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for people
for ever

North Ayrshire Local Group

Newsletter

Edition 105
Autumn 2005

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www.narspb.org.uk

Top: Shieldhall at Fairlie
Below: Herring Gull
Photos: Stuart McMahon



Steaming for Seabirds

All things considered, I think it is fair to say that our 'Steaming for Seabirds' Cruise on the Shieldhall on Saturday 16th July was a great success, and has raised a wonderful £960. It was not without it's fair share of hiccups though!

Some three months after booking the cruise and after the advertising was sent out we were informed that it was not going to be possible to call at Tarbert due to insufficient water. Because of the draught of the Shieldhall, no other suitable piers were within range of our cruising time. As such we had no option but to cancel the Tarbert leg of the journey.

However, virtually everyone continued to support the amended cruise and on the morning of Saturday 16th July, the sun was shining and things were looking promising. However, the strong breeze caused problems for the Shieldhall to get off the berth at Greenock, and as a result delayed us by about 30 minutes. On leaving Greenock we were

immediately passed by the MV Cruiser, our charter vessel from last year. Before long we saw our first Manx Shearwaters near the Cloch Lighthouse.

Arriving 40 minutes late at Fairlie we soon boarded the balance of our passengers for the amended cruise. However, small yachts anchored south of Fairlie Pier meant that the Shieldhall lost more time in departing. By now the weather was starting to getting noticeably greyer and the wind strengthening.

Captain Stirling agreed to sail over to Lochranza before turning for home. However the headwind had reduced our speed to only 7 knots. One highlight near Arran was watching the Royal Naval exercise with HMS

Monmouth and a RN Merlin helicopter dropping a sonar listening device into the water. Biggest surprise though was when a submarine's periscope appeared some 30 feet beside the Shieldhall!

After turning a bit sooner than expected we headed over to the west coast of Bute and Dunagoil Bay before sailing round the south of the Little Cumbrae in a heavy drizzle and arriving back at Fairlie slightly early at just after 6pm. Berthing yet again took an eternity, but it wasn't long before we were heading back to Greenock, where we disembarked at 9pm as originally planned.

A selection of photos from the cruise are printed on p7.

continued on page 2 . . .

Spring passed so quickly, summer sun has been lacking, and even the birds in Ayrshire have been keeping a low profile, with a few exceptions. Terns breeding at Ballantrae have had an excellent year with at least 8 pairs of Little Terns successfully raising young, along with good numbers of Arctic Terns. On Ailsa Craig, the Puffin numbers have been increasing, with over 100 birds recorded by Angus Hogg during a recent visit. House Martins seem to have done well, ably helped the Montgomerie self catering accommodation in Saltcoats, but was it just me, or were there very few Swifts about? Hopefully some autumn gales will spice things up a bit!

The Shieldhall cruise was a reasonable success. Likewise for the Calmac sailings. New memberships have been lower this year, but the badges are as popular as ever and sightings of porpoises have been at an all time high.

This newsletter is a wee bit smaller than our recent editions, mainly in part to a lack of articles. Whilst the next newsletter isn't published until early March, I'll happily accept articles at any time. Handwritten or typed copy (preferred!), Word documents, scribbles on a beer mat are all acceptable, as are photos (digital, prints or slides), jokes, web site links or reviews – anything that you think other readers would enjoy.

Wendy Tedd, our Membership Secretary, has introduced a small membership card this year with a receipt attached, which a local representative will give to you when he/she delivers your syllabus and newsletter and collects your subscription. This should simplify Wendy's records. Some outlying districts and members will still receive their newsletters by post, but if you are one of the latter can we urge you to send your subscription as promptly as possible to Wendy, and certainly no later than 31st October 2005.

Remember to keep visiting our website www.narspb.org.uk for news about the Group and also to visit groups.yahoo.com/groups/arranwildlife for news and information from Arran.

Stuart McMahon, Editor and Vice Chairman
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Shieldhall Cruise continued from front page . . .

The Shieldhall was a wonderful ship, and the ability to visit the Bridge and Engine Rooms was certainly a welcome addition to the cruise.

Birds were noticeably absent throughout the day although good views of Common and Black Guillemots were seen along with numerous Gannets. A dolphin and several porpoise were also spotted.

