

# Cambridgeshire Bird Club



E-Bulletin 34 April 2016

(The records in this bulletin are unchecked and may be revised at a later date)



Cattle Egret at Chesterton photo: Neil Bramwell.

## HEADLINES

**CATTLE EGRET\*** Chesterton Fen from 8<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup>.

**WHITE STORK\*** Fen Drayton Lakes on 1<sup>st</sup> and Paxton Pits on 21<sup>st</sup>, (this latter bird was Polish ringed and had collided with power lines and later been brought to UK for rehabilitation - also seen previously at Welney); 2 flyovers on the same day, Ouse Washes one circling high over Pymoor on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Milton a flyover on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**SPOONBILL\*** Ouse Washes Earith on 9<sup>th</sup>, Eldernell on 14<sup>th</sup>, March Farmers on 17<sup>th</sup>.

**ARCTIC SKUA** Paxton Pits - dark phase bird on 29<sup>th</sup>.

**LITTLE TERN** Ferry Meadows CP on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER** Ferry Meadows CP on 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **Other records**

*All records below refer to the month at the head of the E-bulletin and where no numbers are given the record relates to single birds.*

*Where there is an asterisk after the name of the species this indicates that it is necessary to send a description to the County Recorder before the record will be accepted.*

**Weather** *The month began with variations of warm-cool, sunshine and showers but a westerly airstream aided migration both inward and outward. By mid-month the wind had turned to the north but the pattern continued with both warmth in the sun and cool without it. Overall a rather cool month with, once again, long spells with northerly winds and unseasonably cold to end with. Interestingly this does not seem to have hindered early arrivals with dates largely similar to 2015 despite last year being a warmer spring, indeed some waders arrived earlier and only Swifts and Reed Warblers were notably later (by a week).*

### **Wildfowl**

**Mute Swan** Swaffham Prior Fen 23 on 5<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 8 on 11<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 7 on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Bewick's Swan** Ouse Washes a single on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sutton Gault 2 on 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Whooper Swan** Ouse Washes 52 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, c80 on 10<sup>th</sup>, Sutton Gault 13 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 16 on 8<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes 31 on 8<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen the escaped bird on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**White-fronted Goose** Ouse Washes on 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Greylag Goose** Cam Washes Upware 43 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 52 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen maximum 42 on 18<sup>th</sup> 2 broods on 30<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits pair with goslings on 21<sup>st</sup>, Fowlmere NR 45 on 27<sup>th</sup>, Whittlesford GP 39 on 27<sup>th</sup>, Trumpington Clay Farm 15 on 27<sup>th</sup> (3 nests), Burwell Fen maximum 51 (11 pairs) on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Canada Goose** Cam Washes Upware 4 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 15 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 24 (4 pairs), Trumpington Clay Farm 14 on 12<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen 16 on 30<sup>th</sup> (6 pairs).

**Barnacle Goose** Whittlesford GP 3 on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Egyptian Goose** Paxton Pits 2 on 16<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Waterbeach on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Shelduck** Fen Drayton Lakes 2 on 9<sup>th</sup>, one on 16<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 2 on 5<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits a pair on several dates maximum 3 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 10 on 13<sup>th</sup> (5 pairs), Wicken Fen maximum 4 on 9<sup>th</sup> (2 pairs), Fowlmere NR a pair on 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Mandarin** Ouse Fen 2 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Wimpole 2 on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Wigeon** Wicken Fen 43 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 6 on 9<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 20<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware c50 on 5<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 23 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3 on 20<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 3 males on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Gadwall** Wicken Fen maximum 19 on 9<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 35 on 24<sup>th</sup> (12 pairs), Cam Washes Upware 10 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 3 on 28<sup>th</sup>.



Drake Gadwall at Paxton Pits photo: Phil Smith.

**Teal** Wicken Fen 63 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 48 on 18<sup>th</sup>, 23 on 30<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 14 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 6 on 20<sup>th</sup>, Fowlmere NR 4 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 16 on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Mallard** Burwell Fen maximum 27 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen maximum 35 on 9<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 15 on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Pintail** March Farmers 112 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen on 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Garganey** Berry Fen on 2<sup>nd</sup>, - first of the year, Wicken Fen a pair on 5<sup>th</sup>, thereafter reported from: Burwell Fen (maximum 4), Fen Drayton Lakes, Nene Washes, Ouse Washes, Wicken Fen.

**Shoveler** Wicken Fen maximum 32 on 18<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 23 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 10 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 20+ on 7<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 3 on 27<sup>th</sup>, a pair on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-crested Pochard** Paxton Pits 2-3 on several dates, maximum 5.

**Pochard** Burwell Fen 2 pairs plus 3 females on 7<sup>th</sup>, 4 on 11<sup>th</sup>, one on 24<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Waterbeach 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Tufted Duck** Wicken Fen 8 on 5<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 30 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Trumpington Clay Farm 14 on 12<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, March Farmers 290 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Fowlmere NR 4 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Whittlesford GP 4 on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Scaup** Ouse Washes the bird from March still present until at least the 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Scoter** Grafham Water on 4<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 11<sup>th</sup>, a single on 18<sup>th</sup>, 4 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Goldeneye** Ouse Washes on 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Gamebirds**

**Grey Partridge** Haddenham/Aldreth Fens 4 pairs on 20<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Waterbeach 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Cormorants**

**Cormorant** Burwell Fen maximum 13 on 11<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 2 on 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Egrets and herons**

**Bittern** reported from six likely breeding sites.

**Little Egret** *reported from:* Burwell Fen (12), Cam Washes, Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (2), Ouse Washes (28), Paxton Pits (4), Swaffham Prior Fen and Wicken Fen (roost of 8-10).

