpierpoint and the winning hedge



Points Trophy

	Laughton		Hurstpierpoint		West Grinstead		SEHLS		Total	Position
	pos	pts	pos	pts	pos	pts	pos	pts		
Bob Whittaker	1	10	4	7	3	8	0	0	25	2
Gary Moore	2	9	1	10	1	10	0	0	29	1
Darren Hulbert	6	5	7	4		0	0	0	9	
Mike Bentley	4	7	2	9		0	0	0	16	
Frank Wright	5	6	6	5	5	6	0	0	17	
Mark Moore	6	5	5	6	4	7	0	0	18	
Paul Matthews	3	8	3	8	2	9	0	0	25	2

FOR YOUR DIARY

SEHS Events, Shows and Training

Date	Event	Address	Post Code
2 nd Jan '16	Coppicing	Benenden, Kent & Wakehurst	
9 th Jan 2 '16	Improvers Day Competition	Scotney Castle, Lamberhurst.	TN3 8JN
21 st Feb '16	SEHLS Annual Competition	Scotney Castle, Lamberhurst.	TN3 8JN
23 rd Jan '16	President vs Chairman	Wittersham, Kent	TN 30
26 th Feb '16	SEHLS AGM	Business Centre, Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, Plumpton, Lewes	BN7 3AE
19 th March '16	Hedge laying Fun day	Wittersham Kent	TN 30

Members please remember to book for these events

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 events.

Experienced current members

A section of hedge will be allocated for experienced current members wishing to lay hedge, please contact Phill Piddell book your place.

Non Members

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

Form on page 7:



Note that there are two simultaneous coppicing venues on Jan 2nd. You can take your choice about which to attend. Info and maps about the new site at Benenden follows.

Directions

From Benenden Crossroads take the B2086 west towards Cranbrook, Hartley, Goudhurst and Tunbridge Wells. After a mile take a left turn into Babbs Lane. This is the only left turn for 3 miles and is shortly after Crandons Factory and a small garage. Decend down Babbs Lane ignoring two right turns. At the bottom of the hill cross a small stream in a narrow section of wood. This is the northern end of White Chimney Wood. Continue up the lane (now Coldharbour Road) , past a small grassed triangle , track and Scullgate House on the left. Turn immediately right into Hinksden Road. After 15 yards pass the entrance to Scullgate Cottage (big oak tree in the centre of a circular drive) then past entrance to Upper Scullgate Cottage and continue south up the lane for 50 yards. The field entrance will be marked and is on the right. If you reach the brow of the hill you have gone too far.

For those with satellite navigation the entrance to the field is between post codes TN17 4LE and TN17 4LD.

For those that can read a map the OS grid reference of the entrance is TQ792323

Benenden Maps



And here's some work from the December training day



SEHLS 2016 Annual Competition

SUNDAY 21st February 2016.

HELP

This year we hope to attract visitors! The National Trust will be advertising the event, and running guided walks around the estate. It would be great to have some members willing to talk to the visitors about hedge laying.

NEW PRIZES!

This year we are introducing a hand-tool prize. The best work using hand-tools only will win £50 and best of all this prize applies for each Class. To be eligible you must use only hand tools – the moment a chainsaw touches your section you will be ineligible. Axe or Saw. Traditionally the heels would be removed with an axe, and our judges are very traditional.

THE HEDGE

This year you have mainly Hazel, it's reasonably thin, but there is a lot of it. The hedge is on the top of a bank. Because of the volume of material we are reducing the length of individual cants to approx. 7 and 9 yards

It's the tall hedge next to this year's 'Improvers day' hedge– so have a look while you are there J

ACCESS / PARKING

You can drive to the hedge to drop off tools etc. and parking is a short walk further down the track at the farm, just follow the signs

DRAW FOR CANT

A number of members requested this be re-instated the committee have agreed – please arrive promptly and listen for announcements

Phill Piddell

SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 1046124



32nd ANNUAL HEDGELAYING COMPETITION

to be held at Scotney Castle, Lamberhurst, Kent. TN3 8JN.

By kind permission of the National Trust

on **Sunday 21st February 2016**

Entries close 14th February 2016

Entry for the competition is **free to members** and includes lunch at a local hostelry details will be in your joining pack. A joining pack including a schedule, map and prize list will be posted/emailed on **15th February 2016**. Confirmation that your entry was received will be sent to members who have email

The Meal is free for competitors and competition officials. Everyone else is welcome to join us, the cost is £13 per meal, please include payment with your entry.