I would like to thank various folk for helping to make the day the success it was. Firstly to the rest of the committee who supported me behind the scenes in organising the day, particularly Susan our treasurer who managed to make sense of who paid what, and who was owed money! To Jim for the excellent publicity we received in the press. To Vall and John for organising the passengers at Fairlie.

To the volunteers and crew of the Shieldhall - they were all so friendly and helpful. To the caterers on the day, the food was excellent and very reasonably priced. To Tony for his photography and to Alastair Goodman, my main contact with the Solent Steam Packet, for helping to liaise with the folks from Southampton. And to anyone that I've forgotten to mention!

Tony Barr has now compiled a DVD of the day, collating photos of the cruise from various folk on board, but also, uniquely, from some folk on dry land who took pictures of the Shieldhall along her route from various angles! The DVD lasts about 20 minutes and will cost £15. Orders can be placed at the opening meeting on September 16th or by contacting Tony directly on 01294 603372.

Stuart McMahon



Forthcoming Meetings and Trips

Black = Indoor meeting
(Ardrossan Civic Centre at 7.30pm)
Blue = Outdoor Trip

Friday 16th September
Hen Harriers and Art: Duncan Watt,
followed by RSPB Film "Skydancer".

Saturday 17th September
Muirshiel Country Park, Lochwinnoch.
Meet at Muirshiel Car Park at
10.30am.

Friday 7th October
An update on the Return of Sea Eagles
- Roger Broad, RSPB.

Fri 21st - Sun 23rd October
Weekend Trip to Morecambe Bay and
Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve. Limited
spaces available.

Friday 11th November
The work of a Clyde Muirshiel Ranger.

Sunday 20th November
Ardeer and Stevenston Point.
Meet at Stevenston Point at 11am.

Friday 9th December
Christmas Buffet and Members'
Pictures / Videos Night.

Monday 2nd January 2005
New Year Knees Up - Birdwatch at
Saltcoats Harbour at 11.30am.

Friday 6th January
Paisley International Colour Slide
Exhibition. Tickets £1.

Saturday 21st January
Winter Seabirds on Loch Ryan.
Minibus available.

Friday 10th February
Habitat Management and
Conservation at Kelburn -
Peter Downes.

Sunday 26th February
Martnaham Loch, Blairbowie and
Doonfoot. Minibus available.

Chairman's Report



Looking back, the weather was perfect for the Wood of Cree – please note that the first week in May really is the best time for this unique RSPB reserve when the canopy is still very open; the Oak-greens at their freshest; the Pied Flycatchers; Redstarts and Wood Warblers so visibly active! Those Garden Warblers and Blackcaps are much trickier to see but highly vocal.

For me the cascades and whirl-pools of the two streams dancing down their glens over and between gorgeous rock formations to join the River Cree far below make this one of the most enchanting landscapes in Scotland.....ah, but beware that two weeks later on, the tiniest, almost invisible, yet most vicious midges infest the air!

On the road from Newton Stewart to New Galloway the landmark of Murray's Monument always suggests to me a brief stop just in case...well the wild Goats are usually there and Ravens too but this time the stop proved its worth with the most obliging Cuckoo that performed brilliantly showing all of its field characteristics accompanied by its onomatopoeic song echoing around the valley! This is the time to hunt the Gowk – never be so foolish as the April fools!

Marco McGinnty has learned a thing or two during his work with the RSPB – his suggestion of travelling the length of the Raiders Road brought us to another magical place at Otter Pond where a very confiding Common Sandpiper so beautifully lit up and reflected in the smooth flowing waters of glacially scraped granite, such a contrast to those rushing montagne burns in penumbral woodland.

After some fish suppers we returned to Raiders Road in the dark to go-a-hunting for Nightjars. Sadly the sky was too clear so the night became cold and although we heard the spookie sound of Snipe 'thrubbing' the air and 'roding' Woodcock croaking, the mysterious 'churring' of the Nightjar was denied us on this occasion despite trying every luring trick we knew!

A big thankyou to Val who had tracked them down to the location in the previous week. It has to be a warm and buggie night to get this species... perhaps they were all awa' sucking Goat's milk? Liz and I returned a fortnight later, but again it turned cold that night – that's birding.

