

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 371



Opinions expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of the Club.

RECENT REPORTS NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2003

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records, and comments are made by Bruce Martin (Grebes to Wildfowl), Mark Hawkes (Raptors to Coot), Jonathan Taylor (Waders), Steve Cooper (Skuas to Near Passerines and Hybrids and Exotica), and Stuart Elsom (Larks to Thrushes), Mike Foley (Warblers to Tits) and David Wege (Nuthatch to Buntings). If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the relevant county recorder (addresses on back page).

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

A total of 149 species were recorded in this period (excluding hybrids and exotics) compared to 136 last year. Two excellent records came from opposite ends of the county: a Rosy Starling near Cambridge and a Dartford Warbler – only the third county record – near Peterborough. Accounts of both species appear in this bulletin

AGM

The AGM of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club will be held at St Johns Church Hall on Friday March 12th 2004. Any nominations for Officers or Council Members must be sent to the Club Chairman by Friday February 13th 2004.

CBC Meeting in Ely – March 22nd

Full details of this meeting on p10



Dartford Warbler and Stonechat by Graham Easy

Numbers in brackets indicate November and December maximums.

GREBES TO HERONS

Little Grebe At Fen Drayton GP (9, 12), Ouse Washes (1, 13), Paxton Pits (18, 14) and Shropshire's Reservoir (13, 8), and single figures from 13 other sites.

Great Crested Grebe At Fen Drayton GP (138, 123), Grafham Water (450, 427) and Paxton Pits (30, 16). Single figures were noted at 7 other sites.

Red-necked Grebe One bird was seen at Paxton Pits on Nov 24th.

Slavonian Grebe A single bird was at Grafham Water on Dec 7th.

Black-necked Grebe A single bird was Paxton Pits on Nov 21st.

Gannet A bird was reported on BBC Look East as having been found in a Chippenham garden on Nov 18th and was subsequently returned to the coast. We are unable to discover any more details than this.

Cormorant At Fen Drayton GP (144, 120), Grafham Water (35, 31), Ouse Washes (27, 50), Paxton Pits (212, 278) and Shropshire's Reservoir (7, 13). The Paxton figures are the dusk roost counts. There has also been a dusk roost building up at Fen Drayton in recent months with over 100 birds counted in December. It was thought that until this roost formed all the birds were moving to Paxton to roost. Single figures were noted at eight other sites. There were no counts received from Wicken Fen, which also has a sizeable roost.

Shag A bird was seen on the River Nene by the Dog in a Doublet on Dec 18th & 19th and another was at Grafham water on Dec 23rd.

Bittern Singles were reported from Ely BF, Fen Drayton GP, Kingfisher's Bridge, Nene Washes, Paxton Pits and Wicken Fen during the period.

Little Egret Single were at Snailwell on Dec 17th and the Cam Washes Upware on Dec 29th.

Grey Heron At Fen Drayton GP were (22, 31) and the Ouse Washes (10, 17). Also reported from 14 other areas.

White Stork The Cottenham bird was seen at Landbeach on Nov 2nd and at Long Drove on Nov 5th. But there has been no sign of it since then.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Fen Drayton GP (60, 40), Ouse Washes (290, 390) and Paxton Pits (145, 109). A flock of 61 were feeding in the fields at Smithy Fen on Dec 28th and small numbers were noted at 9 other sites.

Bewick Swan From 12 birds seen on the WeBS count at the Ouse Washes on Nov 3rd numbers built up to 1000 by the year's end. 600 were counted on the Nene Washes on Dec 15th. Apart from these main wintering areas birds were noted at a number of sites during the period. They included 1 at Grafham Water on Nov 1st, up to 11

at Paxton Pits during early November, 20 flew north low over Whittlesford GP on Dec 3rd and 2 flew north over Fen Drayton GP on Dec 6th.

Whooper Swan At the Ouse Washes (135, 799), and the Nene Washes 227 by the end of December. At Grafham Water 4 birds were present on Nov 1st and 10 on Dec 5th. Two birds were at Prior's Fen on Nov 11th and singles near Whittlesford on Nov 12th and at Smithy Fen on Dec 28th.

Pink-footed Goose A flock of 8 birds were at Kingfisher's Bridge on Nov 15th and one at the Ouse Washes on Nov 20th.

White-fronted Goose From 2 birds at the Ouse Washes on Nov 20th numbers increased to 13 by the year's end. At Prior's Fen 7 birds were seen on Nov 15th and 26th. And 2 birds were at Burwell Fen on Dec 8th.

Greenland White-fronted Goose One bird was with a flock of feral geese at Orton BP on Dec 3rd.

Greylag Goose At the Ouse Washes (374, 677), Paxton Pits (415, 600). Other counts were 649 at Kingfisher's Bridge on Nov 3rd, 125 at Cottenham on Nov 9th, 189 at Shropshire's Reservoir the same date and 360 at Prior's Fen GP on Nov 11th. Smaller numbers were noted at 5 other sites.

Canada Goose At the Ouse Washes (146, 330). 130 birds were counted at the Cam Washes Upware on Nov 16th and 515 at Kingfisher's Bridge on the same date. Fifty birds were noted at Roswell Pits on Dec 14th and small numbers were records at six other sites.

Barnacle Goose Three birds were at Paxton Pits throughout November and until Dec 9th with four on the Nov 17th. Up to 2 birds were at the Ouse Washes during December and a single bird was at Prior's Fen on Nov 11th.

Egyptian Goose A single bird was recorded at Paxton Pits between Nov 23rd and Dec 12th.

Shelduck Single figures were noted at 6 sites during the period.

Mandarin Up to 4 birds were at Grafham Water during November, 2 at Paxton Pits on Dec 8th, and singles at Buckden GP on Nov 14th and Wimpole Park on Dec 27th.

