

Volunteer & Farmer Alliance project

68 farms have been paired up with volunteers in the region and surveys are now in full swing. The volunteers have seen some stunning birds such as firecrests, buzzards, corn buntings and lots more. If you would like to be involved in farmland bird surveys in 2009 please contact Emily Field on 01603 660066 or e-mail emily.field@rspb.org.uk

Goodbye to Chris

After 30 years with the RSPB, media man Chris Durdin is moving on to concentrate on his wildlife holidays business. *Involve* asked him to cast his mind back over the last three decades.

I started as one of Trevor Gunton's team in the old Development Department at The Lodge. Working with local groups was the main role; most of the group network was already up and running but I helped set up new groups at Huntingdon, Bury St Edmunds and Woodbridge.

After three years, I transferred to Norwich as Assistant Regional Officer, boosting the regional office team to three! A year later I was invited to appear on the new BBC Radio Norfolk, and I have been a regular voice there ever since.

While time with groups and film shows continued, I was also getting involved in bird protection work. Cranes were starting to nest in the Broads, then a closely guarded secret, and I did a couple of shifts keeping an eye on them. Helping to manage the harrier and stone-curlew projects followed.

When a cluster of terns started to nest at Great Yarmouth, I put in place a protection scheme. That first year, 1986, numbers behind the fence grew rapidly to 55 pairs fledging 95 young, and within five years had topped 200 pairs. With a five-year run of data, English Nature was persuaded that this site, unrecognised in conservation terms, should both be a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and declared as of European importance as a Special Protection Area (SPA). I managed the little tern project for the first 11 years of its now 23-year life. As conservation officer, I was by then involved in planning casework, public inquiries and the push to recognise the value of estuaries.

Managing bird survey work was a theme. Breeding redshanks of saltmarshes in Essex and The Wash; breeding waders and wintering wildfowl of the Broads grazing marshes; and finally waders of the Suffolk River Valleys made up a five-year succession of work, the result of which remain a valuable baseline.

Throughout this time I was often the public face of the RSPB, and for the last 10 years especially so in public affairs. Improving how the RSPB is seen in the farming community was a priority. A huge range of printed material and news releases has crossed my desk. The greatest challenge of these to write was 'A greener future for the Broads', released last year, setting out the RSPB's perspective on the way forward for this unique wetland. It rattled some cages: so it should.

In the last 18 months, 35 staff and three volunteers have completed my one-day media training course, so we're set fair to maintain the high profile so vital for the Society. Long may we thrive.

You can contact Chris via www.honeyguide.co.uk

