Welcome to our monthly update of wildlife sightings and events in the Lewes area.

I hope you all had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year and you are keen to get out in 2012 to experience more of the wonderful wildlife around Lewes. There was certainly no ‘White Christmas’ in December, in fact I only had to scrape my car windscreen once. The seasonal weather did not push great numbers of wintering birds into the area and there was no repeat of last year’s memorable waxwing invasion. However there was still plenty of interest in and around town (see report below).

Now the year has started I’m putting together another programme of walks and events for the coming year. I hope to see you again at some point in 2012.

Michael Blencowe, Community Wildlife Officer, Sussex Wildlife Trust

**Wildlife News for December 2011**

One way of making a winter wildlife walk a bit more exciting is to turn it into a hunt for the eggs of one of our most elusive butterflies. The **brown hairstreak** is ‘on the wing’ throughout August – but you never see them. They spend a great deal of time in the treetops and your best chance of an encounter is to look for an egg-laying female who descends to lay her egg on **blackthorn** suckers. These eggs become relatively easy to see in the winter, like miniature, white, sea urchins against the dark bark. A crowd of people joined me in Plumpton, the eastern edge of this butterfly’s known distribution in Sussex, and we were soon crawling around in the hedgerows. Mark Colvin found the first egg and then others followed. Seven eggs were found in all.

The mild weather throughout December meant that ‘our’ **short-eared owls** were not in a rush to go anywhere. The birds stayed hunting in the fields east of Rodmell and if you were lucky you’d also see other wintering raptors here too; **merlin** and **hen harrier** were reported on a few occasions throughout the month. Interestingly a lone **Bewick’s swan** also lingered in the area through December.
It seems the only day when the weather approached anything vaguely winter-like was the day I chose to lead a walk on the Lewes Brooks. On December 16th I led a group out into the freezing sleet and snow. We were rewarded with peregrine, kingfisher, redwing and a large flock of fieldfare. I had hoped to see more on the Brooks but aside from a flock of lapwing and a redshank there were not the great numbers of wintering ducks I was expecting – the weather just hasn’t been cold enough to send these birds to Sussex. Despite starting the walk in snow and rain we ended up under glorious blue skies.

People were still reporting hedgehog sightings to me in December. Some of these animals were refusing to believe it was winter and were still snuffling around in gardens. Jon Tooley reported bumblebees on the Railway Land too. I was also refusing to believe it was winter when I went last-minute Christmas shopping on December 22nd and saw a red admiral flying up Lewes High Street between the tinsel and Christmas lights. Sarah Rideout reported another in Lewes on the same date.

The final surprise of the year arrived a few days before Christmas when a female goosander appeared on The Ouse right outside the Linklater Pavilion. These smart looking ducks breed in northern Britain and Europe and visit our estuaries in the winter. The goosander has stayed with us over Christmas and the New Year and you can usually see her if you check The Ouse south of Cliffe High Street before 9am.

Upcoming events:

**Friday January 13th**: Jack’s Back – fully booked!

**Sunday January 15th**: Jack’s Back…again! (almost fully booked!)
Lurking in the wet meadows around Lewes is one of Britain’s most elusive birds. Jack Snipe are winter visitors to Sussex but you’ll never see them! We’ll start the walk at the Linklater Pavilion with an illustrated lecture which will teach us more about this secretive species. Then we’ll head out to search along The Ouse for this mythical bird. Limited spaces so booking essential.

**Sunday February 5th**: ‘Ring of Bright Water’ (Lewes Junior Film Club event, £5)
A screening of one of the best wildlife films of all time. Meet at the Linklater Pavilion at 10am for short walk through the Railway Land to the All Saints Centre for the screening.

Sussex Wildlife Trust Courses at the Linklater Pavilion in 2012
The Sussex Wildlife Trust run a wide variety of wildlife courses at venues across Sussex. The following courses are being held in Lewes in 2012. Please see our website for full details of all our courses (www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/events/courses_diary/index.htm) and contact Filma Dyer for course fees and booking information t:01273 497561 email: swtbookings@sussexwt.org.uk

Friday 25th May: An Evening with Bats
Saturday 16th June: A Beginners Guide to Landscape Photography
Friday 6th July: Introduction to Dragonflies and Damselflies
Saturday 21st July: The Conservation, Ecology and Identification of Bumblebees
Saturday 28th July: An Introduction to British Spiders
Sunday 5th August: Butterflies and Moths of Sussex (Final session of 3-part course)
Friday 17th August: Conservation Grazing
Saturday 22nd Sept: Gardening with Wildlife in Mind

Michael Blencowe   michaelblencowe@sussexwt.org.uk   tel: 01273 470880 mobile: 07827830891
Check our website for future walks and events [www.leweswildlife.org.uk](http://www.leweswildlife.org.uk)