Wigeon At the Cam Washes (598, 300), Fen Drayton GP (504, 390), Kingfisher's Bridge (260, 322), Ouse Washes (8689, 22881), Paxton Pits (973, 2000) and Shropshire's Reservoir (244, 976). Other counts of note were 1200 at the Nene Washes on Dec 6th and 100 at Godmanchester GP on Nov 18th. Double figure counts were noted at 5 other sites.

Gadwall At Fen Drayton GP (152, 219), Kingfisher's Bridge (62, -), Landbeach GP (52, 1), Milton CP (16, 42), Ouse Washes (7, 172), Paxton Pits (218, 276). Shropshire's Reservoir (28, 10). Single figures were reported at 4 other sites.

Teal At the Cam Washes Upware (162, -), Fen Drayton GP (89, 100), Grafham Water (473, 549), Kingfisher's Bridge (63, -), Ouse Washes (601,

3901) and Paxton Pits (22, 231). Small numbers were also noted at 8 other sites.

Mallard At Fen Drayton GP (163, 162), Grafham Water (498, 472), Milton CP (105, 94), Ouse Washes (1556, 2757), Paxton Pits (76, 41), Shropshire's Reservoir (147, 132) and Whittlesford GP (66, 60). Other counts of note during the period were 110 at Kingfisher's Bridge and 150 at Waterbeach GP. Small numbers were also noted at 8 other sites.

Pintail Apart from the counts at the Ouse Washes (572, 879), single figures were noted at 7 sites.

Shoveler At Fen Drayton GP (36, 10), Grafham Water (102, 80), Ouse Washes (19, 103), and Paxton Pits (74, 50). Small numbers were noted at 4 other sites

Red-crested Pochard Birds were noted at the same 2 sites as the previous months with a female again at Whittlesford GP on Dec 3rd and 6 birds present at Paxton Pits on Nov 14th dropping to 1 by the end of the month.

Pochard At Block Fen GP (120, 85), Fen Drayton GP (184, 270), Grafham Water (214, 385), Mepal GP (85, 90), Milton CP (45, 63), Paxton Pits (467, 204) and Whittlesford (2, 60). Numbers at the Ouse Washes began to build up as once the floods arrived with 205 on Dec 1st. Small numbers were also noted at 5 other sites.

Tufted Duck At Fen Drayton GP (580, 514), Grafham Water (319, 815), Paxton Pits (429, 408) and Shropshire's Reservoir (95, 51). Also recorded at 10 other sites.

Scaup A flock of 6 of these scarce ducks to the county at Paxton Pits on Nov 9th must have surprised (and delighted) the observers. One bird remained until Nov 21st. Grafham Water also had its share of records with 1 bird on Nov 11th building to 3 by the end of the year.

Common Scoter Grafham Water hosted another scarce county duck with 5 of this species on Nov 15th with 1 remaining to Dec 9th.

Velvet Scoter Making it a trio of rare ducks at Grafham Water, an immature bird was seen on Nov 24th but unfortunately it flew off to the south within minutes of being discovered.

Goldeneye At Fen Drayton GP (85, 119), Grafham Water (65, 94) and Paxton Pits (62, 73). Single figures were noted at nine other sites.

Smew First noted at Grafham Water on Nov 7th, Paxton Pits on Nov 9th and Fen Drayton GP on Nov 12th, the latter site being the most favoured. Though counting was difficult due to the birds active feeding and mobility between pits, they sometimes gathered together resulting in a count of 17, which included 3 males. The Grafham maximum was 3 and Paxton was 6, (again with 3 males). Two birds each were also seen at Orton BP and Godmanchester GP during the last days of the year.

Goosander Double figure counts were recorded at Maxey GP, max 28 on Dec 23rd and Paxton Pits,

max 17 on Dec 27th. Single figures were noted at 5 other sites.

Ruddy Duck Three sites had double figures, 20, 16 and 13, and 4 sites had single figures.

RAPTORS

Red Kite Just 1 record; A bird flew over Brampton on Nov 8th.

Marsh Harrier Reported from 4 sites. On the Nene Washes (from March Farmers to Standground Wash), 2–3 were seen regularly until the end of the year, with 4 on Dec 27th. Also recorded at Ouse Washes on Nov 2nd, 27th & 30th and Dec 1st (with 2 on 27th), also singles at Wicken Fen on Nov 2nd & 3rd, Dec 6th, and 1 late bird at Chrishall Grange on Dec 22nd.

Hen Harrier Recorded at 11 sites. Regular on the Nene Washes, with 1 in Nov and 1–2 during Dec. At Wicken Fen 2 were roosting in Nov, building to 7 on Christmas Day, and on the Ouse Washes, a female and male on Nov 30th, and a male on Dec 1st. Also recorded at Burwell Fen, Kingfisher's Bridge, Holt Fen and Swaffham Priors Fen (all probably roosting at Wicken Fen). Away from the regular haunts, singles at Paxton Pits on Nov 5th, Witcham Gravel on Nov 8th and Farcet Fen on Dec 16th.

Goshawk A possible, late in the day at Little Wilbraham Fen on Nov 9th.

Sparrowhawk Recorded from 37 sites, usually involving 1–2, but 3 on the Ouse Washes during Dec, and 4 around Cottenham.

Buzzard Recorded from 17 sites, with 1–2 at most sites (mainly in the north and west of the county), but with 3 at two sites, and 5 at one site.

Kestrel Recorded from 19 sites. Most sightings of 1–4, with 5 at Stretham, and on Ouse Washes 9 in Nov and 12 in Dec.

Merlin Regular on Nene Washes (up to 2) and Ouse Washes. Elsewhere seen in November as follows; 2 at Fowlmere and a single at Histon on 1st, Monks Wood on 3rd, Farcet Fen on 6th, Wicken Fen and Wimblington Fen on 7th, Baites Bite Lock, Burwell Fen and Grafham Water on 19th, Hemmingford Abbots and Peterborough on 20th, Elm on 22nd, Paxton Pits on 24th, Fowlmere on 26th, Grafham Water on 28th, Kingfisher's Bridge and Tanholt GP on 30th. Seen in December as follows; Impington on 4th, Farcet Fen on 5th, Girton on 15th, Waresley on 16th, Oakington on 18th, Histon on 21st and Witcham on 21st & 25th.

