

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 380



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

RECENT REPORTS MAY AND JUNE 2005

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), Stuart Elsom (Larks to Thrushes), Mike Foley (Warblers to Tits) and David Wege (Wood Nuthatch to Buntings). If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the county recorder (address on back page).

MAY & JUNE

This bulletin reports the occurrence of 173 species (excluding hybrids and exotics). The most exciting record is a Collared Pratincole seen at Wicken Fen (see p.8 for a full account) – and another 27 species of wader were recorded in the period. Other scarce/rare species included White Stork, Honey Buzzard, Black Kite (possible), Firecrest and Raven.

FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to thank all contributors to this bulletin. Their efforts are greatly appreciated. If you would like to contribute something to the Bulletin – an article or brief note about birds in Cambridgeshire or elsewhere, illustrations or anything else that you think will be of interest to other members, please contact the editor.

Hedge Sparrow by Graham Easy



Numbers in brackets indicate May and June maximums.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Fen Drayton GP (16, 105), the latter figure reflecting on birds arriving for their annual moult. At the same site the 3 nests noted in May had not produced any young by the end of the period. Double figures were noted at 6 other sites and broods at 6 different sites.

Whooper Swan A single bird was seen on the Ouse Washes on two dates in June.

Pink-footed Goose A single bird was seen at Paxton Pits to May 9th and one again at Whittlesford GP on Jun 29th.

Greylag Goose At Fen Drayton GP (82:46) and Needingworth GP (182:368). Of the 553 birds counted at Paxton Pits in June, 115 were goslings. Broods were also reported at 8 other sites.

Canada Goose Observations mirrored that of the previous species. At Fen Drayton GP (20:108) and Needingworth GP (27:187). The Paxton Pits count of 164 contained 53 goslings. Broods were seen at 7 other sites.

Barnacle Goose Feral birds were noted in single figures at 4 sites and 3 each at Paxton Pits and Whittlesford GP during the period.

Egyptian Goose Two birds were present at East Fen Isleham on Jun 6th.

Common Shelduck Broods were noted at 3 sites, Cam Washes Upware (3 broods), the china clay quarry near Upware and at Grafham Water. Birds were also reported at 5 other sites, the most notable counts were 24 at the Ouse Washes and 48 at Grafham Water.

Mandarin A single bird was seen at Grafham Water on May 7th and 15th.

Eurasian Wigeon Last seen at the Ouse Washes on May 2nd when 10 birds were present. At Paxton Pits 2 males were present until May 17th with 1 remaining throughout the period, possibly an injured bird. Another male was at Kingfishers Bridge until Jun 29th at least.

Gadwall Double figures were noted in June at Fen Drayton GP (29), Godmanchester GP (12) and Paxton Pits (51). Single figures at 2 other sites.

Eurasian Teal Five males were at Paxton Pits on Jun 12th, with 2 on the 24th. Two males were at Kingfishers Bridge also on Jun 24th and a pair was seen at Grafham Water on May 11th and Jun 14th.

Mallard Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (44:143). Double figures were recorded at 8 other sites.

Northern Pintail At the Ouse Washes in small numbers up to May 15th when the last pair was seen.

Garganey A maximum of 5 were present on the Ouse Washes on Jun 1st with singles seen at 5 other sites during the period.

Northern Shoveler At Kingfishers Bridge a maximum of 11 birds were noted in May and single figures at 6 other sites during the period.

Red-crested Pochard A male was present for the first week in May at Paxton Pits and again on the

29th. That or another was seen at Grafham Water on May 13th.

Common Pochard A brood of 6 were seen on May 16th at Kingfishers Bridge where a possible 2 more pairs attempted to breed. Up to 4 birds were present at Fen Drayton GP, Grafham Water and Paxton Pits in late June.

Ring-necked Duck The male at Grafham Water from Apr 5th remained until May 11th.

Tufted Duck Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (107:49) and Needingworth GP (82:145). Counts up to 30 were noted at 9 other sites.

Common Scoter Five males and one female were at Grafham Water on May 1st.

Goldeneye Single birds were present at 4 sites up to mid May with 1 at Paxton Pits till at least Jun 22nd.

Ruddy Duck Up to 5 birds noted at 6 sites.