Thanks to Stuart McMahon the SS.Shieldhall cruise was a financial success, more of that in his own report of course but the great question is what will he come up with for next year? (*ED - I've checked but the QE2 is a bit big to get in to Tarbert . . .*) I feel that the exploitation of our maritime association is a hall-mark of our Group and now having the only two remaining Boat-Buskers on the Clyde as our friends we have a tradition to maintain!

The Clyde Muirshiel Hen Harrier Project's 3rd season ended with the flight of one young male, I have invited Lucy Moor the Project Officer to bring the recorded highlights of this season to our first meeting. My little talk will feature the drawings and paintings of the stunning female "Cleopatra" and a showing of the RSPB film "Skydancer" will round off a night dedicated to the Heather Gled.

Over 7,000 people visited the project this summer and we could clearly do with more RSPB volunteers to talk to visitors at this beautiful country park, facilities are excellent and the Clyde Muirshiel Staff are very friendly and enthusiastic so please consider giving some hours of your time next season!

Looking forward to the October field trip to the RSPB reserve at Leighton Moss and the spectacle of thousands of Knot which will fill the sky in aerial display when the tide comes in at Morecambe Bay towards sunset / sunrise / high noon.

A final request on the writing campaign to lobby maintainance of the current Raptor Protection Legislation.....The DOO-MEN are at it AGAIN!

Duncan Watt
Group Leader

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Unfinished Business . . .

At the opening meeting on 16th September there will be a little bit of official business which was agreed to be held over from our AGM, and that is to decide on a project to donate our money towards this year. At the time the newsletter went to press the committee hadn't yet held their meeting to shortlist some projects but it is likely that one project being put forward will be for new signage on Ailsa Craig. Our treasurer has also indicated that we should be able to donate at least £1500. Final details will be given at the meeting. If you have an idea for a donation, or if you think the Group would benefit from the purchase of any particular item(s) then please let any of the committee know and it will be considered.





Secondhand Book Sale at Lochwinnoch Reserve

This year's eagerly awaited Lochwinnoch Reserve second-hand natural history book sale will be from 17th to 25th September 2005

If you have some books you would like to get off your shelves or you would like to acquire some more (including bargains, rare books, etc) then this event is for you!

Anything natural history (books / magazines / journals / pamphlets / videos / DVDs / CD ROMs / even maps, etc) qualify for the sale. You can donate books to be sold on the RSPB's behalf, or we can also sell books on your behalf keeping a mere 10% ourselves to cover our administration costs.

For rare / scarce books, we intend selling by auction (mainly to stop commercial booksellers coming in and buying them straight off). If you send us any rare / scarce books, we will need a reserve price. If you are interested in a list of the rare/scarce items, please ask us to send you one. **NO BOOKS WILL BE SOLD** before the first day of the sale.

Books need to be with us ASAP and no later than end of August. For further details, please contact Joan Shaw at joan.shaw@rspb.org.uk or phone the reserve on 01505 842663.

Weekend Trip to Morecambe Bay and Leighton Moss

The Group is running a late autumn weekend trip down to Morecambe Bay and the Leighton Moss RSPB reserve, pictured opposite, from Friday 21st October to Sunday 23rd October.

The accommodation will be at the Eidsforth Hotel on Morecambe's seafront and will include an evening meal on the Saturday night, along with an illustrated talk on Leighton Moss by former group member and Lochwinnoch warden, David Mower, who now works at the reserve.

Other highlights will include seeing the huge flocks of waders at roost on Morecambe Bay around Hest Bank, and of course the visit to Leighton Moss. The reserve is good at any time of the year but in the autumn it has a huge potential for drawing in the odd rarity or two, not to mention the frequent sightings of Bitterns, Bearded Tits and Marsh Harriers.

Very few spaces are now left this trip - please contact Susan Montgomerie on 01294 466334 to reserve your place. Deposits, for those who have not already paid them, are due at the opening meeting.

Wildlife Art Exhibition: "Art on the Wing 2005"

16th October – 12th November 2005
in the Maclaurin Art Galleries in Rozelle Park, Ayr

The Central Ayrshire RSPB Local Group is organising a wildlife art exhibition as detailed above. This is part of the Ayr 800 activities, as the town celebrates 800 years since it became a Royal Burgh. King William I signed the Royal Charter in Lanark in May 1205.

