

# Newsletter 2007

The New Season Starts on  
September 4th.

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## President's Report 2007 - Michael Rayner

**T**his newsletter will arrive at the end of our 40<sup>th</sup> year as Huddersfield Birdwatchers' Club. The mere fact of survival in a competitive world, where there are all sorts of other calls on our leisure time, is noteworthy, but there is reason to celebrate in that the Club continues to flourish. Our meetings often bring in about half the membership and our other activities, such as recording, engage many others. (Regrettably, though, we were not successful in getting the required number for an anniversary dinner.)

As well as our publications, we now present an electronic face to the public through our website. This is now complete and has already established itself with many members as a place to find Club news and information, and, importantly, recent sightings. Anyone wanting to draw on the tireless labours of those who go out into the field has only to click to see what's about and where.



We hope that non-members will find out about us by this means and be drawn into the fold. Much work has gone into getting this site set up and our thanks are due to David Holloway for all that he has done to liaise with the designer, Michael Flaherty, and to oversee its operation.

The annual reports are now being prepared together with a special edition entitled 'The Birds of the Huddersfield Area'. All of these rely on members observing and reporting and then these reports being knocked into shape and printed by the unflagging efforts of Brian Armitage, Russell Boland, Mike Denton, Paul Bray, Alf King and Mike Wainman. Illustrations are once again being provided by Stuart Brocklehurst. After years acting as Recorder, Brian has decided to devolve some of his tasks to Russell. We would all, I know, wish to thank Brian for his devotion, especially in testing times, and welcome Russell's help.

An amazing financial fact about the Club is that, after allowing for the cost of the annual report, our meetings cost each member about 50p each, which should strike everyone as a marvellous bargain. However, after holding to our current subscription for several years, it has been necessary to raise it to about 60p per meeting! This is a matter of regret but the committee would be irresponsible if it failed to take action. Mike Wainman gives the background to this in his financial report printed elsewhere in this issue.

Once again we arranged a set of Local Outings, which were better attended than in the past. Visits to

Blackmoorfoot, Scout Dyke, Digley and Langsett, led by Mike Denton, David Holloway, Mike Wainman and Chris Abell respectively, showed what a range of bird-life there is in these areas. They are most enjoyable visits, enhanced by the local knowledge of their leaders.

Last October at a Committee meeting I announced that at the AGM in November 2007 I intended to stand down as President after serving for 5 years. They have been enjoyable ones but I thought it was time for a change and for meetings to have a fresh voice to listen to. Unfortunately that fresh voice was not forthcoming even after long searching. However we are very lucky to have a prospective new President for November 2008, with the consequence that I shall continue for one more year if, of course, the membership supports the proposal.

I should like now to record my thanks to all officers and committee members. Where would we be without their efficient and generous contribution to the smooth running of the Club?

**Our new season starts on Sept 4<sup>th</sup> and I look forward to seeing members then.**



## The Black Necked Grebe Saga - Mike Denton

**T**he Black-necked Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*, on Blackmoorfoot Reservoir on 2nd January 2007, had been found at the road side some 70m from the main water body by a member of the public walking his dog. The gale force winds, coupled with heavy rain, had presumably deceived the bird into believing the road was a stretch of water. How fortunate that the finder, Mr Hague, who described the bird as "a baby grebe with red eyes", had a dog which didn't savage it and was sufficiently knowledgeable about birds to realise that it should be on the reservoir.

Despite the trauma of being sniffed by one potential predator and man-handled by another in the wake of what was obviously a very bumpy landing, the bird was always very confiding, rarely venturing further than 10m from the reservoir edge and showing no concern about the close proximity of people or their dogs.

The grebe was present until 3rd March when it was found dead (see below). During the length of its stay, with the exception of the following incidents, the bird was only seen to eat Three-spined Sticklebacks, *Gasterosteus aculeatus*. On 24th February the bird was feeding in the catchment channel where it enters the reservoir at no more than 5m distance. After a number of fruitless dives it came to the surface holding an earthworm which was estimated to be about 15cm in length. The grebe manipulated the worm with great dexterity and swallowed it headfirst in a matter of seconds. A similar scenario occurred the

following day, although on this occasion the worm was about 18cm long. The worms, although appearing dead, were still brightly coloured, and had presumably only recently been washed out of the catchment bank by the increased water flow caused by recent heavy rain.

