

## Committee Profile: Richard Hill – Chairman

Born and bred in Sheffield, I was really 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 insisted on marching me and my sister everywhere on foot. It was here in May 1981, that I made my first foray into bird watching thanks to Chris McNaghten – a birding evangelical, who lived four doors away and who gave me my first ever bird book: *The Observer's Book of Birds* – that semi-monochrome classic, which kick-started a similar interest in so many others up to and including my own generation. Naturally, this was soon discarded, but the quality of the illustrations in Ian Wallace's *Watching Birds* and Lars Jonsson's *Birds of Mountain Regions*, both proved to be inspirational in different ways, and continued to fuel my teenage interest even further. It was around this time that my life-long passion for visible migration first began to stir and I still have fond memories of counting migrating Meadow Pipits from our front steps before school – at the time, I had no idea where they were heading, but the seasonal patterns of this natural spectacle always provided a welcome escape from the real world and continue to do so today – I'm a firm believer in birding being good for both the mind and the soul !

Around December 1981, I made my first visit to Redmires Reservoirs – a somewhat chastening experience, which saw me struggle to find wintering Goldeneye amongst the leaden grey waves, whilst simultaneously holding my Dad's huge 10x50 binoculars in a biting north-easterly gale. This bleak, but sometimes magical place, has continued to hold a fascination for me locally, although access was very different in those days, with my teenage curiosity for identifying distant blobs, usually thwarted by either the chain-smoking Ellis Colley – the gnarled, long-serving water bailiff, or a pipe-wielding Ken Crookes, who was then the SBSG Treasurer. A successful permit application in 1986 changed all that, however, and I was at last free to find my own birds. Reward came almost instantly, when after a run of easterlies on 1st September, I found my first local rarity: a confiding Wryneck on the dam wall – part of a big east coast fall at the time. Convinced no-one would ever believe a 15-year old school kid, my unsubmitted fieldnotes were then misplaced amongst a pile of old schoolbooks, only to resurface 27 years later, when I cleared out my parent's old garden shed! Thankfully, they were sufficiently accurate to gain this memorable record acceptance, but this episode did teach me a valuable lesson: document everything – something I have tried to do in all my subsequent visits, which have now almost reached the 4,000 mark at the time of writing.

The dam wall at Redmires was where I also first bumped into such local luminaries as Kevin Gould, Keith Clarkson and Tony Morris. Their encouragement remains 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 in north Norfolk – I still recall the stunning female Wilson's Phalarope there in May 1987 and a skulking Thrush Nightingale the following year, which I eventually saw on all fours as it walked amongst the sea buckthorn! For the past three decades, I have tried to remain faithful to local birding, despite occasionally flirting with both twitching and foreign travel – my

favourite places being Point Pelee in Canada, Ephesus Marsh in Turkey and Finnish Lapland. With two fast-growing sons, my wings have been clipped a bit of late, although I still manage to potter around both the western moorland fringe and south-eastern flashes in an attempt at finding my own stuff. Although my Sheffield list is nothing particularly special, I have managed to stumble across over 200 species locally, including White Stork, Montagu's Harrier, Ring-billed and Sabine's Gull, Hoopoe, Black-throated Thrush, Marsh and Dartford Warbler, plus the Sheffield area's first breeding records of Wigeon and Firecrest. This latter species remains my favourite bird – for me, they still provide an enthralling encounter and easily knock a Pallas's Warbler into a cocked hat, unless that happens to be at Redmires of course!

Having always thought that committees were the preserve of old people, my involvement in the Group prior to 2007, was primarily restricted to co-editing the annual report and taking part in local surveys. However, on reaching the joys of 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, before becoming Honorary Secretary a year later – this latter role has been particularly rewarding during the past decade, when the Committee's hard work and commitment has been recognised by both healthy finances and increasing membership numbers, as well as the culmination of some significant projects, such as the publication of the SBSG breeding atlas, which I had the privilege of co-editing with our former Chair, David Wood.

In taking over the role from David, I hope to maintain this consistent progress and continue to drive the Group forwards, hopefully attracting the next generation of local birders in the process.