The Art Exhibition will include work from professional wildlife artists from Scotland, England and Sri Lanka, including our own Duncan Watt and Susan Montgomerie, and will incorporate two dimensional work in oils, water colours and pencil, and three dimensional work, incorporating sculpture, ceramics, wood and basketwork, as well as jewellery.

All profits from the sale of artwork will be donated to RSPB Scotland's conservation programme. The Local Group acknowledge the help given by South Ayrshire Council and The Maclaurin Trust.

Below is a list of artists who are taking part in the exhibition: *Christopher Allan, Lise Bech, Reuben Paul Bethey, Keith Brockie, John Busby, Keith & Beryl Dawdry, Claire Harkess, Peter Howson, Alan Lees, Aidan Maccormick, Susan Montgomerie, William Neill, Lester Perera, Darren Rees, Pascale Rentsch, Derek Robertson, Chris Rose, Fiona Russell, Dafila Scott, Glen Scouller, Andrew Stevenson, Thelma Sykes, John Threlfall, Anna de Ville, Mike Warren, Donald Watson, Duncan Watt, Elizabeth Waugh, Jim Whitworth, Darren Woodhead, Winifred Wright.*



News from LIPU UK

(Working in Britain for Birds in Italy)



Italy's fight against illegal hunts

by Julian Pettifer

On the rugged, volcanic island of Ischia on the Bay of Naples, I visited a camp where volunteers from WWF Italy have been trying to stop the trapping and hunting of birds on their migratory journey from Africa to Northern Europe. Leading the team was an enthusiastic amateur ornithologist from Milan, Daniele Colombo. Daniele and his friends gave up their holidays to perform a depressing and often fruitless task.

I joined them at their headquarters one morning as they surveyed the evidence of their night's work. From the early hours of the morning they had been patrolling the cliffs and hillsides, searching for traps and snares and hoping to intercept hunters armed with shotguns.

They had enjoyed some success. Laid out on a table were about 50 small spring-loaded traps. Daniele explained how the traps do their deadly work. He pointed out that each trap was baited with a maggot or a worm, still wriggling on its pin. Hungry and exhausted birds, desperate for food, take the bait and spring the trap which captures them around the neck, killing them instantly. At least half of the traps held pathetic little corpses. "Today all of them are whinchats," Daniele told me, "they are the most numerous victims. But we also find pied flycatchers,

nightingales, stonechats, redstarts, robins, thrushes and various warblers." I remarked that most of these are very small species, weighing only a few grammes, but I was assured that nothing is too small to be trapped and eaten. "Hunters with guns are after larger quarry," Daniele said. "Target number one is quail, but they will also shoot doves, oriole, hoopoe and even birds of prey."

Some of these species can legally be hunted at certain times of the year but not during the closed season. According to the European Union Birds Directive, the closed season must cover the breeding season, and for migratory birds, the spring migration to their breeding grounds. The use of traps, bird lime (glue), nets, live decoys and poison is forbidden.

Daniele summarised the activities of his team during the previous few days. As well as confiscating hundreds of traps, with police assistance they had seized three guns, two of which had had code numbers erased to avoid identification of the owners. He also showed me 10 electronic decoys they had found. Some of this equipment was very elaborate. One set-up, discovered in the middle of a steep cliff, had an antenna, a remote control and 200 metres of cable leading to the loudspeakers.

LIPU has more than 100 volunteers in different parts of Italy as illegal hunting is by no means confined to Ischia. In fact, it is even more organised in northern Italy where songbirds fetch a high price in

gourmet restaurants. In the Brescia valleys, LIPU has confiscated more than 50,000 traps set to capture robins and other small birds. In recent years, 600 mist nets have been removed, and 6,000 trapped birds have been freed.

One of the problems with law enforcement in Italy is that no fewer than five different police forces are supposed to regulate hunting and enforce the law. General Fernando Fuschetti of the Forestry Police showed me what he regarded as one of his recent successes.