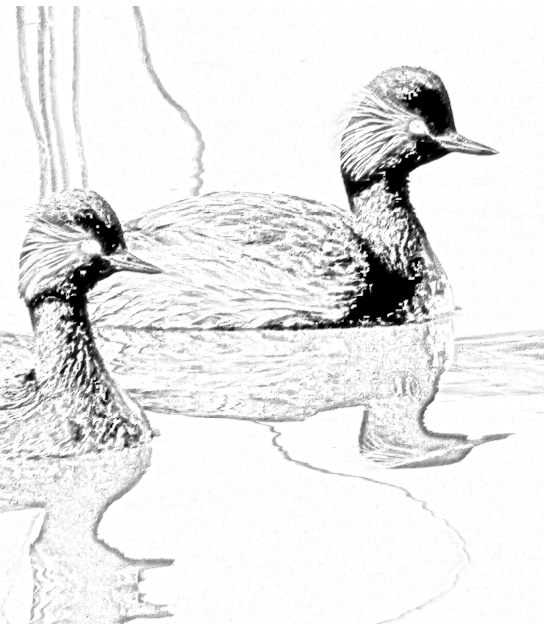
Even though Black-necked Grebe is less piscivorous than its larger cousins, eating a large number of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates (beetles, caddis flies, dragonfly larvae, earwigs, mayflies etc.), this would appear to be the first recorded instance of one actually eating earthworms. The eating of earthworms by Black-necked Grebes is perhaps not unusual but, as with other terrestrial invertebrates, they can only come into contact with them if they fall into the water, as in this instance.

The cause of the bird's death was not apparent on external evidence, although despite feeding regularly and appearing to eat sufficient for its needs, the sternum did lack muscle. The corpse was sent to John Mather for preparation as a study skin and he has kindly commented as follows: The bird, an adult female, had no sub-dermal fat and the breast muscle was wasting away leaving a sharp sternum. This, however, was not the cause of the bird's demise as there was recent blood-clotting at the base of the neck and shoulders and the lower mandible was slightly damaged.

The bird had obviously been in a tussle, the only likely opponent being a Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*, a pair of which

were proclaiming a breeding territory near to where it had succumbed. Great Crested Grebes tend to be intolerant of other grebe species within their territory and in this instance the smaller, rather emaciated bird, was at a total disadvantage.

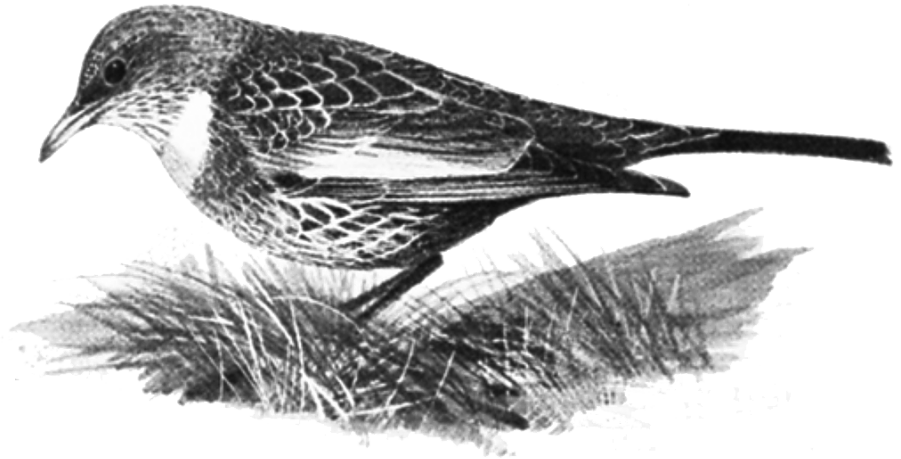
This initially very fortunate and resourceful bird had survived for more than two months after its original ordeal. How unfortunate it was to have been killed by one of its larger cousins. Having watched this particular Black-necked Grebe on a near daily basis, my future observations of Great Crested Grebes will never be the same again.