Peregrine Regular on Nene Washes (2) and Ouse Washes (max. 3). Elsewhere recorded in November as follows; Flag Fen on 3rd, Swavesey on 12th, Litlington on 16th, Farcet Fen on 19th, Peterborough on 20th, Kingfisher's Bridge and Little Paxton on 30th. In December as follows; Drysides GP on Dec 7th, Girton on 9th, Morborne Hill on 15th and Grafham Water on 24th.

GAMEBIRDS TO COOT

Red-legged Partridge Recorded at 13 sites. Ranging from 1–47 birds.

Grey Partridge Recorded at 11 sites. Numbers ranging from 2–21 birds.

Pheasant Reported from 11 sites. Numbers from 2–49 birds, including many released birds.

Water Rail Recorded at 11 sites, with numbers from 1–3 birds, and a maximum of 10 at Fen Drayton GP on Dec 6th

Moorhen Recorded at 16 sites. Peak counts included, Ouse Washes (94, 60), Grafham Water (13, 24), Paxton Pits (14, 12).

Coot Recorded at just 11 sites. Peak counts included, Paxton Pits (1334, 1148), Grafham Water (288, 71), Kingfisher's Bridge (76, 53) and 143 at Brampton GP on Dec 16th. The 50% partial albino returned to Godmanchester GP for its second winter.

WADERS

Oystercatcher One at Grafham Water on Nov 29th.

Avocet Following strong SE winds on Nov 29th 16 at Grafham Water and 7 at Fen Drayton GP were exceptional counts for the Autumn period.

European Golden Plover Majority of birds in southern half of county. Highest counts from Fen Drayton GP (1500, 5000), Fenstanton 3500 on Dec 24th (including a leucistic bird), Ouse Washes (250, 3000), Over Fen (1000, 1800), Holt Fen 1400, Byall Fen 1350, Haslingfield 1000, Fletton BP 832.

Grey Plover Single at Dogsthorpe Star Pit on Dec 22nd.

Lapwing At Ouse Washes numbers built up to 25 000 by Nov 30th though peak in Dec was 8444. At Nene Washes low numbers due to low water levels - peak of 4500. Elsewhere 1064 at Cam Washes up to 950 at Long Drove (Cottenham) and Swaffham Prior Fen, 600 at Paxton Pits and only small groups elsewhere.

Little Stint Single at Grafham Water from Oct to Nov 2nd.

Dunlin Highest counts: Ouse Washes (21, 36), Grafham Water (21, 10) and 2–6 Cam Washes/Kingfisher's Bridge area and 8 at Nene Washes.

Ruff Main locality was Ouse Washes with a peak of 80 on Dec 7th, elsewhere up to 12 at Nene Washes and 10 at Ely BF on Nov 19th and 5 at Byall Fen on Nov 5th.

Jack Snipe Only reported from 1 site – Kneesworth where up to 2 by Nov 30th and 3 on Dec 29th.

Common Snipe A very poor autumn, Ouse Washes (13, 30), Kneesworth (25, 7), Paxton Pits (21, 1), Kingfisher's Bridge 15, Dogsthorpe Star Pit 10, Cam Washes 8.

Woodcock Singles at 10 sites

Black-tailed Godwit At Ouse Washes peak of 60 on Dec 15th and 14 on 28th also singles at Cam Washes and Kingfisher's Bridge in November.

Curlew Nine at Ouse Washes on Nov 17th was the largest group for some time, 2 there on Dec 28th, single at Nene Washes to Nov 8th and 1 over Longthorpe on Nov 6th.

Redshank Main locality was Ouse Washes (33, 100), elsewhere highest counts Nene Washes 40, Cam Washes (25, 17), Dogsthorpe Star Pit 25 on Nov 8th, Grafham Water (18, 14), Paxton Pits (10, 2) and 1–8 at a further 9 sites.

Green Sandpiper Highest counts from Kingfisher's Bridge with 4 on Nov 30th, Paxton Pits (3, 1), Godmanchester Pit/Tip (2, 1) and singles from a further 8 sites.

Common Sandpiper Singles at Grafham Water on Nov 1st and Dec 14th to 16th and Paxton Pits on Nov 2nd and 1–2 through December, continuing the run of wintering birds at these sites.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull In November probably the same adult roosting at Grafham water on 1st, 4th and the 6th. In December 1cy birds noted at Dogsthorpe Star pit on 7th and Waterbeach on 29th, an adult was at the Ouse Washes on 23rd.

Black-headed Gull The drilling of chicken waste attracted up to 1000+ birds to fields along Twenty Pence Cottenham in December. At Shropshires reservoir 415 were noted on Dec 18th .

Common Gull Still poorly recorded, 55 north east over Fowlmere on Nov 30th and 50+ in the Cottenham area throughout were the only records of note.

Lesser Black-backed Gull The continuing increase in winter of this species was reflected by the 500+ noted at Smithy Fen throughout the period and 153 noted on Shropshires reservoir on Dec 18th.

Herring Gull Large numbers at Smithy Fen where 800+ noted throughout the period and 650 at Fen Drayton GP on Dec 21st.

Western Yellow-legged Gull Reported from 14 sites, with 10 attracted to the chicken fields in the Cottenham / Aldreth area on Dec 10th and 6 noted at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 8th and 12th.

Caspian Gull Single adults noted at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 1st and 8th Nov. In December, 3 noted at Aldreth with 2 at Twenty Pence on 14th. Elsewhere singles noted at Dogsthorpe Star Pit and Smithy Fen on 7th and Eye Tip, Tanholt GP and Twenty Pence on 14th.

Greater Black-backed Gull Low numbers throughout with 65 at Fen Drayton GP on Dec 21st, the largest count received.

NEAR-PASSERINES

Feral Pigeon Reported from four regular sites, Drummer Street Cambridge (80), Elizabeth Bridge

Cambridge (45), Over (40) and Wisbech (160).

