

Chris Greenwood's profile

My interest in birding came about from growing up on the edge of a village in West Lancashire in the early 80s. It is only looking back now that I can appreciate how lucky we were. Our estate backed onto farmland and country lanes and were pretty much free to roam everywhere on our bikes. In amongst climbing trees and making dens in farmer's fields we would stand on our bike frames to peer into nests in the hedgerows. Nests were 10 a penny, as were the Starlings who sat on the phone wires and mimicked the ring of fancy new push button phones. Along with bikes and football, birds were a part of everyday life for local lads. Errands to the farm shop would be sound tracked by Lapwing, Skylark, Swallows, Corn Buntings and Yellowhammers. I can still picture them now. Infrequent visits back to the area suggest that most of these birds are now gone.

A few miles up the lane was Martin Mere WWT where we were taken on school trips. After passing our cycling proficiency test, aged 8, we were allowed up to Martin Mere on our bikes and so off we went with our heavy old binoculars. Initially fascinated by the captive collection of colourful wildfowl such as Bufflehead and Falcated Duck, we were soon obsessed by the Hen Harriers, Ruff, Whooper and Bewick's Swans we could watch from the hides, not to mention the tens of thousands of Pink Footed Geese. Little did I know that when I moved away from the area that I wouldn't see the ghostly grey of a male Hen Harrier for another 30 years.

Discovery of urban attractions such as music, movies, cars, pubs & clubs, then University and the long slog to establish a career in film/television production meant that birding disappeared from my life for a good 20 years or so. Luckily for me the knowledge and memories which had laid dormant came flooding back when my passion for birds was reignited in my mid 30s. I've spent the last 10 years trying to make up for lost birding time.

Being in Sheffield has played a major part in my modern birding life. I'm a lover of the Peak District and the National Park on our doorstep has played a significant part in rekindling of my birding passion. It is the habitat and birds of the Western side of our area which exert the greatest pull on me, from the Dippers and Grey Wagtails of the upper Porter Valley to the handsome Stonechats and Ouzels of the Edges. Late March and April find me agitated with *Zugeneruhe*, completely distracted until our birds have returned. The first bubbling Curlew, the first treetop Chiff and Chaff, mean there are Ouzels, Willow Warblers, Swallows, Swifts, Redstarts, Flycatchers, Cuckoos and Nightjars on their way home our uplands. These sights and sounds bring me joy and lift my spirits, not just a tick on a list. Birding is good for the soul.

These days most spare time, weekends, holidays, visits to family are skewed in some way towards spending time in the outdoors, experiencing nature and wildlife but most of all seeing birds. Work life involves being away from home a lot and long inflexible hours which makes patchwork and dedication to one site difficult but I find I start going stir crazy if I don't get out birding every few days. Family & friends think I've gone bird crazy but I'm an average birder at best and a bad bird photographer, ironic given my chosen profession. I'm not afraid to admit that Goldfinch is one of my favourite birds because its comical whistling and buzzing from the top of a TV aerial sounds like R2D2. I'd love to discover a rarity or an

area first one day but I'm more than content watching the tumbling aerobatics of a swallow or the scything & screeching flight of a swift on a warm summer's evening, over the rooftops or over the moors.

Naturally a focus on the birds of our uplands leads to an interest in migration, so places such as Spurn and Filey hold a pull in the autumn however, the thing most often in my mind is the steep decline in bird numbers during my "sabbatical" period. The efforts required today to see birds which I took for granted as a kid is quite shocking and I want to do whatever I can to help or highlight the plight of our bird life. To that end I've joined the BTO, taken up a BBS square and joined SBSG. Like many things in my life in recent times I discovered SBSG through my wife Jill, who found the group on Twitter!

SBSG is fabulous. I thoroughly enjoy the meetings, the field trips and the newsletter. The group gives me enjoyment watching and learning about birds and it's great to find friendly, like-minded people. I'm grateful to all that organise, administer and sustain the group - it wouldn't exist without them. Groups like SBSG are possibly more important now than ever. I have joined the committee to give the current stalwarts help in whatever way I can. My aim is to help maintain the current healthy status of the group and to try to promote it further. Together as a group I hope that we can enjoy birding, enjoy the social side of birding, and be a force for the conservation and promotion of birdlife and wildlife in our area.