

SOUTH OF ENGLAND HEDGE LAYING SOCIETY

Reg Charity No 1046124

Promoting the craft of hedge laying,
training, competitions and countryside management
December 2017



SANDRINGHAM



The National Patron visits the SOE team

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The first 3 training days have been well attended. Thank you to all the members that have helped training the new hedge layers joining the Society. The Society was well represented at the Nationals, held this year at Stouhead Wilts. The tools sharpening trainees had a bonus this year, looking at hedges in the process of being laid & those previously laid at the college. I look forward to seeing you all in the new year & wish you all enjoyable Christmas & prosperous 2018.

Best wishes, Phil Hart.



Keeping your edge

To help prevent your pleaching tools going into the soil and hitting stones, lay 2 stakes or pieces of wood on the ground, if you miss the stem you are pleaching, they should land on the wood & not penetrate the soil. Thus preventing chips to your cherished sharp edge.

What are these chaps doing and why?



FROM DICK MORLEY

I have always had a soft spot for the Hurstpierpoint and District Ploughing Match because my Dad was winner of the Champions' Class for four consecutive years in the 1930s. His Ransome's plough now has an honourable position in our garden in Ditchling. The art-work of his certificates is magnificent but they reveal the dark side of contemporary agricultural employment which still touches me on the raw. The farmer, being a subscribing member of the society, entered his "man" and the first three of these certificates were "Awarded to Morley", albeit with no reference to the employer or the farm, in this case, North End, Ditchling but on the fourth, dated 1937, my Dad was granted the dignity of an initial, depicting his Christian name, Jack. This evidence of a change in socio-economic values still excites me and I rejoice in the advance. My anger was against the former concept of servitude and not – definitely not – against my Dad's employer, Jack Holman; he was a just man and his wife had asked my parents to let her be my god-mother. She always gave me sensible, exciting books, at Christmastime and I cherish being sent up to the dairy for extra milk, skim milk, beyond our daily allotment of what is now called "Gold Top" when she had been making choice butter from the prize Guernseys whose milk went by train to 'Peck Freans' biscuit factory in London.

For quite a different reason, I find the choice of this season's Hurst Ploughing Match fascinating as I have among my collection a copy of a public notice published in Ditchling as early as the

1780s. It took the form of a public warning from the major landowners and directed towards the poor whose way of life had become increasingly threatened as a result the rapid growth of the enclosure by the rich of what had, for many centuries, been regarded as common land. This was the dreaded

"Society for Prosecuting Thieves" which met at The Bull about half a century before many of the same families formed the Ditchling Floricultural and Horticultural Society in 1822. One landowner who subscribed to the Society for Prosecuting Thieves was William Tanner of More House Farm.

The public notice should be read today in two contexts: (i) that a farmworker's income was around one shilling a day; (ii) that at the time of the ill-conceived "Poll Tax" Margaret Thatcher's government made similar attempts to bribe poor people to "grass" on any neighbour suspected of disobeying the law. Imagine that you are a farmworker one hundred and fifty years ago. Your ten children are denied sufficient protein in their diets and you are obliged to poach whatever meat that you can, despite the fact that your employer owns everything. The notice leaves you in no doubt as to the risks:

"Whereas the profecuting Thieves, being attended with fo great expence, that they are often fuffered to go unpunished, by which they are encouraged to purfue their villnous Practices: A SOCIETY has been therefore eftablifhed to raife a Fund fufficient to profecute any Offenders who fhall be found guilty of robbing or defrauding any of the Members thereof,

of their Property: and that fuch Offenders shall be discovered and brought to Juftice, We, the Members of this Society, whofe names are underwritten, do hereby give Notice that we will pay the REWARDS hereafter-mentioned, to any Perfon or Perfons who fall give Ibformation of any Accomplice, or other Perfon, robbing or defrauding an of the faid Members of their Property. To be paid on Conviction of the Offender or Offenders, as the Meeting of this Society next after fuch Offender or Offenders fhall have been convicted thereof (that is to fay):

A REWARD OF TEN SHILLINGS on the Conviction of any perfon flealing Firewood, Coal, Garden Stuff, Turnips, Rape, Fruit or other Property of that kind from any Member of this Society.