Stock Dove Counts received largely from fenland areas; Elm (55), Ouse Washes (Earith -Mepal 33), Over Fen (42) and Swaffham Prior Fen (196). Elsewhere 1–20 reported from 5 sites.

Wood Pigeon Large counts presumed to be feeding flocks received from Conington (1500), Flag Fen (1200), Comberton (800), Elm (560). At Stretham, 4 noted feeding on either a very large bird table or a very crowded one!

Collared Dove Largest counts received were 55 at Wayhead on Dec 26th and up to 33 at a feeding station in a Melbourn garden.

Barn Owl Reported from 21 sites those away from Fenland as follows- Abbotsley, Boxworth, Gamblingay, Godmanchester, Gt Straughton, Knapwell, Kneesworth and Melbourn.

Little Owl Records received from 11 sites, including 3 at Long Drove Cottenham.

Tawny Owl Records received from only 5 sites – let's hope for a bit more effort to record this species during the next few months. Please send in all records during the owl survey a good example was the record of 2 males + a female noted in Little Paxton village.

Long-eared Owl. Reports of 1–2 from 5 sites including Ferry Meadows and Grafham Water.

Short-Eared Owl Up to 3 birds on the Nene Washes (March Farmers) and singles noted on the Ouse Washes throughout. A single was at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 6th, a scarce bird at this site.

Kingfisher Thirty-three records received from 25 sites including up to 4 around Paxton Pits, 3 at Milton CP and 3 noted on the Ouse Washes (Earith-Mepal).

Green Woodpecker Reported from 22 sites this species remains very widespread across the county.

Great Spotted Woodpecker Reported from 25 sites including up to 4 visiting feeders in a garden at Elm. Drumming was noted at Paxton Pits on Dec 24th.

Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker Singles reported from Grange Rd and Newmarket Rd Cambridge, Chesterton, Eversden Woods, Farcet Fen, Ferry Meadows CP, Girton, Little Shelford, Paxton Pits and Wimpole.

PASSERINES

Skylark Recorded from 13 sites with a maximum of 105 at Westfield Farm, Comberton on Dec 21st

House Martin An extremely late single was noted at Ramsey Mereside on Nov 10th. The latest ever record for the county was on Dec 12th 1977

Meadow Pipit Records were received from 8 sites with the highest count coming from Ouse Washes with 99 present on Nov 3rd.

Rock Pipit Two were recorded in the period. The first was seen at Paxton Pits on Nov 1st with another being recorded at Ouse Washes on Nov 5th.

Water Pipit As would be expected all records originated from the Ouse and Nene Washes and records were evenly spread throughout the period. The maximum count was an impressive 13 at Ouse Washes on Nov 6th.

Grey Wagtail Reports were received from at least 12 sites with the majority of records concerning 1–3 birds. The maximum noted was 5 at Paxton Pits on Dec 7th.

Pied Wagtail Noted from at least 15 sites with some impressive counts received. The maximum recorded was 400+ at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge on Nov 19th. Other sizeable counts were from Holt Fen with 250 and Cambridge Research Park with 200.

Bohemian Waxwing Recorded from sites during the period with the first record on Dec 9th when 8 were seen at Monks Wood. Others followed with 20 at Girton on Dec 16th and a single at Star Pit, Dogsthorpe on Christmas Day.

Black Redstart A single was present at the Millennium Bridge, Northey on Nov 6th.

Common Redstart A single at Stuntney on Nov 11th was the latest county record ever. The previous latest record was on Nov 2nd 1990.

Stonechat Recorded from at least 7 sites. The maximum noted was 9 at Stanground Wash on Dec 10th

Blackbird Records were received from 8 sites. The maximum count came from Elm with an impressive 120+ present during November.

Fieldfare This species was seen in good numbers during the period with many high counts received. Peak counts for November were from Morborne (1000) Ouse Washes (666), Cam Washes (600) and Swaffham Prior Fen (400). Peak counts for December were from Stretham (950) Elm (800) and Girton (480)

Song Thrush Counts were received from 9 sites. The maximum recorded was 10+ present at Elm throughout the period

Redwing Seen throughout period in reasonable numbers. The peak count of 300+ was from Paxton Pits. Nocturnal passage was noted throughout the period from many sites including Fanshawe Rd, Cambridge and Eynesbury.

Mistle Thrush Reports were received from 17 sites with 1–2 being the norm. Maximum count was from Stonebridge Corner with 20 on Nov 11th.

Sedge Warbler Reports of individuals at Ouse Washes (Dec 5th) and Stanground Wash (Dec 10th) are the latest-ever county records of this summer visitor.

Dartford Warbler Located at Stanground Wash first on Dec 10th (BHS et. al.), this rare bird remained in the area until Dec 17th at least. It was rather elusive, but when found it was often associating with Stonechats.

Lesser Whitethroat One was noted at Ferry Meadows CP on Nov 24th and 25th. This was thought to be possibly an eastern race.

Garden Warbler An individual was reported from Queen Adelaide on Dec 21st. This would be the latest-ever county record of this species.

Blackcap Reported from several locations within Cambridge city, and also from 10 other areas. Records were of 1–2 birds in most cases, though 4 were present at Eaton Socon on Dec 29th.

Chiffchaff All *collybita* sightings were of single birds, at 4 sites in Nov and at 4 sites in December. One report of the *tristis* Siberian race was received from Tanholt GP (Dec 9th).

Goldcrest Reported from 29 sites. Counts of 5+ birds were made in the Cottenham area, at Fen Drayton GP, Fowlmere NR, Godmanchester GP, Holywell, Kingfisher's Bridge, Milton CP, Ouse Washes, Paxton Pits, Pidley, Wimpole, and at Wicken Fen.

Firecrest Individuals were noted at Fen Drayton GP (Nov 16th, Dec 14th/22nd), while at Paxton Pits there were records of single birds on Nov 30th and Dec 21st/23rd/29th, and of two birds on Nov 1st/16th).

