

The Twitchers' Guide to Leaders – January 2010

It is almost 5 years since the UERSA Walking Group had their first walk. During that time we have welcomed many new members and it seems appropriate that a resumé of the excellent species 'Walk-Leader' is included at this time.

The term 'Walk-Leader' denotes a stalwart reliable two-legged vertebrate which sallies forth in all weathers followed by a bedraggled mass of similar vertebrates. The flock which is following usually has a loud chattering noise associated with it.



A very early snap of 4 W-Ls. Although not possible to see easily, this was a celebratory cake with two lit candles – the second anniversary of the group in a typically muddy area near Lustleigh. Note wet and muddy conditions and extreme cheerfulness of the species.



Note distinctive headgear on bird on left – same bird is seen in centre of next photo (again with distinctive headgear) but now showing normal extra feature on back. This is **Trevor** who attempts to maintain discipline and order so that the breed will continue to flourish and have a superb following flock increasing in number and happiness in 2010.

Second photo shows large flock feeding in between displays around countryside. Collective chirping always audible at a large distance. This was the largest flock ever seen together (it occurred in December 09) – a count of 30 plus one extra at the final feeding time.

The subspecies are now listed:

Mike and Suzanne



Mike – male, plumage in photo is not typical as bare knees are the usual attire. This is a rare snapshot of winter plumage. Found in all places which normal flocks avoid – heavy mud terrain is typical with a preference for tough ups-and-downs. Here seen in forefront of picture on left enjoying a typical meal of rough-cut whole-grain sandwiches. The flock here is well dispersed since, in rain, each individual tries to find meagre shelter.



Suzanne – female, a useful mate of the above, who brings up the rear on occasions when the Walk-Leader is Mike. She has been known to have great power in her calls when the flock is being led astray from the desired flight path. Here shown in a favourite habitat – mud, the more the better. Typical view of facial expression, never been known to show any emotion other than extreme happiness.

Barbara and John



An inseparable duo, very much a country species especially woodland and heath. Both have been spotted frequently over the last five years – the female usually near a stile. The male always has a broad smile even in adversity but take care. He may be evolving into a predator since often seen with dead pheasants under each wing. Unfortunately both are much occupied with new habitats and now may be seen less frequently.

Patrick and Sue



Frequently spotted in Exmouth area, on cliffs, in railway cuttings and on cycle paths. Have a large nest which is invariably full of superb cakes resulting in the arrival of a large noisy flock. So far strenuous efforts by the following chirpers to clear nest of cakes have failed – they hope to try again next year.

Roger and Roseanne



Central to the group here, the Walk-Leaders are in a typical position ready to enjoy the typical food of this sub-species – cream teas. Usually found in the Quantocks or on Exmoor. They are the most adventurous of the species over-wintering from time to time in Africa. Fortunately invariably return once desire of female for cream teas becomes unbearable. This female has also proved invaluable in directing the flock unerringly through pastures where the male could lead all the followers astray

John B

Male characterised by heavy binoculars used frequently on the days he is not leading allowing much flitting in all directions keeping a look-out for other feathered species. Has cornered the market on train / walking outings. Seen here on right of photo with a couple of invaluable and loyal supporters who always appear if they possibly can.



Frankie

Female, trusted and very chirpy assistant to John, seen here central right showing fine plumage with wind coming from behind. Inclined to chirp incessantly when going up hill – this can cause breathing problems.



Tom



The most long-legged of the species (seated, second from left), inclined to run in ever increasing circles if given the chance. Keen, speedy and accurate in direction.

Trish

Quiet and charming with accurate directional tracking. She was a W-L near Killerton quote 'on a circular walk which had a stiff down slope but no obvious up-slope'! Apparently secretive – no close-up photos exist.

Alan and Mary



Characteristic pose is in left photo – close inspection shows a suspicious drink although W-L assures everyone that the contents are H₂O. A rarer pose is on the right - no alcohol in sight. General homing instinct is towards the nearest pub at ever increasing speed. Female, Mary, provides deep thoughts regarding suitability of terrain when the above male needs to be restrained. Sustains a trusty pace on contours. Regret no action photo available.

New Breeds which will be spotted in the Spring of 2010:

Christine and Jarka



Keen eyes will see from the date that this was a breakaway group of waders at 'Midsummer Madness' but rest assured that these birds love mud and rough territory. Christine (on right) will lead the flock unerringly while her trusty assistant will make sure that no bedraggled stragglers get separated from the main flock.

Pete

A younger member of the main flock formerly found exclusively on Dartmoor. Now seen in other habitats and distinctive leg markings aid identification. Experience as W-L belies his age and expect to see him often in 2010.

You may also notice aforementioned species, Tom, second from left, and the couple of invaluable and loyal supporters.