## Recent Sightings - Russ Boland

The highlight for many in one of the warmest and driest Aprils on record was the best passage of **Ring Ouzels** witnessed in recent years.



Around mid-month small parties of what were probably Scandinavian bound birds were reported from several sites including Cheesegate Nab, Digley, Hartcliffe Hill and Issues Road. What was perhaps the earliest ever **Pied Flycatcher** for the Huddersfield area turned up at Hagg Wood, Brockholes on 11th and, especially pleasing, is news that successful breeding took place after a female joined him on 3rd May. It's also good to report further **Pied Flys'** from Digley and Langsett. While working over here in Barnsley at the month end, I quickly became aware of higher than usual numbers of **Lesser Whitethroats** singing. The Hudds area also appears to have had an excellent spring with birds reported from Almondbury, Denby Dale, High Hoyland, Horbury and Scout Dike. With the high temperatures came two early **Hobbys** – at Shelley on 18th and Elland Gravel Pits on 27th. The first **Swifts** were over Lepton on 25th and a reeling **Grasshopper Warbler** at Scammonden on 24th was joined by two others in early May.

Rarity-wise a **Black-necked Grebe** was an excellent find at Ingbirchworth Res on 2nd, whilst a female **Black Redstart** was at Brow Grains on 12th. On 26th a **White Stork** of unknown origin was watched flying NW over Bretton and, a little later on, continuing NW over Emley. Three different **White Storks** were reported by Bird Line North East in the region on 15th, so perhaps this was one of those.

In May came welcome news of no fewer than five **Wood Warblers** - three at Langsett from 9th and two at Delves Wood, Beaumont Park from 30th April. Hopefully, recent considerations to change its status from migrant breeder to scarce visitor will have been premature. Rarest birds of the month were three **Dotterel** that graced Whitley Common on 7th and 8th, whilst another fine wader find came in the shape of a **Wood Sandpiper** at Dewsbury SF on 14th. Three more **Hobbys** were reported at Broadstones on 13th, Cumberworth and Denby Dale on 30th and, intriguingly, at a probable former

breeding site late month. The River Calder produced fly by **Little Gulls** at Horbury on 4th and the first **Turtle Dove** since 2001 at Bradley Hall Farm on 20th. Two **Ruddy Ducks** at Ingbirchworth on 24th and a flock of 20 **Crossbills** near Bretton on 26th are also worth mentioning. As birds settled down to breed in June, news broke of a male **Red-backed Shrike** caught on camera in a Holme garden on 5th June – only the fourth ever Hudds record. Like the previous record (at Gilbert Hill on 29th May, 1998) this bird appeared on a classic date for a spring overshoot. **Oystercatchers** bred for the first time at Dewsbury Sewage Farm but some species, especially those breeding in exposed habitat, must have had a terrible time of it in the atrocious conditions we've experienced recently.

In early July a **Quail** sang from the 'Little Bunting' field at Shepley on 7th and a party of 17 **Common Scoter** and a **Mediterranean Gull** paused at Blackmoorfoot around this time.



## Local Patch Outings 2007 - Chris Abell

I don't know what gave me the greatest thrill; the displaying Great Crested Grebes, the male Ring Ouzel or the singing Wood Warblers. I do know however that these were all experienced on our patch outings. Unfortunately I couldn't make the trip to Blackmoorfoot but the visits to Scout Dyke, Digley and Langsett were all memorable.

At Scout Dyke on 21<sup>st</sup> April we were rewarded with an influx of summer visitors. I saw my first Swallow for the season and we heard singing Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Blackcap. It was good to see a pair of Reed Buntings but the highlight was probably the displaying Great Crested Grebes. In total I recorded 38 species.