**Great White Egret** Ouse Washes singles on several dates maximum 2 on 11<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Fen on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Farcet Fen on 4<sup>th</sup>, Sutton Gault on 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Heron** Wicken Fen 12 (6 nests) on 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **Grebes**

**Little Grebe** Wicken Fen 6 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 18<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware on 5<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 13<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 4 pairs on several dates, Trumpington Clay Farm 3 on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebe** Wicken Fen on 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 3 on 13<sup>th</sup>, a pair on 24<sup>th</sup>, Trumpington Clay Farm on 12<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, Whittlesford GP pair (nest) on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-necked Grebe** Grafham Water the bird from February still present until at least 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-necked Grebe** one at an undisclosed site in early April.

### **Raptors**

**Red Kite** Cambourne on 8<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 11<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 5 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 14<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 18<sup>th</sup>, Thriplow on 16<sup>th</sup>, Buckden 6 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen on 24<sup>th</sup>, Upwood 2 on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Marsh Harrier** *reported from:* Burwell Fen/Wicken Fen (7), Fen Drayton Lakes (3+), Ouse Fen (4), and two other sites.

**Hen Harrier** Swaffham Prior a flyover on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Burwell Fen a ringtail, on 7<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen 3 ringtails on 9<sup>th</sup> and 2 on 10<sup>th</sup>, a male on 11<sup>th</sup>, Devil's Dyke (Burwell end) a male on 16<sup>th</sup> - ?latest date.

**Buzzard** *reported from:* Babraham, Barton (4), Burwell Fen area (8), Chippenham Fen, Fowlmere, Fulbourn, Haddenham, Hemingford Grey (4), Melbourn, Paxton Pits (3+), Six Mile Bottom, Upware, Upwood (5+), Wandlebury, Wicken Fen (4).



Common Buzzard at Paxton Pits photo: Phil Smith.

**Osprey** Farcet Fen flyover on 4<sup>th</sup> - the first of the year, Maxey GP one possibly two on 5<sup>th</sup>, Ferry Meadows CP on 10<sup>th</sup>, Guyhirn a flyover on 11<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 19<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits a flyover on 22<sup>nd</sup>, Ely a flyover on 29<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Rails and crane***

**Water Rail** *reported from:* Little Wilbraham Fen (5+), Wicken Fen (2).

**Moorhen** Cam Washes Upware 5 on 5<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 6 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Coot** Cam Washes Upware 16 on 5<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen maximum 24 on 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Crane** Ouse Washes on several dates maximum 5, Wicken Fen/Burwell Fen 1-6 on several dates, elsewhere individuals, mainly immatures reported flying over.

### ***Waders***

**Avocet** Ouse Washes 2 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, single on 10<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 27<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 2 on 21<sup>st</sup>, Cam Washes Waterbeach 20 on 22<sup>nd</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 3 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Burwell Fen on 24<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes 4 on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Oystercatcher** Ouse Washes 12 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Grafham Water 2 on 6<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits maximum 8 on 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 5 on 11<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Golden Plover** Maxey GP 175 on 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Plover** Paxton Pits on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Ouse Washes a flyover on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Lapwing** Paxton Pits on several dates maximum 6 on 11<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Waterbeach 5 on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Little Ringed Plover** Paxton Pits 1-5 on several dates, an undisclosed site a pair in early April, Maxey GP 2 on 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 15<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, Godmanchester 3 flyovers on 16<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes on 16<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Ringed Plover** Paxton Pits 2-3 on several dates from 16<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Whimbrel** Paxton Pits 6 and Grafham Water 8 on 17<sup>th</sup>, first of the year [earliest in 2015 April 20<sup>th</sup>], then Paxton Pits one on 18<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes a flyover on 21<sup>st</sup>, Burwell Fen on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 3 on 22<sup>nd</sup>, Nene Washes on 23<sup>rd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup>, Witcham Gravel 2 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 2 on 28<sup>th</sup>.



Whimbrel at Grafham Water photo: Ian Dawson

**Curlew** Burwell Fen on 7<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 13<sup>th</sup>, Berry Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes on 24<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen 26<sup>th</sup>, Dullingham on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Black tailed Godwit** Fen Drayton Lakes on 1st, Nene Washes 2,000+ on 2<sup>nd</sup>, c1,100 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 200 at March Farmers on 17<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes 500+ on 3<sup>rd</sup>, c700 on 10<sup>th</sup>, c800 on 12<sup>th</sup>, Sutton Gault 520 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 15+ on 6<sup>th</sup>, 40+ on 8<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 16 on 27<sup>th</sup>, Fowlmere NR on 4<sup>th</sup> - an unusual record this species is rarely recorded south of Cambridge, Paxton Pits 2 on 12<sup>th</sup>, single on 24<sup>th</sup>, Berry Fen 4 on 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** Eldernell c25 and Paxton Pits on 11<sup>th</sup> - first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 17<sup>th</sup>*], Nene Washes on 23<sup>rd</sup>, 7 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Turnstone** Ferry Meadows CP on 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Ruff** Ouse Washes 23 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 'a few' on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Sutton Gault on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6 on 8<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 11<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Berry Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes 18 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Sanderling** Paxton Pits on 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> - first of the year.