A REWARD OF TWO GUINEAS on the Conviction of any Perfon flealing Fifh,

Fowls, Corn, Hay, Wood, Timber, Hop-Poles, Iron, Lead, or fuch like Property.

A REWARD OF TEN POUNDS on the conviction of any Perfon wilfully murdering any Member of the Society; or breaking into and robbing any Houfe or Buildings belonging to any Member; or committing any Robbery, or ftopping and greatly abufing any Member on the highway; or flealing and Cattle; or maliciously fetting fire to any Houfe or Building, Stacks of Corn, or Hay, or fuch like Property belonging to any Member of this Society.”

LEWES: Printed by W. and A, LEE

This public notice was underwritten with no fewer than a staggering fifty-five names of the local gentry.

Dick Morley



CAPTION COMPETITION

**suggested by
Phill P.
who was rather
puzzled by the
floating
chainsaw**

We've introduced QR codes next to links. Those with smartphones can download a QR code app, point the phone at the code and hopefully the link will work.

What are these guys doing and why? Answer:

“Tis the Ceremony of the Horngarth or Planting of the Penny Hedge.

Bob Lewis wrote to me to remind me of this: an event I was vaguely aware of when I lived in Yorkshire, long before I took up hedge laying. Whitby folk have to lay the hedge on the beach on Ascension Day and it has to survive for three tides.

The legend is that in 1159 there occurred the murder of a hermit by three local Knights. The hermit forgave them before he died but the local Abbot demanded that, as a penance, the hedge should be built annually. The legend is probably nonsense but the true origin of the ceremony has been lost.

<https://whitbymuseum.org.uk/whitby-history/penny-hedge/>



Letter from Phil Taylor

To let you know of a member who has never laid a hedge nor attended a training day in the twenty or so years that he has been a member, namely myself. I have had a fascination with hedge laying as far back as I can remember, maybe as early as 11 or 12, when we used to cut our way into the farmers' hedges whilst poaching his rabbits with ferrets and standing the cut sections of hedge back in after we had finished hoping the farmer wouldn't notice. On being offered an under-keepers job on the estate that I had been beating on for 12 or 13 years I jumped at the chance. Within a few years I was beating on another local estate to help a fellow keeper when I met Bob Hunt for the first time who was doing some of cutting there (do you remember the 'Tartan Terror' Bob?).

Time marched on & I thought I ought to pop along to one of the AGMs at Plumpton College; lo & behold who should I bump into but Dick Morley my old Headmaster (evening Sir! -I still have memories of the cane cupboard, not fond ones I might add!). Also there I spoke to Dave Truan for the first time whom I've met many times since at Royal Sussex Regiment dinners (Seen Kempie recently Dave?). Getting to the crux of the matter, my main passion is working my dogs, so, what with Keepering the Shoot & beating on other estates as time allows, you can probably understand that the training days always clash with Shoot days which is most disappointing for me. I live in hope that I might get there someday as I'm in my sixties now & it would be a great experience to learn hedge laying properly. I read about it, I watch it on YouTube & suchlike but it's not the real thing. In my job keepering I do get to do a fair bit of coppice work, providing necessary light in through the canopy to the floor below and creating new cover for pheasants & wildlife in general. This year I have started tackling what was the outside hedges to some of the woods, hopefully these will grow back and be maintained as such. Who knows I could yet be the oldest beginner in the society if I manage to make the training days one year . Happy Hedge Laying.

Training in Hedge Laying and Diary

9th Dec.	Hedge Laying 3, Magham Down, Sussex
30 th Dec	Coppicing Turners Hill
6 th Jan 2018	Hedge Laying Improvers Day 4, Magham Down, Sussex
20 th Jan	Coppicing Turners Hill
27 th Jan	President's verses Chairman
18 th Feb SUNDAY	ANNUAL COMPETITION
17 th March	Fun Day Wittersham, Tenterden, Kent.

Dates and locations may be subject to change.

Fees

Hedge Laying: the course (days 1 to 4) £150.