The weather for Digley early on 6<sup>th</sup> May was cold and rainy, so it did not auger well for a trip over exposed farmland and moors. But I was wrong; we had an excellent day, soon adding Garden Warbler and Swift to the list of summer migrants. The strong wind kept the birds down but it did not stop us picking up a male Ring Ouzel and a Wheatear sheltering behind stone walls. We recorded the expected Curlews and Lapwings and it was good to hear a Cuckoo on the moors. I had to leave early so left the others behind and set off on a brisk walk back to the car park. I soon slowed down to watch a flock of Golden Plovers feeding in a field as a Lesser Blacked-Back Gull passed overhead. I recorded 34 species but I believe those who lasted the full outing reached around 40.

I bravely volunteered to lead one outing, at Langsett on 26<sup>th</sup> May. I was very concerned, what if no one turns up? Worse, what if people turn up expecting a good day and we see nothing? I need not have worried because the birds were in excellent form, we had so many good views that we did not manage to visit all the sites I hoped to, despite being out for nearly 5 hours. We started by finding a Treecreeper's nest in a wall, soon followed by Great Spotted Woodpeckers entering a hole in a tree. 2 (or was it 3?) singing Wood Warblers followed next, and we were rewarded with a view of the male singing from an exposed branch. Then we were surprised to hear the whistle from a Wigeon. A rather pale male landed on the reservoir. Was it an escape or hybrid? A careful examination showed it had all the characteristics

of Wigeon except for the paler colours. Can we count it? If we do the total I recorded came to 41 species. This was helped by having Brian Armitage with us with his powerful observation skills and acute ear. It was good to see Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart. By late May resident birds have had their first brood and it was a pleasure seeing common birds like Song Thrush feeding young.

I recorded 66 species in 2 and half visits, each visit had around 7 participants. It is a pity that more people don't try to attend. It is good to meet and talk to other members, particularly at a time when we don't have indoor meetings. I find that I always learn something on every outing. Thank you to Mike Denton, David Holloway and Mike Wainman for giving up their time to show us their patch and thanks to those who attended. However I cannot decide what the highlight of the outings was. Let me just simply say, I enjoyed every minute of every outing.





## Local Patch Outing to Blackmoorfoot - Mike Denton

The 14th April 2007 dawned clear and sunny with no wind, and by the time the seven Club members assembled by the inflow at Blackmoorfoot Reservoir it was already pleasantly warm. Before we ventured on our way, a short introduction on 'local patch' watching was delivered. It being pointed out that to get the most out of a 'local patch' you have to know the site intimately and, it is only by watching and recording on a regular basis that you learn about bird movements and where they are most likely to turn up. An example pertinent to Blackmoorfoot concerns the hirundines congregations which utilise the lee of the west bank willows if a strong westerly wind is blowing.

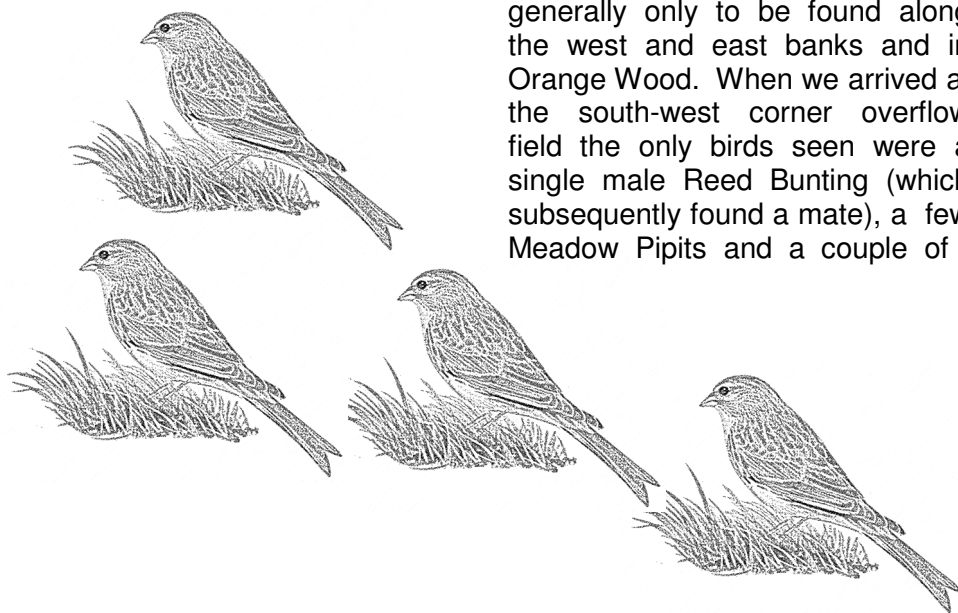
Birds actually seen on the water were few; seven Great Crested Grebe, two Tufted Duck, two Coot, four Moorhen and a female Mallard with 13 rather early ducklings. Most of the people present, however, said they were pleased not to be counting gulls! Indeed, on this occasion, not a single gull was in evidence.