**Dunlin** Ouse Washes 11 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Paxton Pits on several dates from 11<sup>th</sup> maximum 16+ on 30<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes on 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 11<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, Berry Fen 2 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes 3 on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Common Sandpiper** Trumpington Clay Farm on 12<sup>th</sup> - first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 16<sup>th</sup>*], Paxton Pits on 13<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 5 on 24<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes on 14<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 16<sup>th</sup>, 3 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, one on 28<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 4 on 18<sup>th</sup>, one on 28<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes 2 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Green Sandpiper** Ouse Washes 3 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Chesterton Fen 2 on 8<sup>th</sup>, Maxey GP on 11<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen on 12<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 13<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, Maxey Cut 2 on 19<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes 5 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Spotted Redshank** Wicken Fen on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Nene Washes on 7<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Greenshank** Eldernell 3 on 11<sup>th</sup>, - first of the year, Paxton Pits on 12<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup> then 1-3 for the rest of the month, Portholme/Godmanchester 3 on 16<sup>th</sup>, Berry Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 3 on 21<sup>st</sup>, Ouse Washes 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Nene Washes 4 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes on 25<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Wood Sandpiper** Nene Washes and Paxton Pits on 23<sup>rd</sup> - first of the year, Paxton Pits on 25<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Redshank** Wicken Fen maximum 5 on 13<sup>th</sup>, Cam Washes Upware 2 on 5<sup>th</sup>, Chesterton Fen on 8<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen maximum 2 on 13<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on several dates maximum 8 on 13<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Snipe reported from:** Burwell Fen, Cam Washes Waterbeach (5), Ouse Fen, Paxton Pits, Wicken Fen (3 drumming).

## ***Terns and gulls***

**Black Tern** Grafham Water 5+ on 14<sup>th</sup> - first of the year [*earliest in 2015 - April 23<sup>rd</sup>*].

**Sandwich Tern** Ouse Washes a flyover on 3<sup>rd</sup> - first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 24<sup>th</sup>*], Fen Drayton Lakes on 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup>, Berry Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>, Ferry Meadows CP on 20<sup>th</sup>.

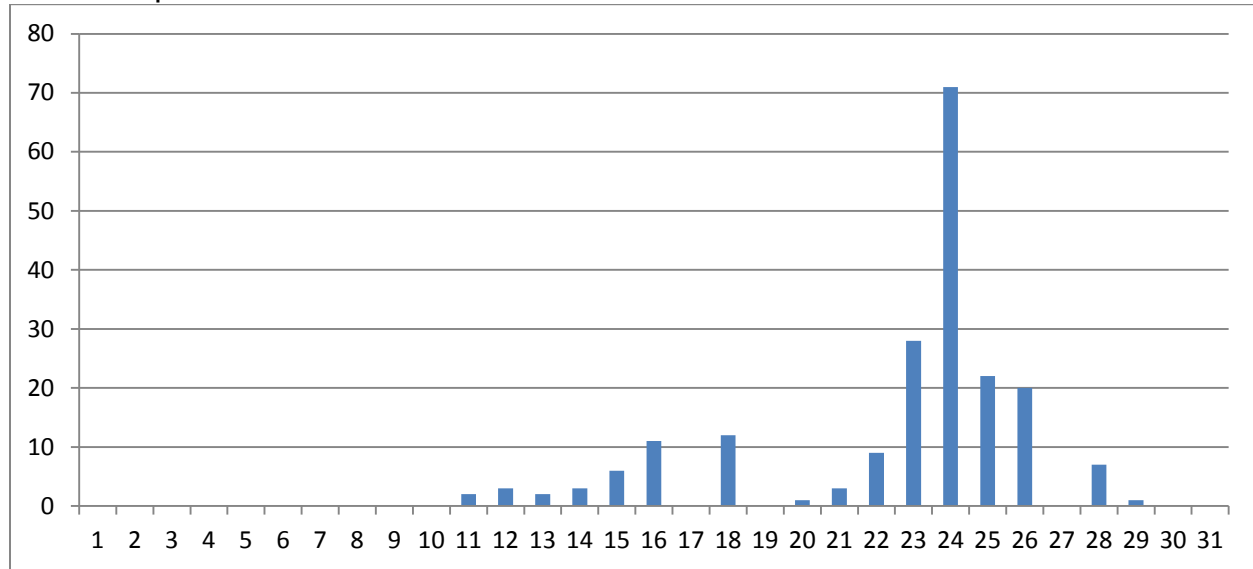
**Common Tern** Ferry Meadows CP on 11<sup>th</sup>, Maxey GP on 11<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 2 on 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 2 on 12<sup>th</sup>, 26 on 15<sup>th</sup>, 38 on 21<sup>st</sup>, 70+ on 27<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes 6 on 14<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 21 on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Arctic Tern** Ferry Meadows CP on 11<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 11<sup>th</sup>, - the first of the year, then 3 on 12<sup>th</sup>, 2-3 on 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>, 9 on 18<sup>th</sup>, 3+ on 21<sup>st</sup>, 59 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 3 on 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, Ferry



Meadows CP 5 on 16<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes 3 on 16<sup>th</sup>, 15+ on 23<sup>rd</sup>, 10 on 24<sup>th</sup>, 10+ on 25<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen 3 flyovers on 18<sup>th</sup>, Earith on 20<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes 7 on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2 flyovers on 24<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 9 on 25<sup>th</sup>, Cambridge Research Park 11 flyovers on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Nene Washes 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Longstanton c20 at new lake on 26<sup>th</sup>.

### Arctic Terns in April



**Black-headed Gull** Burwell Fen maximum c100 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 56 on 11<sup>th</sup>, Trumpington Clay Farm 104 on 12<sup>th</sup>, 44 on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Gull** Fen Drayton Lakes an adult on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sutton Gault 6 on 6<sup>th</sup>, on the 11<sup>th</sup>: Eldernell c10, Ferry Meadows CP 2, Grafham Water 13, Maxey GP 5, Ouse Washes 6; on the 12<sup>th</sup>: Burwell Fen 2, Fen Drayton Lakes 6, Grafham Water 6, Ouse Washes 8, Paxton Pits 11,; on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes 2; on 14<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 2; on the 15<sup>th</sup> Ferry Meadows CP one, on the 16<sup>th</sup> Grafham Water 6, then a single on 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Mediterranean Gull** Fen Drayton Lakes 2 on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Burwell Fen 2 on 13<sup>th</sup>, one on 24<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen 2 on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Herring Gull** Burwell Fen 2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Yellow-legged Gull** Paxton Pits on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Black-backed Gull** Fowlmere NR an immature on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and presumed the same Whittlesford GP on 27<sup>th</sup>.

