Another year has flown by and the Autumn season is upon us once more, with the wintering birds soon to arrive.

We have had another good year in spite of a few problems. Our available drivers for the monthly minibus trips dropped to just one for a while but, despite last minute hiccups with the Midas driving test, we now have four newly qualified drivers (making a pool of six). So congratulations to Pete, Paul, Rex and Peter and thank you to John H who kept us going during the Summer, and Robert, our longest serving member of the driving team.

Peter Clarke retired from the committee after more than thirty years service and has been replaced by John Tomlin, so a big thank you to Peter and welcome to John. We still have a very strong committee in place to carry us forward, so the future looks rosy.

Bob Montgomery - Group Leader

Collective Birds... by Marion Hession

There are some collective nouns which are well known and in reasonably common use. These include...

A flock of birds; a gaggle of geese (for geese on the ground); a skein of geese (when in flight); a raft of ducks; a covey of partridge; a murmuration of starlings; a charm of goldfinch (my favourite collective noun); a parliament of owls.

Recently I was looking for other collective nouns and came across some obvious ones...

A host of sparrows; a flight of swallows; a flight of goshawks (wouldn’t it be good to see that?); a congregation of plovers; a clattering of chough (or jackdaw); an exaltation of larks; a spring of teal.

And some which are less obvious...

A bellowing of bullfinches; a herd of wrens (or curlews or cranes); a trip of dotterel; a fling of dunlin (or sandpipers); a watch of nightingale; a deceit (or desert) of lapwings.

But I sympathise with these corvids...

An unkindness of ravens; and a murder of crows...
‘Spoonies’ by John Tomlin & Gen Carpenter

You might think that any trip to see as rare a bird as a Spoon-billed Sandpiper would be difficult and with a high chance of failure. In February this year a group of five of us (John Tomlin, Pete Soper, Pete Marshall, Gen Carpenter and Geoff Driver) set off on a quest to see this iconic little bird. We knew that they overwinter in Thailand and so that’s where we were heading, all the time wondering if we’d be lucky enough to find any.

Our adventure started with a long flight with Austrian Airways to Bangkok via Vienna. We left London Heathrow around 8 pm in the evening and arrived in in Bangkok just after 3 pm local time - total flight time was around 12 hours. A taxi ride through the congested Bangkok traffic took us to our hotel, the Salil Hotel, on the very humid city outskirts with temperatures in the mid 30's°C. A quick freshen up and a beer in the hotel “bar” and we were off sightseeing and looking for somewhere to eat before heading back to the hotel for a badly needed night’s sleep.

Just before 5 am the following morning we met in the hotel reception area ready to be picked up by Nick Upton our guide. Nick arrived promptly at 5 am and after a two and a half hour drive we were at Pak Thale the much publicized salt pans wader hot spot.  [Cont’d page 5]
News from RSPB The Lodge

As the first fingers of Autumn take hold of the countryside, it’s nice to look back on the lovely summer that we have just enjoyed. The harsh and long winter seems a very long time ago now, but we have noticed that some birds were still fledging young towards the end of August; no doubt a knock on from the later start to the breeding season due to the very cold conditions. I am happy to report that some of the special birds at The Lodge, such as ravens, hobbies and nuthatch have raised young again this year, and although the spotted flycatchers didn’t pick their usual spots around the Gatehouse, where they have easily been seen in previous years, a family of these smart summer visitors were seen along the drive and near the hide around mid-August.

It has also been a pleasure to see so many butterflies and bees, especially after the difficult time they have had in recent years. The lavender that runs along the path to the RSPB shop was alive with these amazing creatures, one lady actually counted 151 bees of various shapes, sizes and species!

You may have noticed the building works that have been taking place this summer to improve the Gatehouse entrance. The wall at the entrance has been rebuilt and widened, the shop have a much needed new storage area and there is a much larger and welcoming Visitor Reception building to meet and greet all of our visitors to the site. Later in the year, new signage will appear to make navigating around the entrance and the driveway easier for all.

