

Committee Profile: Richard Hill - Honorary Secretary

Born and bred in Sheffield, I was fortunate to grow up in Crosspool where a large part of my childhood was spent exploring the nearby Rivelin Valley; mainly thanks to my late Dad, who didn't own a car and therefore insisted on marching me and my sister everywhere on foot. It was here in May 1981 that I made my first foray into birding, largely thanks to Chris McNaghten, who lived four doors away and gave me my first bird book: the Observer's Book of Birds - that semi-monochrome classic. This was soon discarded, but Lars Jonsson's 'Birds of Mountain and Moorland' acquired a couple of years later, remains my favourite bird book to this day - truly inspirational stuff. It was around this time that my life long interest in visible migration first began to stir and I still have happy memories of counting Meadow Pipits from my front steps before school - who'd have thought that would ever catch on?!

Around December 1981, I made my first visit to Redmires Reservoirs - a truly horrific experience, which saw me search for a distant Goldeneye bobbing amongst the leaden grey waves, struggling to hold a huge pair of 10x50 ex-army binoculars in a freezing NE gale. My Dad called it 'character-building', I seem to remember calling it something else! In spite of this, the place continued to hold a strange fascination for me, although access was very different in those days, with my teenage curiosity for identifying distant blobs usually thwarted either by the chain-smoking Ellis Colley - the long-serving water bailiff or a pipe-wielding Ken Crookes. A successful permit application in 1986 changed all that, however, and I was at last free to find my own birds. I was rewarded almost instantly, when after a run of easterlies on 1st September, I found my first local rarity: a confiding Wryneck on the Middle Res - part of a big east coast fall at that time. Convinced no-one would ever believe a 15 year-old kid, sadly this record never saw the light of day, but it did teach me a valuable lesson: document everything - something I have tried to do ever since, up to and including my 3,118th visit to Redmires last week! It was here, where I first bumped into such local luminaries as Kevin Gould, Keith Clarkson and Tony Morris. Their encouragement was, and still is, greatly appreciated; as was a chance meeting there with David Herringshaw - for it was 'DH' who gave me that final push to join the SBSG in October 1986.

With no transport, the SBSG was a huge influence in those early years, particularly the field trips to iconic places like Spurn, Gibraltar Point and perhaps best of all Cley - I still recall a stunning female Wilson's Phalarope there in May 1987 and a skulking Thrush Nightingale the following year. For the past two decades, I have tried to remain faithful to local birding, despite occasionally flirting with twitching and also foreign travel - my favourite places being Point Pelee in Canada, Ephesus Marsh in Turkey and Finnish

Lapland. With two young sons, my wings have been clipped a bit of late, although I still prefer pottering around the moorland fringe finding my own stuff, as opposed to the modern trend of pager/web-based 'birding by numbers'. Although my Sheffield list is nothing special, I have managed to find 202 species locally, including White Stork, Black-throated Thrush, Hoopoe, Marsh and Dartford Warbler, plus breeding Wigeon and Firecrest. The latter remains my favourite bird of all - for me, they still knock a Pallas's into a cocked hat, unless it's at Redmires of course!

Having always thought that committees were the preserve of old people, my involvement in the Group since 1997, has been restricted to co-editing the annual report and taking part in surveys. However, as I now hurtle towards middle age, I thought it was high time I gave something back to the Group that fostered my early interest. After shamefully declining the offer twice, I finally joined the SBSG Committee in May 2008, and have now become Honorary Secretary. With local bird clubs facing a rather uncertain future, I hope to help drive the Group forward again, not just through the annual report, but also the forthcoming breeding atlas, which hopefully might attract a new generation of local birders