1 taster day £60

Tool Sharpening: £10

Coppicing days: FREE to Members

If you are unable to attend a training event please let us know. No shows and late cancellations are a headache for the organisers. If you are unable to attend an event the following fees apply:

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 - £3

Experienced current members

A section of hedge will be allocated for experienced current members wishing to lay hedge, if you wish to please let Phill Piddell know which event(s).

Maps

For each event a reminder email is sent about 1 week before, and Maps are emailed a few days later

To Join

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 (p13) to Phill Piddell.

34th Annual Hedge Laying Competition

The Society is pleased to announce that the annual competition will be held at Angmering Park Estate, Lee Farm BN13 3XJ on Sunday Feb 18th 2017.
The Hedge is about 2- 3 miles from the A280, and I am told is pretty straight forward.

As always competitors and officials get a meal, and this year we are at the Black Horse a short drive from the site.

If you wish to attend please complete the entry form and return it to me (email preferred, just give me your name and class, and any additional meal details). You must be a paid up member of the society by the 31st Jan 2018 to be eligible to enter this event.

Entries will close on the 3rd Feb, and no entries will be accepted after this date. Phill P
Classes and prizes

Class	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	
Champion	The Society Cup +	£50	£25	£15
Senior	Westward Plaque +	£50	£25	£15
Novice	Westward Plaque +	£50	£25	£15
Novice Pairs	Society Plate +	£50	£25	£15
Veteran	The Society Trophy +	£50	£25	£15
Best 1 st Year re-growth	The Whittington Shield +	£25	£15	£10
Best Veteran re-growth	The Fred Mouland Memorial Trophy			£25
Best bindings (Novices only)	Presidents Prize - kindly donated by the Society President			£20
Most improved Novice	The Bill Truran Memorial Trophy			£25
Best work on a poor length	The Joan Streete Memorial Shield			£25
Best stake & binding	The Jim Vantassel Tankard			£25
Best work with hand tools - Novice				£50
Best work with hand tools - Novice Pairs				£50
Best work with hand tools - Veteran				£50
Best work with hand tools - Senior				£50
Best work with hand tools - Champion				£50

Classes

Class	Eligibility
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")

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 **13th 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 £15 per meal, and must be paid in advance. Please include payment with your entry.

CONDITIONS

All competitors must be fully paid up members of the Society on 31st Jan 2018. 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

Vehicles may only be parked as directed.

COMPETITION ENTRY FORM 2018

Name		
Address		
Telephone		email

PLEASE INDICATE THE CLASS YOU WISH TO ENTER (**tick 1 box**)

Class	Tick
1 Veteran A	
2 Veteran B	
3 Senior	
4 Champion	
5 Novice	
6 Novice Pair	

Lunches: I wish to order ____ additional lunches £15.00 (enclose payment)

If you would like a vegetarian meal please advise.

I have read, understood and accept the competition conditions & rules

Signed: _____

Date:_____

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED FORM TO:

**Phill Piddell. 1 Hope House Farm Cottage, Crouch Lane, Sandhurst, Cranbrook, KENT.
TN18 5PD. Or ideally email details to phill.piddell@bt.com**

South of England Hedge-Laying Society

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (or renewal)

April 2017 to March 2018



PRESIDENT:

Peter Tunks
The Coach House, Waltersville Way
Horley, RH6 9EP
Tel: 01293 784826 / 07836 75757

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: _____ Email: _____

Tel: _____ Mobile: _____

Emergency Contact (Name and Number) _____

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 on online – www.sehls.co.uk

The Team at Bentley Wood Fair



NHLS Award Scheme 2017/2018

This scheme replaces the scheme run in the 2016/17 Season.

To encourage younger people to take up the skills of Hedge Laying we are pleased to announce the NHLS Award scheme for the 2017/2018 Hedge Laying Season.

This year we are offering awards of £25 to anyone under the age of 30 taking part in a hedge laying competition or training course.

If you are interested and qualify please contact Phil, Phill or Chris.

Coppicing Days



Event reports

All event reports are from Phill Piddell except Cissbury

Laughton Competition

We kicked off the season on a hot and sunny day at the Laughton and District ploughing match (hedge laying section).