## ***Doves, cuckoo, owls and kingfisher***

**Turtle Dove** Cambridge Research Park on 17<sup>th</sup> - first of the year (apart from the Aldreth long stay bird), [*earliest in 2015 - April 21<sup>st</sup>*], Murrow on 18<sup>th</sup>, Fowlmere NR on 21<sup>st</sup>, Paxton Pits on 22<sup>nd</sup>, Aldreth on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Cuckoo** an arrival on 17<sup>th</sup> with birds noted at: Swaffham Bulbeck, Waterbeach, Wilbraham Common and Burwell Fen/Wicken Fen (and on several dates thereafter), [*earliest in 2015 - April 16<sup>th</sup>*], then on 18<sup>th</sup> at Castor Hanglands, on 19<sup>th</sup> at Wimpole, Eaton Socon on 20<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes (2), Ouse Washes and Paxton Pits on 21<sup>st</sup>, Maxey GP and Ferry Meadows CP on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Barn Owl** *reported from:* Burwell Fen Wicken Fen (2).

*Road deaths:* on A 14 near Conington on 4<sup>th</sup>, A10 Milton on 18<sup>th</sup>,

**Little Owl** an undisclosed location on 20<sup>th</sup>, Swaffham Prior on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Tawny Owl** Hare Park 2 on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Short-eared Owl** *reported from:* Buckden, Burwell Fen (3), Fen Drayton Lakes, Maxey GP, Nene Washes (2), Paxton Pits - birds still being reported at the end of the month.

**Swift** Ferry Meadows CP and Paxton Pits on 21<sup>st</sup>, - first of the year [*earliest in 2015 - April 14<sup>th</sup>*], then Fen Drayton Lakes 10+ on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes 6 on 22<sup>nd</sup>, Burwell Fen c20 on 24<sup>th</sup>, 14 on 25<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 15+ on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Kingfisher** *reported from:* Paxton Pits (2) and Wicken Fen (2).

## ***Falcons and parrots***

**Merlin** Cottenham on 12<sup>th</sup>, March Farmers on 17<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen on 20<sup>th</sup> - last of the winter?

**Hobby** Eldernell on 17<sup>th</sup> - first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 17<sup>th</sup>*], Wicken Fen on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Burwell Fen on 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Peregrine** Wicken fen on 5<sup>th</sup>, Hemingford Grey on 10<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes 2 on 12<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Ring-necked Parakeet\*** Witcham a pair on 14<sup>th</sup>.

## ***Shrikes and corvids***

**Great Grey Shrike\*** near Crowland but in Cambs on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Jackdaw** Burwell Fen 36 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Carrion Crow** Burwell fen 15 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Raven** 3 pairs with young all on the western county boundary plus roaming birds as follows: Morborne Hill a pair on 10<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 17<sup>th</sup>, Castor Hanglands 2 flyovers on 18<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 2 flyovers on 23<sup>rd</sup> and on 29<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Crests, tits and larks***

**Goldcrest** Witcham 6 singing males on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Firecrest** Paxton Pits one photographed on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Bearded Tit** *reported from:* Little Wilbraham Fen (3+) and Wicken Fen (3+).

### ***Hirundines and warblers***

**Sand Martin** Grafham Water c50 on 6<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits c100 on 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Swallow** reported widely from the beginning of the month, Paxton Pits c80 on 15<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 30+ on 14<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 100+ on 15<sup>th</sup>, c120 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**House Martin** reported from the beginning of the month, [earliest in 2015 April 1<sup>st</sup>], then large counts as follows: Paxton Pits c60 on 15<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen c70 on 24<sup>th</sup>.



Hirundines at Grafham Water photo: James Hanlon

**Cetti's Warbler** *reported from:* Cambridge Research Park, Fen Drayton Lakes (21 - a new county record), Fowlmere NR, Little Wilbraham Fen, Marsh Lane GP (2), Maxey Cut, Milton CP, Ouse Fen (3), Paxton Pits (4), Sutton Gault, Wicken Fen (8).

**Wood Warbler\*** Grafham Water on 13<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> at least, Bainton Pits on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Chiffchaff** general arrival took place in the final week of March for example 9 birds caught in a part of Wicken Fen on April 1st.

**Willow Warbler** Fen Drayton Lakes 2 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, thereafter widely reported.

**Blackcap** Chippenham Fen up to 5 on 5<sup>th</sup> part of a general arrival in the first week.

**Garden Warbler** Paxton Pits on 23<sup>rd</sup> - first of the year, Fen Drayton Lakes on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Lesser Whitethroat** Wardy Hill Drove on 11<sup>th</sup> - first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 15<sup>th</sup>*], Marsh Lane GP on 13<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 2 on 13<sup>th</sup>, Cambridge on 13<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes on 14<sup>th</sup>, Little Wilbraham Fen 2 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Whitethroat** Fen Drayton Lakes on 10<sup>th</sup> - the first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 12<sup>th</sup>*], Paxton Pits on 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Grasshopper Warbler** Wicken Fen 4 on 10<sup>th</sup> - first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 11<sup>th</sup>*], Fen Drayton Lakes on 13<sup>th</sup>, Little Wilbraham Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Fen on 17<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen one retrapped on 17<sup>th</sup> had been ringed there in May 2015, Litlington on 19<sup>th</sup>, thereafter general arrival. Also recorded at: Bainton Pits, Clopton, Cottenham, Grafham Water.

**Sedge Warbler** Ouse Fen and Wicken Fen on 2<sup>nd</sup> - the first of the year, [*earliest in 2015 - April 8<sup>th</sup>*], Woodwalton Fen 2 on 4<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes on 5<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 2 on 10<sup>th</sup>, thereafter a general arrival.



Sedge Warbler at Fowlmere NR : photo by Garth Peacock.