He took me to a wetland near Naples where his men had raided and shut down a string of 10 hunting ponds. "These ponds," he told me, "have been run by an organised crime syndicate for poaching wildfowl during the closed season." The business had allegedly been turning over millions of Euros for the bad guys. They had constructed elaborate concrete "hides", furnished with all mod cons: armchairs, fridges and even a TV so that they could enjoy their "sport" in comfort.

While the General was very proud of what he regarded as a victory for law enforcement, another police officer I spoke to from a different force was highly critical of what he regarded as an assault on a revered local institution. Similar attitudes can be found elsewhere in southern Europe, in Malta, Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Portugal. It will take more than the Birds Directive to change them.

North Ayrshire Polo Shirts

We are proposing to order some customised leisurewear for members of the North Ayrshire Group. The logos are still being designed as the newsletter goes to print but will probably incorporate a tern or Black Guillemot similar to that shown opposite. Our understanding at the moment is that we need to pay a one-off fee to get the logos digitised by the manufacturers. After that we can have it reproduced on various items, probably polo shirts or sweatshirts, but maybe also fleeces and jackets.

Costs have also still to be finalised but should be around £14 for a polo shirt and £16 for a sweatshirt. In order to keep costs down a minimum order of 20 items need to be ordered. Further details and an order form will be available at our September and October meetings, with the items hopefully being ready for the November meeting, just in time for a Christmas present!



Outdoor Access Code

The Group now has a copy of the new Scottish Outdoor Access Code, produced by Scottish Natural Heritage. If you have any queries about the new access rights to the countryside then this booklet will have the answer. The three key principles of the code are to respect the interests of other people, care for the environment, and to take responsibility for your own actions.

www.outdooraccess-scotland.com



Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve News

Right: Meadowsweet in bloom at
Lochwinnoch. Photo: rspb-mages.com
Below: Aird Meadow
Photo: Stuart McMahon



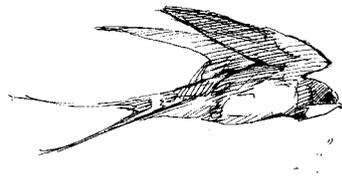
Marco McGinty, RSPB Lochwinnoch

It has been a very hectic period indeed with lots of work happening related to the new footpath to the village (see below). Towards the end of the school term, the reserve was very busy, catering for school groups almost daily. Volunteers have, as always, been excellent and we have taken on several new volunteers recently too.

Recent months have seen yet more staff changes at Lochwinnoch. Jen Walker has taken up her new post of Visitor and Publicity Officer at Leighton Moss, with myself and Bryony Carnie job-sharing on a temporary basis until the Visitor and Publicity Officer post is permanently filled.

On the evening of the 24th June, we welcomed over 200 visitors to the reserve, as the local community celebrated the opening of Phase 1 of the SRANI (South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative) path, linking the reserve and the railway station to the village. The event started at the village end of the path, after which people processed up the path to the reserve, where there was live music, stalls, food and wine on offer – all who attended agreed it was a great party! We are already seeing the benefit of the new path, with many more visitors reporting that they have used it to walk or cycle to the reserve.

Both reserve and external events continue to be successful. Our recent Moth night was enjoyed by all those who attended, and, with the help of the experts from Butterfly Conservation, we identified 40 species of moth. We have also been very busy attending external events at Balloch, Bishopton, Fairlie and Stevenston to name a few. We also continued our long-standing presence at the Ayr Flower Show in early August.



In spring, wildlife highlights included passage osprey, greenshank and a singing cuckoo but without doubt, the star turn was a 1st-summer little gull at the tail-end of May, the first since 1994!

Recently a green sandpiper turned up and fed around the margins of the newly created pond in front of the visitor centre. This is the first record of this species since 2001. With a lot of exposed mud at the pond, this could be the place to watch for passage waders in the coming months.

Wildfowl numbers are slowly beginning to build up on Barr Loch and soon the wild geese and swans will be arriving from the north.

The breeding bird surveys are now complete and post-survey analysis has shown good numbers of sedge warbler and reed bunting and a good increase in singing grasshopper warblers. The blue tit nest-watch was again a huge success attracting many visitors to the reserve. This year eight birds fledged from nine eggs.