The guys found an interesting "big" hedge, which was big in a new way - super wide, and backing onto another hedge, which was to be left in place.

Time allowed was 5hrs, and we only had 8yards to lay (Des would say an easy day)

Everyone spent ages hacking into the hedge just to make a start, but once in most stems were actually quite small (there were a few monsters), sadly they all seemed to be aiming in the wrong direction, which meant a tricky set of pleachers.

Because the "hedge" was so wide we were pulling in stems from quite a way off the hedge line, and were struggling to find enough material to fill the hedges.

Fortified with tea and Shauna's home made cake the day progressed with the usual moans and groans from the competitors (although weirdly I actually quite enjoyed it)

Everyone finished on time and most sections looked really good, so the pressure was on Peter Tunks our Judge for the day.

One section ended up in an amusing banana shape, which did not impress the judges or stewards, I don't think he will do it again though.

Congratulations to the winners

3rd Paul Matthews

2nd Tony Gallow

1st Gary Moore

All the scores on the right, click on image for a bigger version

Pictures as always

<https://www.flickr.com/gp/23011838@N00/0gDh00>

Phill Piddell



Event reports

Nationals

At early o'clock we started to arrive at Stourhead for the 2017 National hedge laying competition.

A bright and dry day with no prospect of rain greeted the competitors, stewards Judges and helpers.

The hedge was around the perimeter of a massive field, with all the regional styles set out in groups. The South of England hedge was as far from the main arena as possible, so quite a long walk.

Our section of hedge was deceptive it looked reasonably easy, but was full of blackberry which is a nightmare as it tangles everything up. The hedge had also been laid before, but quite high, which added to the problems.

So at 09:00 we kicked off, and the idea of an easy day went out the window pretty quickly, everyone struggled to get the hedge down in time, and indeed by the 2pm deadline had not managed.

After finishing there was time to look at all the other sections in the South of England style and try to guess who had won the prizes, then off to the marquee and some well deserved food, and the option for Hedge Slayer beer, perfect.

Having eaten there was still enough time for a wander about before prize giving, Phil Hart was still busy with the have a go section, and a few competitors were still trying to complete their sections.

The diversity of hedge styles is amazing, its well worth a visit to the Nationals if you have the time as you can see the entire country in a single field.

There were some people demonstrating rural crafts, and selling tools, it was tempting to buy another billhook, but somehow I resisted the urge.

By the end of the day we had some very good sections, some functional, and some pretty ropery

Event reports

Great work by Judges, and Stewards and thanks for keeping everyone advised on time.

Results were as follows

South of England Open

4th Clive Gilligan

3rd Nigel Adams

2nd Bill Daniel

1st Mike Bentley

South of England Intermediate

4th Geoff Pitt

3rd Dave Droscher

2nd Mike Mason

1st David Dunk

In other news from the Society the following members picked up prizes in other styles

Midland Intermediate, and best intermediate

1st Paul Matthews

Dorset Open

2nd Russell Woodham

Derby Open

2nd Garry Moore



Pictures are on flic.kr/s/aHskvVZkja

Photographs by Steve Mockford, Matthew Beard,

Louise Homewood and

Phill Piddell

Event reports

Sissinghurst Castle Garden

With a weather forecast promising rain, heavy rain, and rain, and being in deepest Kent we were expecting a low turnout, but wow almost a full complement!

Sure enough at early o'clock we started to arrive, in the rain (Chris was happy), and were allocated cants around the wonderful castle garden. The hedge was quite young, so nothing massive, a hand tool day.

Some sections had little actual hedge, but lots of rose, which amused a number of hedge layers.

we gave the trainees the better sections, and different a trainer (from their last session).

The hedge was going down well, and the rain stopped. A few people managed to get some root-laying on which makes a nice change. Anyway by lunch time most sections were down with a few of the novice cutters left with a few stems.

Lunch was in the Sissinghurst Cafe, a very good veggie curry.

Fortified with food everyone drifted back to the hedge to finish their sections.

Because we were well ahead of schedule we decided to do a continuous bind, which looks so much nicer, all be a bit of a faff especially if you are at the end of a section which I was.