Classes and prizes

Class	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	
Champion	The Society Cup	£40	£25	£15	£10
Senior	Westward Plaque	£40	£25	£15	£10
Novice	Westward Plaque	£40	£25	£15	£10
Veteran A (60 – 69 yrs)	The Society Trophy	£40	£25	£15	£10
Veteran B (70 yrs+)	The Society Shield	£40	£25	£15	£10
Best 1 st Year re-growth	The Whittington Shield	£25	£15	£10	
Best length of bindings (Novices only)	Presidents Prize Kindly donated by the Society President				
Special prize – Most improved Novice	The Bill Truran Memorial Trophy				
Best Veteran re-growth	The Fred Moulard Memorial Trophy				
Best work on a poor length	The Joan Streete Memorial Shield				
Best staking & binding	The Jim Vantassel Tankard				
Best work with hand tools only	Champion				£50
Best work with hand tools only	Senior				£50
Best work with hand tools only	Novice				£50
Best work with hand tools only	Veteran				£50

CONDITIONS. 32nd annual hedgelaying Competition

- All competitors must be fully paid up members of the Society for the current season.
- All competition applications must be fully completed and acknowledged.
 - Any exceptional circumstances or special conditions required by a competitor (e.g. assistance due to lack of mobility or injury) must be agreed by the Chief Steward prior to the start of the competition.

COMPETITION RULES

- The draw will take place at the class sections at **08.15** and laying will commence at **08.30**.
Rejection of the drawn cant will result in immediate disqualification and a penalty of suspension from the Society Competition in the following year.
- Competitors not present at the draw will be allocated a cant by the section steward.
 - Time allowed: 5 Hours** – any extra time will be at the discretion of the Competition Director and Chief Steward.
 - Competitors arriving later than 30 minutes from the start of the Competition will be allowed to start at the discretion of the Chief Steward.
- Signals: An air horn will be used:
 - 2 short blasts will indicate the draw for cants at 08.15.
 - 1 long blast will indicate the start of the competition at 08.30.
 - 1 short blast will be sounded 15 minutes before the end of the competition
 - 2 long blasts will indicate the end of the competition.

Immediately following the final signal competitors will be expected to stand away from their work and no further work is to be undertaken. The Judge will then mark the cant according to the work that has been completed. **Competitors who have not completed their cant will then return to complete it. Failure to do this will result in exclusion from the following year's competition.**

If in the opinion of the Steward or Judge the cant is not completed due to the competitor wasting time, the Judge will deduct 5 points from the competitor's score. Failure to stand away from the hedge will result in that cant not being marked whether complete or not.

- All competitors to cut and lay a stock proof hedge in the South of England style (definition on separate sheet) of not more than 10yds with a finished height of 4 feet to the top of the binders (Veterans and Novices typically 8yds).
- All frith to be cleared to the side of the hedge indicated by the stewards with a minimum 1.5 YARDS separation from the hedge. Any competitor leaving frith within 1.5 yards is liable to DISQUALIFICATION.
- All cants to be left tidy.
- Only those stakes and binders provided by the Society are to be used.
- The Competition will be regulated by the Chief Steward in conjunction with the competition Director.
 - Competitors in the Novice Classes will not be allowed to use chainsaws. A chainsaw steward will be appointed. Competitors in other classes must provide and use the appropriate safety equipment and have their **Certificate details** registered with the society.
- Previously agreed assistance shall be limited to non assessable activities.
- The Judge's decision is final.
- All Competitors agree to abide by the safety directions.
- Depending on the number of entries, it may be necessary to cancel or amalgamate classes and adjust the prizes accordingly.
- No 3rd prize will be paid if there are only 4 entries and no 4th prize will be paid if there are only 5 entries.
- Vehicles may only be parked as directed

COMPETITION ENTRY FORM, 32nd annual Hedgelaying Competition



PLEASE COMPLETE YOUR ENTRY DETAILS BELOW
(Please note that entries in all classes are limited by availability)

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Post Code _____

Telephone: _____ email _____

Are you are happy save the society money and receive joining instructions by email? _____

PLEASE INDICATE THE CLASS WHICH APPLIES TO YOU (tick 1 box)

Class	Eligibility	Tick
1 Veteran A	For those aged 60 to 69 years of age on the competition date	
2 Veteran B	For those aged 70 and over on the competition date	
3 Senior	For those who have previously won 1 st prize in a novice class and experienced cutters who, having previously entered the Novice Class, and now wish to compete at a higher level	
4 Champion	For those who are current members of the Champion Class or have previously won the Senior Class. You will only be eligible to enter this class if you have competed in the SEHLS annual competition within the last three years (i.e. if you have not competed for three years or more you must enter another class) Special note for the Champion class is for the elite layers, and is restricted to a Maximum of Eight entries allocated on a FIRST COME FIRST SERVED basis. Additionally the person in last place will not be eligible to enter this class the following year (they will swap places with the winner of the senior class)	
5 Novice	Entrants for this class must have completed at least 4 training days in the past 3 years or have previously entered, at a similar level, and completed a recognised competition in the allocated time. The first prize winner from the previous year may not enter this class again.	
6 Novice Pair	Entrants for this class must have completed at least 4 training days in the past 3 years or have previously entered, at a similar level, and completed a recognised competition in the allocated time. The first prize winners from the previous year may not enter this class again Name of person you wish to pair with (leave blank if you are willing to be "paired on the day")	

Lunches: I wish to order _____ additional lunches £13 (and enclose payment)
If you would like a vegetarian meal please advise
I have read, understood and accept the Competition preconditions & rules (tick)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED FORM TO:
Phill Piddell. 1 Hope House Farm Cottage, Crouch Lane, Sandhurst, Cranbrook, KENT. TN18 5PD. Or email details to phill.piddell@bt.com

BIRD WATCH

Early indications from around the country, particularly from the East Coast, show large arrivals of small finches from Scandinavia and the Continent. Mainly seed eaters, Siskins and Redpolls are usually found on Conifer trees or Birch and later, from February when the cones open and the seeds become exposed, on Alder. This year however they have been widely reported in many gardens of Sussex during the first week of October feeding on sunflower hearts, Niger seed and peanuts. They are well worth finding and delightful little birds. They are very gregarious, found in small groups or large flocks seeking food and protecting each other from predators with many eyes on the lookout.