The Clyde Muirshiel Hen Harrier viewing project is nearing completion for the year. Unfortunately, a fox predated the nest, and four out five chicks were taken. Thankfully, the remaining chick (Rocky) survived the attack, was later ringed and has now fledged. Spotted flycatchers were successful in raising young from a nestbox on the Aird Meadow trail, again proving a big hit with visitors.

Continuing with the nest-watch theme, the house sparrow terrace situated close to the feeding station was completely taken over by wasps and as I write, they are still busy feeding their young. Not to be outdone, other forms of wildlife continue to surprise with a small copper butterfly noted in early Aug, surprisingly only the fourth record for the reserve and the first since 2001. Otters are also putting in the occasional appearance as well as our more common mammals.



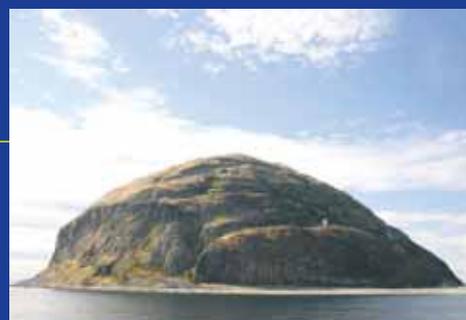
Shieldhall Cruise Gallery

Photos by
Stuart McMahon, Tony Barr,
Vall Firminger and Chris Howe.



Future looks bright for Ailsa Craig's puffins and Girvan communities

A recent wildlife survey has put puffin numbers on RSPB Scotland's Ailsa Craig nature reserve at an amazing 86 birds (around 40 breeding pairs) – the highest number since these colourful characters were found to be breeding again on this living landmark in 2001.



With breeding puffins on the up along with over 40,000 resident gannets and other seabirds including kittiwakes and guillemots, RSPB Scotland and Girvan Community Developments Ltd (GCDL) have launched an ambitious plan to bring this seabird spectacle to more people than ever, through a multi-million pound development at Girvan quayside.

The project, which will see the harbour at Girvan transformed to provide a purpose-built community and leisure facility and state-of-the-art wildlife-viewing centre, was formally launched during a warm and sunny trip aboard the Paddle Steamer Waverley on 8 August.

Guests attending the event hosted by RSPB Scotland and GCDL included Cathy Jamieson, Deputy Leader of the Scottish Parliament, award-winning international architects James McAslam & Partners (London) who will design the centre, and a host of other representatives from across Scotland and the UK – including the Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery funds, who it is hoped will support the project.

Providing a much needed financial and employment boost to the local communities of Girvan, the Ailsa Craig Centre will see close-up images of the Craig's seabirds beamed across 12 miles of ocean to the centre, where RSPB staff and innovative displays will give people a unique insight into this west-coast living landmark and its cultural and natural history.

The environmentally sustainable building will also host leisure facilities including a theatre, cinema, crèche, restaurants and shops which also be incorporated into the development providing a tourist gateway to south west Scotland and bringing revenue into local shops and services around Girvan.

RSPB Scotland's director for South and West Scotland, Dr Tricia Bradley, said: "This is a really exciting opportunity for RSPB Scotland, the people of south Ayrshire and tourism in Scotland as a whole. Ailsa Craig is an amazing place and we want people to realise how important and fascinating a part of the natural environment it is. That is why we are working with GCDL to make the island and

the new centre on the waterfront a memorable experience and an inspiration to other seaside towns like Girvan that have suffered since the rise of the package tour."

Councillor David Duncan of South Ayrshire Council said: "The proposed new community and tourist facility, with its links to Ailsa Craig, presents a unique opportunity to redefine Girvan and the surrounding area. South Ayrshire Council has been able to support the development of these proposals by providing funding and technical expertise. This has helped to translate needs and aspirations identified by GCDL into workable proposals for new facilities. The Council has given a firm indication of its ongoing commitment to these developments by agreeing to donate a piece of land on which to build the Ailsa Craig Centre."

The development of the centre is obviously going to be of great importance to both the Central and North Ayrshire RSPB Local Groups and we will keep you informed of developments as they happen.



Top: Ailsa Craig; Above Left: Birders on the PS Waverley going round Ailsa Craig; Above Middle: Cathy Jamieson, MSP, was one of many guests on the Waverley; Above right: Puffin. Photos: Tom Marshall, RSPB