By the end of the day we had transformed the hedge, and the garden has taken on a different look. it will look amazing in the spring when it starts to grow again, I'm looking forward to seeing all the rose sections :-)

Pictures

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm7DgYJn>



Sandringham (see front page)

HRH The Prince of Wales (Prince Charles) is a hedgelayer, keen to promote rural skills and encourage young people to get involved, so a number of regional hedge laying groups from around the country were invited by the National Hedgelaying society to Sandringham estate.

Each society brought some trainers and trainees along to take part in a Novice event sponsored by HRH. As most of us had a long trip ahead of us we stayed the night at the Premier Inn at Kings Lynn, which was a great chance to catch up with old friends and talk about the recent National competition.

Sunday morning we gathered at Harpley Dams Farm for a rainy start to the day. The Cants had been measured earlier, but needed making out with the styles and names of each competitor.

In the South of England section the trainers were allocated one or two trainees to mentor and so we set off. Fortunately we had brought our own tools including plenty of chainsaws, as the trainees had a selection of tools ranging from ok to pretty poor, and the hedge was something of a beast.

While we encouraged the trainees to do as much work as possible the stems to be pleached were pretty big (mostly thorn), so a lot of chainsaw assistance was required, however the build of the hedge was mostly in the hands of the trainees. Fortunately after an hour or so the rain stopped and it almost got sunny.

At lunch time HRH arrived to inspect the work, and spent time talking to everyone at the event, after which he had a team picture of all the trainees (see below), and was presented with a small gift from the society.

The hedges were then finished and each style was then judged to confirm 1st, 2nd and 3rd places. While the scores were calculated we had a nice post event lunch and had a chance to see all the finished hedges.

Great day out, which I think everyone enjoyed, lets hope as many novices as possible get the hedge laying bug and continue.

Thanks to HRH, NHLS, SEHLS and all the Trainers for their time

3rd Natasha Stonestreet

2nd Jonny Adams

1st Joe Mouland



Pictures

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsma5bDYy>



Event reports

Findon is known for the sheep fair, Cissbury Ring, cricket and horseracing. From our vantage point next to Cissbury Ring we had a good view of all. A splendid location was matched by the weather: frosty to start but, later, dry sunny and windless. The weather gods were with us, as the following day was wet and windy.

Around 30 turned up including trainees, trainers, novices, intermediates and a supreme champion. A man from Surrey Wildlife Trust also came along.

The hedge was almost all single row hawthorn about 10 years old from 6-8 feet high and the stems not too challenging, although the post and rail at the back meant we had to work from one side only. In order to lay uphill, 20% of the hedge was laid left to right. This meant that southpaws David Dunk and Mike Mason were joined by the more orthodox Tim Hughes and a trainee who had to cut cack handed.

The chainsaw addicts did manage to disturb the peace on a few occasions, although, in the main, the air was filled with the sounds of manual labour and axework.

The hedge owners put on a lunch of soup, rolls and mince pies which was enjoyed by all. After lunch most of the hedge was got down, followed by staking and binding produced from the coppicing at Turners Hill and brought to site by Tim Hughes (thanks to Tim). My stakes and binders were fine, so no excuses.

By mid afternoon most were finished and a very presentable hedge was produced, despite there being some early misinformation about the binder height (to the top of the fence, not 4 feet, as instructed).

Phil and Peter kept the landowners sweet and they seemed very pleased with the outcome. Hopefully we can return some time to complete the other hedges at the field perimeter.

Thanks to Frank for setting up the venue and setting out at the start of the day and to the trainers who give their time freely to assist the trainees. The trainees appeared satisfied with their work and committed to the Improver's Day on 6 January 2018.

So from SELHS have a great Christmas, a happy New Year and spare a thought for Bob Hunt our transport manager, who has been recently taken unwell.