The party then walked through the woodland along the south bank towards the south-west corner and amongst the abundant Chaffinches found a single male Brambling. The presence of this individual was only realised when the Greenfinch-like song was heard. Apart from Brambling over flying the reservoir, the best place to locate this species is in this woodland where they feed on Beech mast. On cycling round the reservoir earlier in the day I had located a rather late Fieldfare and five newly arrived singing male Willow Warblers were in the south bank woodland, as the species is generally only to be found along the west and east banks and in Orange Wood. When we arrived at the south-west corner overflow field the only birds seen were a single male Reed Bunting (which subsequently found a mate), a few Meadow Pipits and a couple of

Pheasants. Even though up to six Wheatears had been present on Meltham Cop on most days since the 27th March, none were in evidence today.

It was then decided to take the cars up to Potato Lane to look for Golden Plover. Local knowledge came into its own when we arrived, as the resident Little Owls were found sitting on the wall top in their usual position. A party of seven Golden Plover were present in the largest field (the so called 'Golden Plover field'). This large field tends to be the one which attracts this species and, a look at maps held by Kirklees MC reveals why; it is the only unimproved field in the area (long may it remain so). Also along Potato Lane were a flock of six Twite (the usual place for this species in both spring and autumn) and a couple of Swallows were hawking the fields.

Although the party didn't venture in to Orange Wood, a visit later in the day produced a singing male Chiffchaff, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Nuthatch (a pair of which subsequently raised young). Other birds seen later in the day included three female Goosander and a Common Sandpiper. All in all it had been a very enjoyable day, the only person disappointed was the leader, as not a single gull had been recorded!





## Annual Reports - Mike Wainman

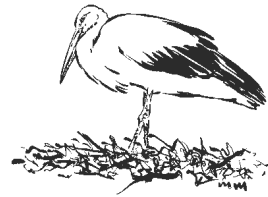
The 2004 report is now in an advanced state of preparation and will hopefully be printed at the start of the new season. We are hopeful that Kirklees Repro Unit, who printed the two last reports, will be able to print this latest, though this is yet to be confirmed at the time of writing. All who were members in 2005/6 will qualify for a free copy and it will be on sale otherwise.

The writing of the 2004 report has been a team effort by Brian Armitage and Russ Boland, with support from Alf King. Stuart Brocklehurst has contributed his usual excellent atmospheric drawings, with graphics also from Russ. I am doing the usual compilation and preparation for printing. At the time of writing we are looking at the possibility of including some colour photographs of birds in the area from that year – it remains to be seen whether that will be possible for 2004. However, in recent years more members have moved into digital photography, as evidenced by the excellent contributions to the club website, so we definitely aim to move in this direction.

2004 was notable as the 'White Stork' year for Huddersfield, in what could have been an historic national event, had the nesting attempts of a pair at Horbury been allowed to continue. With a full account of this and all the other details and highlights of the year, the report makes for a fascinating read.

Russ Boland has taken on the task of writing the 2005 report, indeed has already begun, and we are hopeful that it may be available early in the new year. Over time, we aim to progress to a position in which annual reports are available within 12 months of the relevant year-end.

Meanwhile, thank you to all involved in their production. The work involved should not be underestimated and, as my sneak preview as 'publisher' confirms, the 2004 report maintains the high standards of which the Club can be proud.