**Reed Warbler** Burwell Fen on 11<sup>th</sup>- first of the year, [earliest in 2015 April 8<sup>th</sup>], Cambridge Research Park and Paxton Pits on 17<sup>th</sup>, thereafter widely reported.

### **Thrushes**

**Ring Ouzel** Cambridge on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Upware on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Eldernell on 11<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes on 11<sup>th</sup>, Great Wilbraham Common a male on 14<sup>th</sup>, and one (sex not given) on 17<sup>th</sup>, Witcham on 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup>, Moonshine Gap 2 on 26<sup>th</sup>, a more modest total than in 2015 (see below).

*Ring Ouzel: spring records in recent years*

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
46	24	4	12	8	14	15	15	60

**Fieldfare** Chatteris 3 on 6<sup>th</sup>, Sutton Gault 11 on 7<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes 9 on 23<sup>rd</sup> - latest of the winter?

**Nightingale** Marsh Lane GP on 11<sup>th</sup> - first of the year, [earliest in 2015 April 7<sup>th</sup>], then 3 on 13<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 5 on 13<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 13<sup>th</sup>, 3 on 17<sup>th</sup>, Castor Hanglands on 18<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes on 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>, Wicken Fen on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Little Wilbraham Fen on 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Starts and chats**

**Black Redstart** Granta Park a female on 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Redstart** on 10<sup>th</sup> singles at Cherry Hinton Chalk pits, Dogsthorpe GP, Fowlmere NR and 2 at Moonshine Gap - the first of the year, RSPB Grange Farm Knapwell on 13<sup>th</sup>, Eldernell a female on 17<sup>th</sup> and on 30<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water a female on 17<sup>th</sup>, , Middle Fen a male on 19<sup>th</sup>, Fen Drayton Lakes a male on 19<sup>th</sup>, Fowlmere NR a female on 19<sup>th</sup>, Wardy Hill a male on 19<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen a female caught and ringed on 24<sup>th</sup>, Pymoor a female on 24<sup>th</sup>, Litlington a female on 29<sup>th</sup>, Aldreth on 30<sup>th</sup>.

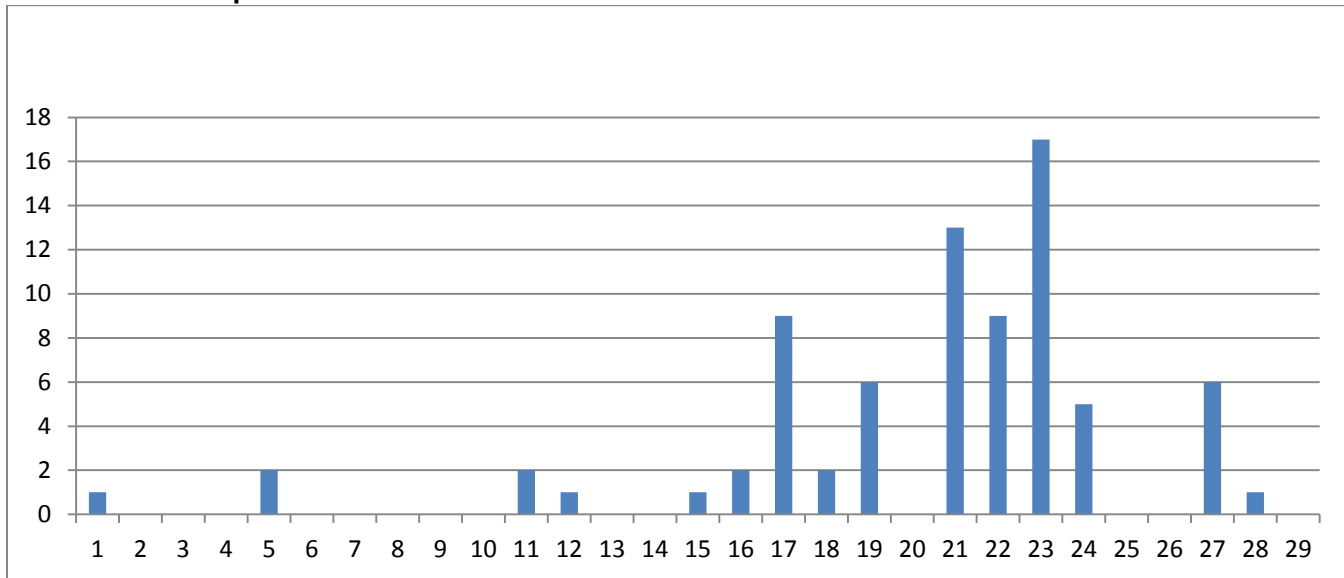
**Whinchat** Burwell Fen a male on 19<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 3 on 25<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits 3 on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2 on 24<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup>, one on 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, Witcham Gravel 3 on 25<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Stonechat** Wicken Fen on 5<sup>th</sup>, a pair on 20<sup>th</sup>, single on 25<sup>th</sup> and 2 males on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Wheatear** Fen Drayton Lakes a female on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bottisham Lock 2 on 8<sup>th</sup>, Maxey GP on 12<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 3 on 19<sup>th</sup>, one on 27<sup>th</sup>, Ouse Washes on 12<sup>th</sup>, 4 on 24<sup>th</sup>, North Bank on 13<sup>th</sup>, Burwell-Upware on 17<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 4 on 18<sup>th</sup>, 5+ on 23<sup>rd</sup>, 6 on 24<sup>th</sup>, one on 27<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 18<sup>th</sup>, Wicken Fen 4 on 18<sup>th</sup>, Maxey Cut on 19<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Trumpington on 19<sup>th</sup>, Ferry Meadows CP 3 males on 20<sup>th</sup>, Haddenham/Aldreth Fens 3 on 20<sup>th</sup>, 5+ on 24<sup>th</sup>, Cambridge Research Park 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, Tubney Fen 7

on 22<sup>nd</sup>, Cam Washes Waterbeach 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 4 more along Waterbeach Long Drove, Cottenham on 24<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 24<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 25<sup>th</sup>, one on 29<sup>th</sup>, Tubney Fen 5 on 25<sup>th</sup>, Waterbeach Fen 4 males and 2 females on 28<sup>th</sup>.