Matthew Beard Pictures <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmbqfV2e>



Bird Watch August 2017

Barn Owl Chicks



Under my Schedule 1 license we checked five Barn Owl nest boxes in the locality recently. The one in the territory where a dead one had been found contained one well grown and well feathered young but also the dried out corpse of a smaller one. Perhaps a single adult had persisted on its own and managed to rear just the one. The box near the footpath to East Chiltington at the southern part of Plumpton Lane where both adults were present had three chicks, all

healthy and of varying size so typical of the species when eggs are laid at intervals and incubated immediately so that each hatches days apart. From the box on an Oak behind Brock's Wood both adults flew out and we found that there were three eggs, so much later than the others but likely to succeed as Barn Owl chicks have been found in nests every month of the year. Both of the other two boxes were occupied by Stock Doves, one just hatching and the other with two

chicks just starting to feather. These are the ugliest of all young birds that only a mother could love!

Stock Doves must be one of the least recognised bird species locally and often dismissed as “just another pigeon”. They are birds of farm and parkland where large trees occur in open spaces. The nest site is usually a hole in a tree so nest boxes fulfil this need. I remember one that laid eggs in a Kestrel box ahead of the usual occupants who usurped the doves, laid their own eggs and incubated them all. After hatching there was no sign of the dove chicks which had probably contributed to the success of the brood of Kestrels. Stock Doves can be identified being a shade smaller than the familiar Wood Pigeon and having no white in the plumage. They are often flighty and difficult to approach with two black wing bars and a sheen of purple and green on the neck region. I wonder if their name reflects their association with livestock that in years gone by were out-wintered and fed fodder so giving them a reliable food source. They are a separate species from the familiar pigeons used for racing or living in most towns and cities. These are descended from the Rock Dove and are so inter-bred that the only few pure-bred ones occur in remote coastal areas.

The House Martin colony at the College contains the second

largest number of nests in recent years. We recorded fifty-eight that either showed young at the entrance or adults flying in and four other nests to check later. One of these has since been proved occupied. In addition to this, House Sparrows are using ten of them so in this part of the country this declining species is doing more than well. I must check Hillside Box at the college farm where to my delight a pair of Swallows have been flying in and out regularly. If so these will be the first to breed here for two years.

Sept 2017

We are now at the time of year when the maximum movement of birds returning south occurs. Generally much of this migration, particularly of Warblers and Flycatchers, happens during the night during times when the weather is settled with high pressure conditions. This was first confirmed with the advent of Radar when the images of huge numbers of migrating birds crossing the North Sea appeared as a misty cloud on the screen and of course with equipment like that their altitude could be calculated. During my National Service in the RAF I worked as a radar operator but cannot claim I ever definitely experienced this

Other species such as Swallows and Sand Martins move during the daylight hours and their numbers are counted and logged by

the coastal observatories. The arrival of the first Swallows in spring is always exciting to see and when I have been at Portland Bill Observatory early in the year, they first appear during the morning. The distance across the Channel at this point is nearly one hundred miles so at the speed they fly even those leaving at first light will not reach this side for about three hours.

Updating on the local Swallows I can report has been encouraging. The brood of four in Hillside box at the college farm, as I write this, are almost ready to fly and are continually fed by both parents. So for the first time for two years successful breeding of this species has occurred. I have ringed more nestling Swallows than last year already and have at least three more nests to check including a second brood in an artificial nest in a small stable in Plumpton Green.

The large colony of House Martins on the main college buildings have fledged the first broods that have dispersed leaving the local food supply for the second broods their parents are raising. All is quiet at the moment as these second broods are

either at the egg stage or with tiny young, not yet requiring the to-ing and fro-ing of the feeding parent birds. With each of these species that I know have reared an average of eight in two broods so that in the spring when two arrived, now ten return to Africa so eighty percent of them will perish in one way or another before they come back to sustain a level population. A small deviation from this percentage will give a noticeable increase or decrease in the numbers we will see next year.

Look out for unusual birds as they move south even quite small gardens can support them as they need to feed on insects and fruit. Many Warblers rely on Blackberries to get in condition to migrate. The juice of these berries is rich in sugars that convert into body fat, the fuel that they need for a long journey. A wonderful time of year is here but with birds all times of year are wonderful and there is always something exciting to see. It amazes me that not more people take up the interest. There is no need to become an expert, just observant. They don't know what they are missing!!

Reg Lanaway

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Items for next Newsletter to Ian by mid March please

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