The Club was sad to hear of the deaths of two members during the past year: John Rutherford and, more recently, Dennis Manchester. Both regularly attended meetings and were well-known, liked and respected. What may not be so well-known is that John had been the Leader of RSPB Local Group and that Dennis was a Founder and Life Member of our Club, both being long-standing, enthusiastic bird-watchers. We shall miss their company and extend our sympathy to their families.

We should also like to extend our sympathy to our Recorder, Brian Armitage, on the loss of his wife, Pauline, after a long illness.

M.R.



## Report on Website - Dave Holloway



**W**aiting for and working on the new club website has been like being midwife to an elephant: after 22 months the baby finally arrives. I exaggerate only a little.

After a few years of members reporting sightings on the message board it was decided to go for a 'proper' website. A Forum was set up which allowed the posting of bird news and photos. This worked perfectly until we had a flurry of undesirable postings and the ensuing attempts to alter settings threw up a number of glitches. Members, eager to support their sightings (e.g. an Arabian Bustard strutting elegantly over a Meltham lawn), were inevitably greeted with disbelief when they were unable to display their photos as proof on the Forum.

At the time of writing (August) the Forum has been changed so that only members (20) have access and is running perfectly. The main web pages have also just been put up.

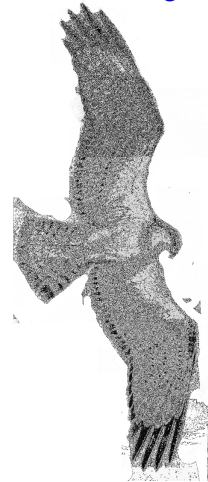
If you have not yet joined then you are missing some fascinating news and views about the birds in our area.

What will you see on the Forum? Well, a range of categories is available: many excellent photos taken by members mainly using digiscopes; news of latest sightings; general chat about birds e.g. species seen on a local walk; club events and announcements; off-topic chat e.g. good buys in binoculars.

The main pages, when finalised, together with Forum additions, should have a map of the club area; a complete list of birds seen in our area; information about the club; publications and an application form for membership.

So, to find out just what you've missed. Yes, it was 10 minutes after you left Yateholme that the Osprey flew in, go to:

[www.huddersfieldbirdwatchersclub.org.uk/index.php](http://www.huddersfieldbirdwatchersclub.org.uk/index.php)



## Publicity - Pat Foster

**T**here is not much to report this year as there has been no Annual Report or special reports. The Previous Report and the Blackmoorfoot Report have both sold well at Old Moor but it is unclear whether they will be able to sell our publications in future. In the light of this if anyone can suggest any other outlets I would be pleased to hear from them. Our advertising seems to be fairly successful, but again I am always looking for new ideas or suggestions.

**The Club is once again indebted to Eurodata Print of Denby Dale for printing this Newsletter free of charge and to In Focus of Denby Dale for their sponsorship.**



## Club Finances- Mike Wainman (Treasurer)

**A**t the time of writing, the accounts for 2006/7 are not finalised, but it appears that we shall roughly break even at operating level (before interest), with only interest on Club investments of some £460 taking us into the black. £60 of the latter is however a one-off 'bonus' arising from changes in bank accounts causing interest to be brought forward in time. Membership is down to 81 from 89, and therefore subscription income and associated Gift Aid are reduced. We have benefited from £110 in sponsorship and free printing for the newsletter, which was very welcome, but as past experience shows, not something upon which we can necessarily depend for the future. There was one less speaker to pay, after a speaker's confusion over dates, and we have continued to enjoy the use of the library, at least for the time being, at old rates. The delay in production of the annual report has meant that we have not incurred the printing costs, the expense of distribution to members, nor income from sales, all of which will be deferred into next year, but the likely net effect would have been a subsidy from funds. We have, however, paid for the setting up and running of the Club's new web site.

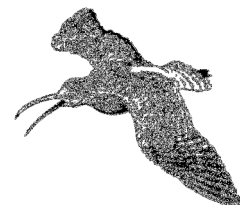
Looking forward to 2007/8, whilst forecasting is always problematic, we anticipate a more difficult year, with the likelihood of a bigger operating loss, if subscription rates were to remain at recent levels. It is the Committee's firmly held view that the Club's invested monies should be used to support our recording, publishing and survey activity in the long term and that normal annual operating costs should be paid out of current subscriptions and related income. This is in keeping with our registered aims as a charity and with the intention of the legacy donation from which we benefited. Hence, therefore, the Committee's decision, supported by members, that we increase subscriptions for 2007/8 and keep them under review thereafter. The new rates of £13 single and £22 joint membership represent a modest move, after five years with no increase, are still incredibly good value and, of course, include a free annual report.