### Wheatears in April



### *Sparrows, wagtails and pipits*

#### Wagtail subspecies/hybrids etc.

Any fieldguide will give illustrations of the variant types of both Yellow and Pied Wagtail. Briefly 'our' wagtails differ slightly from those found on the Continent. The continental Pied is called the White Wagtail and the continental Yellow is called the Blue-headed (for obvious reasons) BUT hybrids between Yellow and Blue-headed Wagtails have been given the name 'Channel' Wagtail. A useful article can be found at:

<http://www.manchesterbirding.com/flavawagtailsarticle.htm>

**Yellow Wagtail** Ouse Washes 3 on 2<sup>nd</sup> - the first of the year, Paxton Pits on 4<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 2 on 6<sup>th</sup>, thereafter widely reported, Paxton Pits 24 in nearby field on 16<sup>th</sup>.

'Channel Wagtail' Ouse Washes on 25<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water on 28<sup>th</sup>, Cottenham a possible on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Wagtail** Cambridge St Catherine's College mid-month.

**Pied Wagtail** Paxton Pits 15 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

'White Wagtail' Colne on 9<sup>th</sup>, Etton Road Pits 3 on 9<sup>th</sup>, Haddenham Long Drove on 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, Grafham Water 3 on 16<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 28<sup>th</sup>, Ferry Meadows CP on 18<sup>th</sup>, Burwell Fen 3 on 18<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Paxton Pits on 18<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 23<sup>rd</sup>, one on 28<sup>th</sup>, Nene Washes 2 on 24<sup>th</sup>, Witcham Gravel on 25<sup>th</sup>, Cottenham on 30<sup>th</sup>.



White Wagtail at Paxton Pits: photo by James Hanlon.

**Rock Pipit** Sutton Gault into the roost on 7th.

**Water Pipit** Ouse Washes singles on several dates, then 15 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 46 at Sutton Gault on 7<sup>th</sup> - a county record.

### ***Finches and buntings***

**Brambling** Farcet Fen on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Hare Park on 11<sup>th</sup>, RSPB Hope Farm Knapwell on 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Goldfinch** Burwell Fen 32 on 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Lesser Redpoll** Cottenham c 25 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, c10 on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Corn Bunting** Ferry Meadows CP 8 on 20<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Exotica***

**Black Swan** Paxton Pits on 17<sup>th</sup>, St Ives on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Ross's Goose** the usual bird at Wicken Fen on 18<sup>th</sup> (see below).



Ross's Goose and Greylag at Wicken Fen: photo by Simon Stirrup.

***Contributors:***

Colin Addington, Richard Astle, Malcolm Ausden, Louise Bacon, Geoff Barlow, Dave Barton, Marie Barton, Malcolm Bell, Peter Bircham, Mark Brandon, Richard Broughton, Chris Brown, Mike Burdekin, Ian Burfield, Howard Butler, Gill Butt, Saimon Clark, Ade Cooper, Steve Cooper, Roger Cresswell, Martin Davis, Ian Dawson, Tim Dee, Ian and Sheila Dickerson, Brendan Doe, Steve Dudley, Ian Ellis, Mike Everett, Paul Gallagher, Andrew Gardener, Don Gardener, David Griffiths, Derek Gruar, Trevor Gunton, Lyn Guy, James Hanlon, Andy Hannaford, James Harding-Morris, Ron Harrold, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Jon Heath, Jem Holding, Michael Holdsworth, Ken Hook, David Hopkins, Malcolm Housden, Carl Howard, Neil Howard, Frank James, Andy Jennings, Colin Kirtland, Charlie Kitchin, David and Sallie Jones, Vince Lea, Diana Leech, Keith Lievesley, Steve Lonsdale, Robert Mansfield, Owen and Monica Marks, Paul Mason, Matt Mellor, Andy Merryweather, Martin O'Leary, Daniel Osbourne, Graeme Reed, John Roote, Tony Rowe, Simon Stirrup, Brian Stone, Jonathan Taylor, Paul Taylor, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne and the Wicken Fen Group, Bob Titman, Erica Towner, Calum Urquhart, Hugh Venables, Luke Wake, John Walsh, Mark Ward, Robin Ward, Iain Webb, Mike Weedon, Jamie Wells, Steve West, Kevin Wilson, Mathew Wilson, Hugh Wright, Barbara York and Christoph Zöckler.

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**Photos:** The Club's website has an abundance of high quality photographs of small birds taken this April, worth checking it out and marvelling at the skill of the photographers. Ed.



Wren at Fen Drayton Lakes photo: Colin Brown

### ***Cambridgeshire Spotted Flycatcher Project 2016***

The CBC is planning to continue our survey of breeding Spotted Flycatchers into 2016.

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#### **Last year's results, and the challenges of Spofling**

Over a hundred observers provided records of Cambs Spotted Flycatchers in 2015. My thanks to you all. I tried to follow up most recent breeding records, and a number of us systematically searched traditional sites.

38 pairs were **confirmed** breeding, either by nests found, or by very recently fledged and dependent young being recorded nearby where a pair had been present earlier. A further four pairs **probably** bred where they were recorded at the same site on more than one occasion. An additional eight pairs may **possibly** have bred; this included single birds more than once or pairs just once at suitable or traditional sites. The distribution of pairs was fairly even throughout the county outside of the large towns and cities, with a tendency towards the north and west - Hunts villages along the north-western A14 and A1 corridors scored particularly well.