Siskins are small green streaked birds, the males showing yellow with a black crown and bib. Some do breed in Britain in conifer woods but numbers are greatly increased here in winter after a successful breeding season abroad. Redpolls are similar in size but streaked brown with mature birds showing yellow bills and the males have a black bib and varying amounts of pink on the breast and red on the crown. Each is considerably smaller than the Goldfinch and as agile as Blue Tits as they hang upside down in the trees or on the feeders. Very few were seen last winter with hardly any reports of them here in Sussex. This fluctuation in the population according to the necessity of finding food, causing mass migration is known as an “irruption”. This occurs in several species with specialist food requirements after a good breeding season so that they have devoured the food in their normal range earlier so need to forage farther west in autumn.

Two of the smallest birds on the British list are also to be found in larger numbers this autumn. Goldcrests are really tiny and may be found in gardens, woods and hedgerows but do like Conifers. Often they can be approached down to a yard when so busy finding spiders and small insects that they take no notice of a person. The crest on these is lemon coloured on females whereas males according to their maturity have on orange centre. This can be obscured in young males so trying to define the sex of them in the field is tricky. Many have arrived this autumn to augment the British population.



Firecrests are similar, only a shade bigger and far more numerous now than in the recent past. They were scarce migrants then that were eagerly sought by birders but now have been found breeding in most British counties so more commonplace but still a delight to see. They have similar crests but a distinctive dark line through the eye with white above and a bronze patch on their shoulder. I would be very pleased to hear of any sightings of any of these birds, particularly if a new

species for any observer. The Brambling is another erratic winter visitor to Britain being most numerous in years when Beech masts are plentiful. Several have been seen locally and my son and I while ringing in his garden captured one with a Belgian ring.



NATURE NOTES



I was pleased to hear from the Environmental Students that their research in Brock's Wood has shown a good population of Dormice. Tube shaped shelters had been attached to branches and had remained undisturbed throughout the summer. Being such a sensitive species, Dormice can only be closely studied under license that the Tutors hold. Three had nest material in them and may well have contained sleeping mice. One however came out and sat on a branch, giving all a memorable view of this delightful little animal. There must have always been a population of them as I can remember seeing them in many of the woods over the years but, like so many creatures that are secretive, can be overlooked if no effort is made to find them.

Yesterday afternoon I watched a couple of drives of the Shoot that is part of the Game-keeping Course at the College. Experienced Guns and people with dogs for picking up the game attend while the senior students organise the drives and beaters. It is the incidental wildlife that are not quarry species that are so interesting flying out ahead of the line. Plenty of Redwings, very wild Blackbirds, probably migrants, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a dozen Skylarks did so. About sixty Pheasants and five Red-legged Partridges were shot and in the strong wind many flew high and wide well away from harm. A ratio of about three and a half shots per bird was counted.

I know some dislike the idea of shooting but what meat is more free-range or organic than from something that has spent its whole life in the woods? These birds have about an equal chance of getting away throughout the whole season and surviving to breed, unlike a pen of pigs or a shed of chickens, all of which will go for slaughter.

As we start a new ornithological year we can look back on the highlights of the previous one and can be sure that some observation or record was something completely unexpected, memorable and exciting. I often think, living in such a varied part of the country, what opportunities there are for us to appreciate all that is around us and how lucky those of us who take such an interest are. Conversely, how much are others missing who have no interest in the world of Nature?

A new year brings resolutions, good intentions and goals to achieve, most of which we break before the end of January! One that is easily done is to make a list of all wildlife, birds, mammals and butterflies seen locally or even in your garden. Such records are not only interesting but can be valuable when compared with not too many years ago when certain species were either more numerous, like Starlings, or now more regularly seen, like Goldfinches.

We can make a difference in the survival of the birds that come to feeders. Some are really abundant and do well in the company of the same species. Robins and Nuthatches do not flock so though often present will be as singles or at most a pair if they have claimed the territory and will later breed close by. Intruders are quickly seen off. Blue and Great tits form unruly gangs feeding on all they can get. They must roam the district as I am recently catching many unringed birds in the garden and indeed several are adults so where have they been previously?

Certainly this freedom of movement with no respect for county or country boundaries makes bird study so fascinating. They can cover vast distances and turn up almost anywhere so, without wanting to turn any of you into "Twitchers", take advantage of a wonderful hobby and see what you can correctly identify in 2016.

Reg Lanaway

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**Items for next Newsletter to Ian by mid March
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