



BLUE SKIES on Monday morning made a lovely backdrop for my walk around the reserve to record the daily bird count. On the trail to the Lapwing hide I spy a female reed bunting hanging on a stalk of common reed, tugging at the feathery seed heads of the phragmites with its beak while being tossed up and down by the strong breeze.

Two more reed buntings landed in at the same clump of reeds to feed, a male and another female. The seeds in the reed heads are their main food source on the reserve in the winter. Watching this active trio dining in the bright sunshine was a visual treat. At the lapwing hide I spotted a grey heron. I knew there were snipe out there in hiding.

At the Ramsar hide the sun on the water dazzles my eyes. Squinting I make out a grey heron where the sun hits the water and count 10 shelducks around the islands. I suddenly hear the noodling call of lapwing and see three males jostling each other up in the air, making small display flights. I see these three again from the Sand Martin hide, all on separate islands. These males are likely from the pairs that breed here and will stay here all winter trying to capture territory for future nesting sites. On colder days we do get larger numbers in on the reserve sheltering for the day.

As I enter the Scrape hide my footsteps startle eight snipe resting on the apron of lawn in front of the

hide. They take flight across the water, coming down deeper in the reedbed. I have better luck at the Reebed hide. Halfway down the channel in the shade I spot a snipe feeding among the reeds for several minutes before swimming across the channel and disappearing back into the reeds.

The clear skies mean colder weather so I expect to see an increase in the small numbers of teal and wigeon currently onsite. We have reports of Bewick's swans arriving further up the Arun valley over the weekend. We get around 30 in the valley every winter. When the temperatures drop and the water starts icing up around the valley we should see the swans come in to roost here at Arundel.



Secretive snipe reff
Photo: Paul Stevens

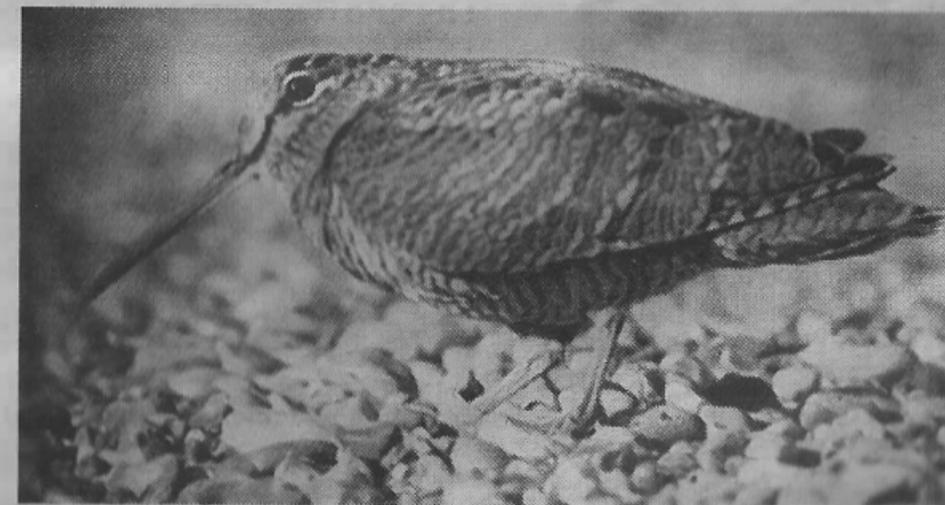
The woodcock

Just one of the birds that require quiet woodlands throughout the winter is the woodcock, pictured here on a shingle bank after having just arrived on migration from Russia.

Binsted Wood is damp and very rich in invertebrates, so the woodcock finds plenty of food.

It also finds camouflage on the forest floor because its plumage matches the colour of winter leaves.

Most woodcock leave



in the spring making the flight back to Siberia in 24 hours non-stop.

Many return on the November full moon when

the wind usually goes easterly which aids their travel. Binsted Woods is ideal sanctuary for these beautiful birds.