Flycatchers are now so thinly distributed - only a handful of tetrads had more than a single record - that it will be increasingly difficult for birds to intercept one another. A notable feature of early May records was of birds, presumably returning males, conspicuous or singing at a traditional site

for a few days before disappearing. There were perhaps twelve such cases. Equally nests were still being found, and noisy young family parties reported, late into early August. This may suggest that some roving birds do persevere and eventually hook up with a partner. It is possible that such late nests were second broods or repeat attempts, but they could also have been just very late getting started.

Unlike tits, for example, which need to synchronise breeding with a invertebrate food source on a fixed timetable, Flycatchers can successfully raise young all summer long, provided they have a supply of largish prey. In some cases this food supply (butterflies, hoverflies) was provided by just one flowering bush or plant; or by a small stream. Many never ranged further than 50 or so metres from their nest-site. Others fed high in the canopy. Given how unobtrusive and silent the birds can be, it's likely that the species is under-recorded. With a pair on the back of a house or in a large garden you certainly cannot rely on them ever to be audible or visible from the road; though you may just be lucky to get one on some wires or an aerial. Many house-owners don't even know that the birds are there, or if they do what they are. Even when adults are present, RSPB fieldwork suggests that only one visit in three will necessarily detect them. For my part, I have on several occasions visited nests for ringing without seeing either one of the parent birds or hearing alarm calls. In a number of cases birds were present, but couldn't be pinned down despite considerable effort - only for a fledged family to pop up a few weeks later in precisely the same location.

Nests were predominantly found in two categories of habitat: rural village gardens (not necessarily large ones) with good herbaceous plantings and often with some water; and parkland with good nettle or umbellifer patches (pollarded limes make popular nest sites). Searches of mature woodland were often fruitless, but by and large woods are rarely visited by birders in summer, so this could just be a recording bias.

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If you just see even a single Spotted Flycatcher after 1 June this year, it will be worth following up. Do you know of a pair nesting near you this year, or of a traditional site which may be being used again?

Please email

[spofl@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk](mailto:spofl@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk)

with any information you have, including records of single birds; and please provide a map reference, preferably to 100m (as TL000000). Follow your leads up and keep us informed or we can arrange to follow up if you don't have time yourself.

Michael Holdsworth

[secretary@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk](mailto:secretary@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk)

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**\*\*\*Outdoor Meeting:** Nene Washes on May 27<sup>th</sup> - book with Vicki Harley.

**Next indoor meeting:**

Cottenham Village College

[13th May:](#) *A Very Fine Swan Indeed: Art, science and the unfeathered bird* by Katrina Von Grouw .



*A Very Fine Swan Indeed: Art, science and the unfeathered bird* by Katrina Von Grouw

The book, *The Unfeathered Bird*, originally intended as a manual for bird artists, has been 25 years in the making. Only much later did it blossom into something far more ambitious. A world away from textbooks and diagrams, this is a work equally intended for scientists and artists, indeed anyone with an appreciation of birds or an interest in their adaptations and behavior. It includes illustrations of 200 species, all made from actual specimens, many in lifelike positions. Virtually all the complete skeletons were prepared and reconstructed at home from specimens donated from zoos, wildlife hospitals and conservation charities. Join Katrina as she explains her aims and inspirations, shares her insights about birds beneath their feathers, and relates how her home was turned upside down as more and more specimens joined the queue.

Katrina van Grouw is a graduate of the Royal College of Art. Her formal education was in Printmaking and Natural History Illustration, but she's also a dedicated ornithologist, a former Natural History Museum curator, a qualified bird ringer, and an experienced preparator of natural history specimens.

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### ***CBC Conference on rare breeding birds***

Here's a date for your diary. The next Cambridgeshire Bird Club Conference will be held on Sept 24th at Cottenham Village College. The theme this year is Rare Breeding Birds. Many of us are motivated to see rare birds, but when they are breeding they present a dilemma. If we announce it to the world, will the extra attention they receive cause additional stress and disturbance? Will someone try and get too close for that photograph? Worse still, will news get to egg-collectors or other miscreants? But if we don't tell anyone, will we be accused of suppressing information? Should site managers or landowners be told so that the breeding site can be protected? If the progress of the breeding attempt is to be monitored, do we need helpers? Monitoring is of crucial importance if we are to learn anything about the status of our breeding birds.

Our Rare breeders are changing - in the last few years we have added Bittern, Little Egret & Crane to the regular list, while Black-winged Stilt and Great White Egrets are making their first steps to possible breeding; at the same time Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has nationally been added to the RBBP list and locally we have lost another RBBP addition, Willow tit.

This conference will have speakers from the National Rare Breeding Bird Panel, as well as experts who have studied some of these species. We will also hear from the BTO and from site managers with a suite of RBBP species on their reserves, and find out how they manage their reserves and monitor progress. Full details and a booking form will appear in the July Bulletin / E-bulletin but we want to give advance notice so that interested members can put the date in their diaries. Of anyone has any studies would like to present (poster or talk) please contact Vicki or Vince

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Wood Pigeon at Cambourne photo: James Hanlon

## **WICKEN FEN (BIRD RINGING) GROUP**

### **Brief news for April 2016**

There were netting sessions at the Fen on 11 different days in April, although some of these were small-scale and targeted at Willow Warblers. The month's ringing total was 122; a further 117 different birds were retrapped, so the overall total for the month was 239. Individual species totals (the first figure new birds, the second retraps) were:

Stock Dove	2, 0	Reed Warbler	1, 0
Barn Owl	0, 2	Treecreeper	1, 3
Blue Tit	4, 19	Wren	9, 11
Great Tit	0, 20	Blackbird	3, 7
Bearded Tit	1, 0	Song Thrush	1, 0
Cetti's Warbler	3, 2	Robin	3, 9
Long-tailed Tit	1, 5	Redstart	1, 0
Chiffchaff	20, 12	Dunnock	7, 5
Willow Warbler	9, 1	Chaffinch	1, 2
Blackcap	15, 2	Goldfinch	1, 0
Lesser Whitethroat	3, 0	Lesser Redpoll	10, 2
Whitethroat	1, 0	Bullfinch	2, 7
Grasshopper Warbler	5, 1	Reed Bunting	5, 4
Sedge Warbler	13, 2	House Sparrow	0, 1

Old birds retrapped during the month were:

Long-tailed Tit BCR091 at 8 years 6 months (a WFG record and close to the British record),

Blackbird XB92895 at 5y 10m,

Chaffinch L094145 at 5y 7m,

Great Tit L504802 at 4y 10m,

Reed Bunting Y114255 at 4y 1m,

Blue Tit Y408052 at 3y 10m,

Robin Y408900 at 3y 7m and Bullfinch Y409137 at 3y 5m.