Bearded Tit All sightings were of individuals, at Grafham Water from Nov 23rd and on various occasions until Dec 1st; at Paxton Pits from Dec 14th to 31st.

Long-tailed Tit Reported from 17 sites, counts peaked at 18 at Over Fen, 20 at Fowlmere NR, 20 at Comberton, 27 at Ouse Washes, c. 30 at Wimpole, 45 at Milton CP, and 50 on Nov 28th at Godmanchester GP.

Marsh Tit Noted at Brampton Wood, Comberton, Eversden Wood, Hayley Wood, Paxton Pits, and Wimpole (where 11 were counted on Dec 27th).

Willow Tit One was present throughout Nov/Dec at Ouse Washes RSPB. Two were heard at Archer's Wood near Sawtry (Dec 5th), and 1 was noted at a site in south Cambs.

Coal Tit Noted at 11 sites in mostly small numbers, with 5 at Wimpole on Dec 27th being the highest count.

Blue Tit Sightings at 10 locations included a maximum count of 16 at The Gloucesters Wimpole on Nov 15th.

Great Tit Noted at 10 sites with a maximum of 5 birds at Gog Magog Downs on Dec 6th.

Wood Nuthatch Recorded from 6 sites. Four birds in the Wimpole area throughout the period are noteworthy. Other sites were Clare College, Cambridge (2), Grantchester, Grafham Water (2) and Hardwick Wood.

Treecreeper Records received from 10 sites. Maximum counts of 5 at Wimpole on Dec 27th and 3 at Godmanchester GP/Tip on Nov 28th are notable.

Jay Recorded from 20 sites, with maximum counts of 7 at Godmanchester GP/Tip on Nov 28th and c.10 around Cottenham throughout the period.

Maggie Reported from just 7 sites. Maximum counts of 12–14 at Elm, and 17–33 from the Ouse Washes during this period are noteworthy.

Jackdaw Records received from 10+ sites. A roost

of 850+ birds at Orwell on Nov 30th is notable, as were counts of 345 at Stretham on Nov 21st, 176 at Ouse Washes on Nov 3rd and 135 at Over on Dec 19th. A Nordic race bird was seen at Eye Tip on Dec 11th.

Rook Records received from 6 sites, with 1,000+ at the Orwell roost site on Nov 30th being the highest count.

Carrion Crow Records received from 10 sites with a maximum with up to 67 in the Ouse Washes area throughout the period.

Hooded Crow A single bird was at Eye Tip between Nov 12th and Dec 14th. An individual at Tanholt GP on Dec 6th was presumably the same individual.

Raven A bird over Earith (flying towards St Ives) on Nov 5th completed an exceptional year for this species in Cambridgeshire.

Starling Highest count received was of a 5,000+ roost at Ely BF on Nov 19th. A single flock of 3,500 flying north-east over Stretham at dusk on Nov 5th were probably heading to the Ely BF roost.

Rosy Starling A popular, but frustratingly short-staying bird graced a housing estate on the outskirts of Histon on Nov 1st. This is a rare bird in Cambridgeshire but was seen by quite a few birders, and after much debate and discussion was identified as a first summer bird moulting into winter plumage.

House Sparrow Records received from just 8 sites with maximum counts of 100–120+ at Elm throughout, 160 in a Pidley garden on Nov 23rd, and 100 at Woodhurst on Dec 14th.

Tree Sparrow Recorded from 3 sites along the Ouse Washes, a number of locations in the Witcham area and 5 other sites. A maximum count of 75+ in game cover on Burnt Hill, Witcham on Dec 30th is both exceptional and encouraging. 30+ were noted at the visitor centre at Ouse Washes on Nov 9th.

Chaffinch Records received from 17 sites. Unlike last winter, maximum counts (by quite some way) were of 100 at Grafham Water on Nov 19th and 100+ at Witcham on Dec 1st.

Brambling Recorded from 18 sites, but unlike the large flocks of last winter, the maximum counts were of 20 at Grafham Water on Nov 24th, and up to 10 at the Ouse Washes.

Greenfinch Noted from 19 sites. Maximum counts were of 90–100 at Chippenham Fen, 150+ at Pidley on Christmas Day, 125 in Stretham on Dec 29th and 120+ at Elm throughout.

Goldfinch Noted from 10+ sites. Highest counts were from Ouse Washes with 50–139 throughout, and 30–40+ at Elm.

Siskin Recorded from just 9 sites – quite a contrast to last winter. Maximum counts were also low, with 30 at Ferry Meadows CP on Nov 12th being by far the highest.

Linnet Records were received from 10 sites. Peak counts were of 45–80 at Elm, 50–60+ at Grafham Water in early Dec, 75 at Lode on Nov 17th and 70

at Over Fen on Dec 28th.

Twite The obliging immature female that arrived at Fowlmere NR on October 27th stayed until Nov 2nd.

Lesser Redpoll Records were received from 14 sites, mostly involving single birds. However, 8 were at Monks Wood in Nov and 6+ were seen over the Nene Washes on Dec 7th.

Bullfinch Reported from over 20 sites, with 12+ at Paxton Pits on Dec 28th being notable.

Hawfinch A single bird was seen at the "regular" site of Milton Park on Dec 27th.

Yellowhammer Recorded from 13 sites, with 80+ at Grange Farm (Witcham) throughout the period being noteworthy.

Reed Bunting Recorded from 16 sites. Counts of up to 30 along the Ouse Washes and 20+ at Grange Farm (Witcham) are noteworthy.

Corn Bunting Records were received from 21 sites. 67 at Littlington on Nov 16th and 50+ at Bury on Dec 30th are noteworthy.

HYBRIDS

Pochard x Tufted Duck A drake Redhead type

returned to Mepal GP on Nov 14th. A drake Lesser Scaup type returned to Fen Drayton GP on Dec 12th.