I think I can safely say that this summer was the busiest and best for our events since I started working here over five years ago. August started with a brand new event for us, we worked with the aptly titled Roger Crews, who along with his team have just restored the John Bunyan boat to promote the charity organising the proposed Milton Keynes to Bedford canal link. Together, we jointly held a boat trip from Bedford to Cardington Lock. 60 people of all ages enjoyed a pleasant cruise on a sunny summer’s night and the profits were split between the RSPB and the Bedford and Milton Keynes community boat charity. The first of the two annual Pantaloons outdoor theatre performances kicked off with Sherlock Holmes, followed by A Midsummer Night’s Dream at the end of the month. As ever, hundreds of visitors enjoyed the lively and fun performances and the Pantaloons will return next August, with both the Tempest and the History of Britain.

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Your committee:

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Leader</td>
<td>Bob Montgomery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Marion Hession</td>
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<td>Membership Secretary</td>
<td>Ace Yates</td>
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<td>Speakers</td>
<td>John Tomlin</td>
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<td>Booking for outings</td>
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<td>Outings reports</td>
<td>Geraldine Carpenter</td>
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The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity:
England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654
Wader Quest: part 1. Identify the waders, then find them in the word search on the back page. (Answers at the bottom of page 6)
Sandwiched in between these events was a little thing called the Big Wild Sleepout! A brand new national RSPB event, we had ten tents full of families and another six with volunteers and me! We ran bat and moth walks, watched the International Space Station fly over twice and saw several Perseid meteors zipping through the clear sky. Next morning, after a five star breakfast, we watched the moth recorders showing us the highlights of the night’s catch before we packed up camp and went home tired but happy. All funds went towards Giving Nature a Home.

As well as these events, we ran a whole programme of mini beast safaris and other activities to help connect youngsters with nature and our local bat expert led another of the popular bat night walks.

The RSPB Lodge reserve is open every day of the week, from dawn to dusk, for everyone to enjoy and there are plenty of organised events: just ring to book. Entry is included in the car-parking fee - £4 a car for non-members, free if you are members or just visiting the shop.

The shop (01767 680541) is open every day (9am-5pm and 10am-5pm weekends and Bank Holidays) and has everything for people who love nature.

‘Spoonies’ continued from page 2...

Incredibly within ten minutes of leaving the minibus we were standing alongside one of the salt pans looking at our first Spoon-billed Sandpipers, dabbling around in the salty water. Our target bird within the first half hour of proper birding – how exciting was that?

During our holiday we visited a number of different sites and saw so many incredible birds – too many to include in this article. But the stars of the trip were definitely the ‘Spoonies’. Even today, when we think back to our trip we can hardly believe how easy it was to see one of the most endangered birds in the world. So I guess the moral of this story is... if you’ve a hankering to go find any bird(s), don’t let doubts about the success of the trip put you off. Just go for it. You never know, you might be pleasantly surprised.
‘Giving nature a home’

Wader Quest – part 2. Find the birds identified in part 1.

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |
| 1 | Oyster Catcher; 2 Avocet; 3 Stone Curlew; 4 Little Ringed Plover; 5 Ringed Plover; 6 Golden Plover; 7 Grey Plover; 8 Lapwing; 9 Knot; 10 Sanderling; 11 Purple Sandpiper; 12 Turnstone; 13 Dunlin; 14 Curlew Sandpiper; 15 Little Stint; 16 Green Sandpiper; 17 Common Sandpiper; 18 Redshank; 19 Greenshank; 20 Spotted Redshank; 21 Black-Tailed Godwit; 22 Bar-Tailed Godwit; 23 Curlew; 24 Whimbrel |

Answers to Wader Quest Pt 1: 1 Oyster Catcher; 2 Avocet; 3 Stone Curlew; 4 Little Ringed Plover; 5 Ringed Plover; 6 Golden Plover; 7 Grey Plover; 8 Lapwing; 9 Knot; 10 Sanderling; 11 Purple Sandpiper; 12 Turnstone; 13 Dunlin; 14 Curlew Sandpiper; 15 Little Stint; 16 Green Sandpiper; 17 Common Sandpiper; 18 Redshank; 19 Greenshank; 20 Spotted Redshank; 21 Black-Tailed Godwit; 22 Bar-Tailed Godwit; 23 Curlew; 24 Whimbrel