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## **Articles from members:**

### ***A strange Reed Bunting - by Roger Buisson.***



At the Ouse Washes RSPB reserve on 1st April 2016, Rebecca and I had sat down for lunch by the feeding station at the visitor centre and I had alternated eating sandwiches with photographing some of the birds coming for their own lunch. Rebecca pointed out an 'odd' reed bunting below a feeder containing red millet seed. The bird matched the plumage of a female reed bunting except for a very dark, but not jet black, 'mask' from the bill to behind the eye. This 'mask' of dark feathers covered part of the cream supercilium but did not completely match the feather tract that makes up the ear coverts - they stopped short leaving the rear part of the ear coverts the normal light and chestnut brown. I took a series of photographs and the one that shows the head features most clearly is reproduced below. I was able to compare it to other male and female reed buntings around the visitor centre and had no reason to believe that I had anything other than an oddly marked female reed bunting before me.

On returning home I did check other dark headed *Emberiza* bunting species which confirmed my belief that this was an oddly marked female reed bunting. Curious I decided to try to find out how unusual was this plumage variant - I had when younger caught many reed buntings for ringing and had not seen this plumage variant before but I was very familiar with the way that male reed

buntings develop their black head marking by abrasion of brown tips to the feathers. A quick internet search of female reed bunting images followed by tracking those images back to the source web pages revealed several other examples including of similar individuals caught by ringers (eg Sorby Breck Ringing Group) and one photographed by someone on a little bunting twitch - clearly different species. A common feature of all the examples that I could find from the UK was that the bird was noted in spring. Various speculative ideas about what led to this plumage variant appeared to be refuted by the information gained from the bird in the hand and through ringing. Was it really a male bird just starting to come in to its summer plumage by some odd moult? No, examples have been caught with vascularised brood patches and all had short wing lengths well within the range of females. Was it a very old female that was gradually adopting male plumage? No, examples have been caught that had been ringed as juveniles and retrapped the following spring.

Although images of similar plumaged birds could be found I could not find any explanation of this plumage variant in the published literature. Does anyone else have an explanation other than it is a variant in the same way that blackbirds are seen with patches of white feathers?

Roger & Rebecca Buisson, 15 Scool Lane, Toft, CB23 2RE

### ***Blasts from the Past - an article by Colin Kirtland.***

We may view with despair the indiscriminate shooting of birds that prevails in many countries and even unfortunately here at times, but before a more caring attitude developed in the 20th century such activities were also considered quite acceptable in Britain. This is well illustrated in the records of the Upware Republic, an informal club established in 1851 by a group of Cambridge undergraduates who met at the the Lord Nelson, a riverside inn which became known as the Five Miles from Anywhere and which was destroyed by fire in the 1950s. This could be reached either by river or from a ferry at the end of the Waterbeach fen road which at least one member of the club recalls using years ago as a short cut to Wicken. Apart from the consumption of large quantities of ale, the students spent their time boating, fishing, shooting and skating, including skating from Cambridge in the hard winters of 1854 & 5.

The shooting episodes illustrate how any bird, edible or not, was considered a suitable sporting target. Thus an entry on 8th March 1852, referring to Twite and Short-eared Owls records: "Fell in with a flock of rare Linnets (*Linaria montium*) and shot about 50; lunched; adjourned to the Fen and killed four Owls (*Strix Brachyitus*)".

Even naturalists, who in those days were far more likely to carry a gun rather than binoculars, joined in the slaughter. They included Frederick du Cane Godman who later travelled extensively collecting specimens, often with his friend Osbert Salvin. They compiled the *Biologia Centrali*

*Americana* and later donated their large collection to the Natural History Museum. From Feb. 1853: "Two members of the Cambridge University Naturalist Society arrived at Upware this day. Shot many Brambling Finches (*Fringilla montium*) and saw a male Hen Harrier at Reach."

Another writer, obviously with literary pretensions, records: "Fine day, came down in early dawn - when Aurora was just peeping o'er the renowned fen of Wicken. After a great deal of trouble we killed 9 and a half couple of Snip (sic) and Water-rails, and a remarkable pied variety of the Stockdove." Snipe seem to have been a favoured target, presumably because they presented a challenge and were obviously abundant: "Fen full of Snipe, and very wet, 4 guns - 14 couple."

Another entry from 9th November 1853: "We had an excellent day's sport, we killed 13 couple of Snipe, 6 Wild Duck, 3 Quails, 1 Partridge, 1 Hare, 3 Rabbits and several other little feathered monsters."

Fortunately in these more enlightened times, when we venture into the countryside we are more likely to encounter people armed with nothing more lethal than binoculars or camera and we also have several reserves where wildlife is protected. Even though Snipe are still legal quarry (from August 12th to January 31st) the Twites, Bramblings and Short-eared Owls at least are relatively safe.

(Details taken from *Cambridge Revisited* by Arthur B. Gray, first published in 1921.)

Colin Kirtland

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Next E-bulletin due out on June 10<sup>th</sup>. Any contributions to be with me by 5<sup>th</sup> please.