EXOTICA

Black Swan A single at Priors Fen GP remained to at least Nov 11th. On the Nene Washes, 3 noted on Dec 6th–7th.

Bar-headed Goose A single in the Kingfishers Bridge/Upware/Wicken area on Nov 13th–21st and perhaps the same individual noted on the Ouse Washes on Dec 13th–15th. A single bird at Paxton Pits was noted throughout the period being joined by a second bird on Dec 17th. Another single was noted at Priors Fen GP on Nov 11th.

Lesser White-fronted Goose The wandering adult bird was at Milton CP on Nov 9th then back at Kingfishers Bridge on Nov 15th–16th Nov and was last noted at Wicken on Dec 13th.

Saker A bird with jesses was on the Nene Washes from Dec 5th–18th at least.

Harris Hawk One frequented Paxton Pits from Nov 15th to the years end.

Budgerigar A single in a garden at Lode on Nov 17th.

Bulletin bird 1: Rosy Starling at Histon

Chris Martin

I recently invested in some new feeders and have been putting out plenty of food hoping to attract birds to the garden to photograph. Little did I know how attractive the food was to be!

The morning of Saturday November 1st 2003 started off quite well with about 30 Greenfinches and even more Starlings coming in to feed. I then saw a flash of pink land on the fat ball and although I have only recently got back into birding, knew instantly that it was a Rosy Starling. I quickly took a few shots of it in case it flew off, (would anyone have believed me if it had?), before ringing Dad to say get round here quick. He was on his way to a working party at Fen Drayton GP and seemed to take an age and the birds disappeared before he and Mum arrived. But I was confident that it would be back and to encourage the Starlings put some bread on the lawn. They soon returned and the Rosy with them. Dad was delighted as it was new bird for his county list and I was relieved that someone else had seen it.

We rang some local birders and they quickly began to arrive. The bird behaved itself and although it flew off with the Starling flock, it wasn't long before they returned. At other times it sat on neighbouring roofs and TV aerials. Dad then left to go to Fen Drayton and the news was put out for other birders to come and enjoy it. I took some more photographs and was joined at times by some of the country's top bird photographers. About mid afternoon it disappeared and to the disappointment of latecomers wasn't seen again. I won't forget the day in a hurry.

Despite looking at all the Starlings the next day I couldn't relocate it. I do wonder though, whether it had been coming to the garden during the week when I had been at work. But that I will never know.

P.S.

The ageing of the bird caused quite a lot of discussion, which I have not been, part of! The general opinion is that it was a first summer bird that had almost completed its moult to adult winter plumage. The problem was

that most Rosy Starlings seen in the autumn in Britain, still look very drab with a lot of juvenile plumage, unlike this bird that has almost completed it's moult, with one unmoulted juvenile feather showing. Anyone disagreeing please don't get on to me. It is all above me and I leave it to the experts!

There are pictures of this bird on the CBC website. I also have a CD from Nigel Blake of the excellent pictures he took, if anyone would like to see them.

Bulletin bird 2: Dartford Warbler at Stanground Wash

Brian Stone

Wednesday, 10 December 2003 was certainly a day to remember. I hadn't checked out the Padholme/Stanground patch for a while so I decided to take a bike around there during my lunchbreak. I check out the Sewage Works and outfall here regularly for Green Sandpipers, Grey Wagtails and the like and always take a look at the washland opposite where Short-eared and Barn Owl are regular as well as Stonechats and the like. What I didn't expect was what looked like a brown Long-tailed Tit, bouncing towards me through the vegetation, along the bank of the River Nene. As it passed just below me, I couldn't quite believe I was having point-blank views of a Dartford Warbler. The bird stayed on the bank next to me for a while but, although it allowed me time to get some excellent scope views, just as I went for the camera, it flew to the far side of the opposite river bank out of sight.

The following twenty or thirty nerve-racking minutes seemed like an eternity as local birders started arriving and there was no sign of the bird. Finally, Steve Dudley thought he glimpsed the bird in flight briefly and very shortly afterwards I caught sight of it near some Stonechats some way from where I had last seen it. Subsequent views were more distant but I was extremely relieved that there was something for the arriving hordes to see. It showed quite well at times and I was eventually able to obtain two record shots, taken in very low light, which are now on the PBC website: http://pbc.codehog.co.uk/gallery/dartford_dec_03.htm.

The bird unfortunately ranged widely across the wash and could be difficult to locate at times, but was always more or less opposite the sewage works or a little to the east. The bird was almost always either with the Stonechats or not far away. Both species preferred the scattered clumps of brown decaying thistle. The depth of colour, on the underside particularly, clearly indicate this is a male, although they are practically impossible to age at this time of year. The last report I know of is on 4 Jan 2004 and several visits since then have failed to locate the bird.

Setting the record – part 2

Mark Hawkes

July

Mid-summer should have provided a welcome break from the pressure of chasing birds; however, on the 5th a Little Tern at Fen Drayton GP's, was gratefully added to the total. Mid-summer is not the time for winter ducks either, so another Long-tailed Duck at Paxton Pits on the 6th was very notable. Obviously July was not going to be as quiet as expected - a Great White Egret on the Cam Washes on the 8th was a brilliant addition to the total, although this species is becoming annual within the county. Another Bearded Tit (this one seen) was at Gault Wood on the 10th, but a White-winged Black Tern on the 12th, was, frustratingly, just 200 yards over the county border in Lincs. The 17th started frustratingly, when a probable fly-by Purple Sandpiper couldn't be safely claimed at Grafham Water, but having left the site, I was forced to return shortly afterwards, when a Manx Shearwater was found that afternoon! On the 19th I found two Little Terns at Grafham Water, and another Redstart was seen here on the 21st. The same day, a fly-over Raven, at Paxton Pits, couldn't be relocated, but I found another Caspian Gull at Paxton Pits on the 24th.