Looking beyond that, the Chancellor Gordon Brown's decision to reduce the basic level of income tax from the 2008/9 tax year from 22% to 20% will mean a reduction in our Gift Aid rebate from 28% of subscriptions to 25% - but think just how much richer you lucky Labour tax-payers will be !

## Notice of AGM

The 41<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting is to be held at Huddersfield central Library at 7.30pm on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> November. A full agenda will be issued at the meeting but the following posts are due for election;

- President
- Treasurer
- Indoor Meetings Secretary
- 2 Committee Members



Nominations for these posts should be sent to the Secretary, in writing or by email, 14 days before the meeting (i.e. to be received no later than November 6<sup>th</sup>)



## 2007/8 subscriptions now due !

**M**embership subscriptions for 2007/8 are due now !

After five years unchanged at the previous rate, there is some increase to subscriptions this time, as discussed with members at the final meetings of last season. These rates still, however, represent incredible value, especially as they still include a 'free' copy of *"The Birds of Huddersfield"* annual publication. The Committee would like to thank members for their expressed support for this measure.

**Please send your subs now** directly to Mike Wainman using the slip below. This method of collection has worked well over the last two seasons - it cuts queues at the early indoor meetings and makes a Treasurer's life a little easier !

In 2006/7 the Club received some £160 in **Gift Aid** and this is an important source of income for us. Most members have already signed a Gift Aid form and it will still be valid, so nothing further is required. However, if you are a taxpayer and have not provided a signed form, please help us by asking Mike for one (Tel. 01484 469232 or email [m.wainman@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.wainman@ntlworld.com)). It costs you nothing and the Club can reclaim an extra 28% of the value of your subscription or donation as a tax rebate from the government.

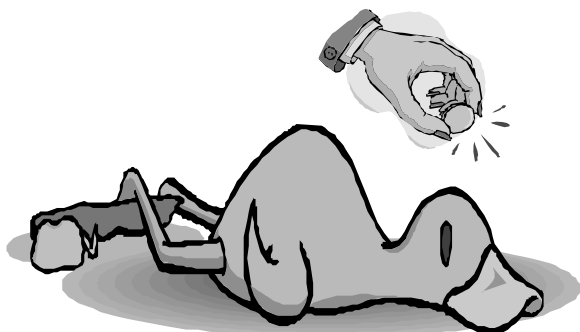
Thank you for your support.



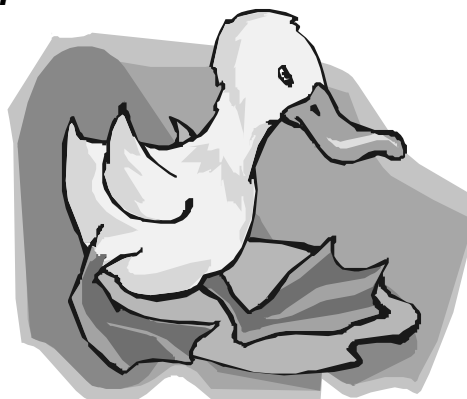
<b>Subscription return slip 2007/8</b>
Name(s):
Subscription (tick): <b>Single £13</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Couple £22</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
Cheques only please (no cash) made out to <b>Huddersfield Birdwatchers' Club</b>
Post to: The Treasurer, Mike Wainman, 2 Bankfield Park Avenue, Taylor Hill, Huddersfield, HD4 7QY



**'Before'**



**'After'**





# in focus

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shop, why not call us to see if we are holding a field event near you.

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**in focus DENBY DALE is open 10.00 - 5.00 Monday to Friday and 9.00 - 5.00 on Saturday but CLOSED ON SUNDAY Telephone: 01484 864729**

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