End of month total: 195

August

Another Sandwich Tern at Grafham Water on the 10th was more obliging than the reported Purple Heron at Barleycraft GP's on the 11th, which couldn't be found. Things improved vastly on the 12th though, with a smart Hoopoe in Cherry Hinton, and another Great White Egret, at Kingfishers Bridge, the same afternoon. Whinchats are most frequent during the autumn in Cambs, so two at Little Paxton on the 15th, were right on cue, as were two Curlew Sandpipers at Holt Fen on the 19th. Having given up all hope of adding Red-footed Falcon to my total, I was over the moon to connect with the male at Wicken Fen on 20th, a real surprise so late in the year. However, Paxton Pits provided me no luck on the 26th, when a brief Pectoral Sandpiper flew just before I arrived and a distant probable Honey Buzzard over on the 28th, slipped through the net. Following-up a further report of a Purple Heron at Barleycraft GP's on the 30th & 31st also provided nothing.

End of month total: 199

September

Holt Fen proved to be a wader magnet during September, and I twitched over on the 1st for a Little Stint (200th species), and again the following day for a phalarope, which surprisingly, given the early date, turned out to be a Grey Phalarope. A Pectoral Sandpiper on the Nene Washes on the 4th flew off before I even had the chance to think about going for it, and a suppressed Pied Flycatcher at Haddenham on the 6th couldn't be found the next day. It took me three days to pin-down a mobile Osprey at Grafham Water, which was a relief, because not only had they been very thin on the ground during the spring, but I was also away on the Canary Isles from 10th–17th. During that period, I missed two Wrynecks and a Ferruginous Duck, but good fortune also played its part, with both the drake White-headed Duck at Paxton Pits, and the Pectoral Sandpiper at Holt Fen, both staying until I returned. Another probable Honey Buzzard over Grafham Water on the 19th was frustrating, but finding a Grey Phalarope there on the 23rd was real compensation (despite it not being a year-tick). Grafham's good wader passage also produced a stunning Purple Sandpiper on the 25th. However, probably the worst day of the whole year, for me, was the 28th; an Arctic Skua at Grafham Water flew-off just minutes before I arrived, and from there I rushed down to Kneesworth for an American Golden Plover, but that too flew before I arrived. To add insult to injury, the Red-footed Falcon found at the same time as the Plover, disappeared and other birds seen in the county during the day included another Arctic Skua and a Woodlark. Despite searching over the next two days, the Plover was never seen again.

End of month total: 204

October

A Wryneck in a Cambridge garden on the 3rd, was reluctant to stay, due to local cats, and despite me waiting, it wasn't seen. October was very quiet, until the 25th, when a Yellow-browed Warbler was located in Cambridge. I heard it that afternoon, but had to return the next day see it. Amazingly, that morning, I was able to see another that had been found at Paxton Pits, and that afternoon, I finally pulled-back Green-winged Teal at Dogsthorpe Pit. The sudden rush of year-ticks continued on the 28th, with a twitchable Twite at Fowlmere, but my good fortune was short-lived, and despite two attempts, I missed the Ring-billed Gull at Landbeach on 29–30th.

End of month total: 208

November

Again no sign of the Ring-billed Gull at Landbeach on the 1st, but good fortune had me near-by when a Rose-coloured Starling was found in Histon the same day. An obliging bird, and most unexpected given the time of year. The next unexpected bonus of the year, was a Willow Tit, which was visiting the feeders at the Ouse Washes. Present since October, this late-breaking news meant I was finally able to connect with this county rarity on the 7th. A small influx of Scaup and Common Scoters during the month kept things ticking over until the 24th, when a spur of the moment visit to Grafham Water repaid itself, when I found an immature Velvet Scoter. It was only on view for 5mins, before it flew off towards Bedfordshire, but was a most welcome addition to the still growing total. It also became the first single observer sighting for me during the year, not a bad statistic so late in the race.

End of month total: 211

December

Even with a few potential winter species still in the offering, I was surprised to add Hooded Crow to the year list on the 2nd at Eye Tip, after a bird had been found there on the last day of November. On the 8th I couldn't relocate the Slavonian Grebe, seen at Grafham Water the previous day, but far better, was the news of a Dartford Warbler on Stanground Wash on the 10th, this bird will probably collect the accolade of most unexpected addition to the year-list, being the first ever twitchable bird in the county. More expected, but almost as appreciated, was a Shag on the River Nene on the 18th. The month then drew to a quiet close, apart from the unexpected bonus of finding a Shag at Grafham Water on the 23rd.

End of the YEAR total: 214

To clarify; my total of **214** species follows the BOU's guidelines, apart from the inclusion of Barnacle Goose, White-headed Duck, Caspian and Yellow-legged Gull. Using the UK400club rules, then the total would rise to **216** species (additions of Greenland White-fronted Goose and White Wagtail), or for those purists amongst us, the total strictly by BOU would be **210**. The only other statistic worth mentioning is that I managed to find a total of 173 species (81%) of my year-list.

Overall the experience of this challenge was very entertaining, and shows that it is possible, with a lot of time and effort, to see over 200 species within a year in Cambs. With reflection, several species that could normally have been expected, didn't present themselves, such as Great Northern Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Spoonbill, Tree Pipit or Snow Bunting, however, I managed not to miss a single twitchable bird, apart from Ferruginous Duck and Wryneck (when I was abroad). Given a little more luck, a total of 220 seems possible, but that is for someone else to attempt!

Finally, thanks to all those who helped provide me with information during the year. Particularly Colin Addington and John Oates, and also thanks to Brian Stone, Steve Dudley, Bruce Martin, and Julian Hughes for various 'hot off the press' phone calls, and Jono Leadley for his hours of company during all weather. Also, congratulations to Stuart Elsom, who managed to achieve a very respectable 209 species (UK400 rules) despite his many commitments during the year.

A full list of the species recorded can be found at www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Indoor meeting coordinator

The Club is looking for someone who is prepared to oversee the smooth running of meetings, particularly at St John's. This would entail making sure the Club projector and extension lead is available if required. Putting out and replacing chairs. Supplying tea and coffee or organising a rota of persons to do so. Please contact the Secretary if you can help.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2004

March 12th 2004 – St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

AGM & Pollutants in Predators by Heath Malcolm

Dr Heath Malcolm is an ecotoxicologist at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Monks Wood near Huntindon and coordinates the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme. Members of the public send in any dead birds of prey that they happen to come across. These are then analysed for contamination by pesticides. This provides essential information on the exposure of top predators to pesticides and pollutants and contributes to an understanding of how these compounds move through food chains and affect populations.

March 22nd 2004 – The Vernon Cross Room, Ely Museum, Market St, Ely.

7.30p.m. for 8

Cooperative Breeding in Long-tailed Tits: A Family Business by Stuart Sharp

In more than 3 % of the world's bird species, breeding pairs are accompanied at the nest by other individuals, or 'helpers', that assist with the rearing of young. For many years biologists have been trying to understand *why* individuals become helpers, providing benefits to others at an apparent cost to themselves. It is now widely accepted that if helpers provide care for kin, with whom they share a significant proportion of their genetic make-up, then they benefit by increasing the number of their genes that are passed on to future generations. In one cooperative species, the long-tailed tit, helpers preferentially provide care at the nests of close relatives. But how are these birds able to recognise their kin? For the last three years, Stuart Sharp has been studying the vocalisations of the long-tailed tit in order to investigate how these charismatic birds know who their relatives are.

Please use the back entrance of the Museum. Car parking (evening only) is available at the East Cambs District Council Car Park.

For further details, contact Vicki Harley.

April 16th – Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre The Chicken Run by Stuart Elsom

Stuart Elsom is a serving CBC Council member and for the past 5 years Chairman of St. Neots Bird & Wildlife Club. He is an experienced birder and all round naturalist and leads birdwatching tours for the highly acclaimed UK birdwatching tour company, Sunbird. Stuart's recent travels have included Morocco, Trinidad & Tobago and many trips to Poland, a country he knows well having spent at least 2 months in the field there.

In April 2003 Stuart and friends spent two weeks in Colorado and Arizona (USA). They were trying to see as many of the lekking grouse and chickens as possible along with the rich and varied birds and wildlife that the Western USA has to offer. During the 2 week period they travelled 4000 miles, saw well over 200 species of bird and visited 10 National Parks & Reserves. This talk takes a light hearted jaunt along their route showing what the Wild West has to offer.

County records for 2003

It is that time of year again when I have to start sorting out the CBC database for the 2003 bird report. So if you have any outstanding records or descriptions I would be very grateful if you could send them to me at your earliest convenience. Any Hunts records received will be forwarded to John Clark. If you submitted records for the bulletin there is no need to send them again. The best way to send in your records/descriptions is on the CBC records spreadsheet/report form, which I can send to willing observers by e-mail. There are details about what type of records are required in the 2002 CBC bird report.

Many thanks to all those observers who have already submitted their 2003 records.

John Oates

Research update: call for volunteers for county-wide Owl survey

Around 40 club members have so far volunteered to survey owl species throughout Cambs. A few more observers are still needed in one or two areas in the north and west of the county. If you are able to cover parts of the following 10 km squares, please contact Bill Jordan on 01767 651737 bill.jordan@niab.com or Louise Bacon on 01223 263962 lou@purplepumpkin.demon.co.uk.

TF 41 Wisbech North area

TF 20 Thorney area

TL 39 Eldernell and South area

TL 49 Sawtry area

TL 07,06 Catworth, Molesworth area

If you would like to help in other parts of the county, please also get in touch

From the Secretary

New members

We welcome the following new members: We welcome the following new members, Andy Badley from Waterbeach, Richard Bayldon from Oakham, William George from Cambridge and Steve Dudley from Farcet Fen, Peterborough.

The Annual Report

A number of 2002 Annual Reports may have been sent out by the printers with some faulty pages. If any one has one of these copies and would like it replaced will they please contact the Secretary.

Bruce Martin

CLUB CONTACTS

Chairman :	Bob SCOTT, 8 Woodlands, St Neots, Cambs PE19 1UE	01480 214904
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The **Cambridgeshire Bird Club** exists to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats in the county, identify areas of conservation value and advance the education of the public in the study of birds.
www.cambridgeshirebirdclub.org.uk

Birdline number

Remember that your Cambs bird sightings can be phoned in free of charge to Birdline East Anglia on 0800 083 0803.
 page.

Contributors: Richard Allison, Dave Anderson, Paul Atkinson, Louise Bacon, Ian Barton, Guy Belcher, Dorothy Best, Peter Bircham, James Cadbury, Robert Coleman, Ade Cooper, Steve Cooper, Robin Cox, Ian Delgado, Pat Doody, Stuart & Jill Elsom, Dr Mike Foley, Richard Fowling, Don Gardener, David Gooch, David Green, David Griffiths, Richard Hall, Kevin Harris, Jack Harrison, Brian & Sheila Harrup, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Fred Heath, Peter Herkenrath, Pete Holt, David Hopkins, John Hoppitt, Julian Hughes, Roger Hughes, Sarah Kendall, Jim Lawrence, John le Gassick, Vincent Lea, Jono Leadley, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Bruce & Gwen Martin, Andy Massey, Duncan McNiven, Will Miles, Mark Missin, Dick Newell, John Oates, Daniel Osborne, Rob Palmer, Richard Patient, Pam & Evan Peacock, Mark Peck, Mark Pettit, Michael Price, Doug Radford, Mike Redshaw, Tony Roberts, Kathleen Rosewarne, Paul Rule, Rodney Self, Ellis Selway, Clive Sinclair, Howard Slatter, Brian Stone, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne, Alan Wadsworth, P. M. Warrington, David Wege.

Apologies to anyone whose name has been omitted. Any records received after the deadline date may not appear in the Bulletin though the observers may be acknowledged. They will be entered on the Clubs database for the Annual Report.

Please send records to: John Oates by March 7th

Next Bulletin due out April 2004, covering January and February

GOOD BIRDING!