GAMEBIRDS

Water Rail Poorly reported: 2 at Kingfishers Bridge on May 27th, and singles at Wicken Fen on May 1st, Ouse Washes on May 15th and Nr. Upware on May 28th.

Corncrake At 1 site a calling male was present from May 25th-27th, with possibly the same (although 2km away) calling from Jun 7th until the end of the month.

Spotted Crake No reports received.

Moorhen Reported from 13 sites, with numbers ranging from 1-30 birds.

Coot Reported from 12 sites, peak numbers included Fen Drayton GP (131, 449), Barleycraft GP (87, 128) and 101 at Kingfishers Bridge on May 26th. Otherwise numbers ranged from 2-62 birds.

DIVERS TO HERONS

Little Grebe Birds were noted at 8 sites but young only reported from one. The largest count was again at Paxton Pits with 13 in June.

Great Crested Grebe The highest count was at Paxton Pits with 77 on Jun 14th and the monthly counts at Fen Drayton GP were (32, 48). Breeding was noted at 9 sites.

Black-necked Grebe The Paxton Pits bird from April remained until May 2nd. Then what was presumed to be two different birds were present at the same site on May 14th and 15th.

Great Cormorant Small numbers reported from 8 sites.

Great Bittern Booming birds were heard at 3 sites but no confirmation of breeding.

Little Egret Reported from 9 sites, with the highest count of 12 on the Ouse Washes where they bred for the second year.

Grey Heron Reported from 13 sites with the highest count recorded at Paxton Pits with 18 on Jun 28th.

White Stork A bird seen flying over the M11 between J12 and 13 on May 6th was later tracked over the Arbury area and the Cambridge Science

Park heading northeast. A probable was over the city centre on May 10th.

RAPTORS

Honey Buzzard One was reported from Brampton Wood on Jun 20th.

Black Kite/kite sp. A probable Black Kite was reported at Littleport on May 29th, whilst on the same day at Paxton Pits, 5 kites were seen circling over high southeast, but they couldn't be identified by the observers – There have been only 1-2 national records of multiple Black Kites (involving a maximum of two birds together) – so maybe they were Red Kites, although in southern Cambs, a group of 5 Red Kites would still be an impressive record. Another birding mystery!

Red Kite Counts of two at Connington on May 3rd, Witcham Toll on May 25th and Orton Malborne on Jun 22nd, otherwise singles seen in May at Paxton Pits on 3rd, Woodwalton Fen on 4th, Morborne Hill on 7th, Great Raveley on 16th, Comberton on 28th, Fen Drayton GP and Over Fen GP on 29th, and in June at Granchester Meadows on 3rd, Paxton Pits on 5th, Hilton and Sawtry on 10th, Ely and Gransden Airfield on 13th, Abbots Ripton on 17th, Holme Fen on 20th, Elton on 22nd and Barway on 23rd.

Marsh Harrier Recorded at 24 sites, with peak counts including 5 along both Nene and Ouse Washes. Presumed migrants were seen at Cambridge, Fen Drayton GP, Glinton, Great Raveley, Harston, Paxton Pits, St. Ives, St. Neots and Whaddon.

Hen Harrier A male migrating through Foxton on May 27th was a late date for this species – potentially the latest date ever (excluding mid-summer records, e.g. 1978, 1985-86 and 1992-94 etc.).

Montagu's Harrier A ringtail was seen at Alconbury Airfield on May 5th, with a male reported on the same date at Kings Dyke NR. A splendid male was photographed on Nene Washes on May 6th, and finally another ringtail was seen at Wicken Fen on May 10th – a bumper week in the county for this rare migrant.

Sparrowhawk Recorded at 27 sites, with numbers ranging from 1-3 birds, with many being seen in gardens preying on passerines.

Common Buzzard Recorded at 21 sites, with numbers ranging from 1-3 birds.

Osprey Singles were seen at Orton BP on May 2nd, Wicken Fen on May 6th and 13th, Grafham Water from May 13th-14th, Roswell Pits on May 18th and around Wyboston Lakes (in Cambs and Beds) on Jun 20th and 22nd.

Kestrel Recorded at 28 sites, with numbers ranging from 1-6 birds.

Merlin A male at Paxton Pits on May 4th was the only record of the period.

Hobby Recorded from 35 sites, with the peak numbers at Fen Drayton GP (16, 1) and Paxton Pits

(16, 8), Ouse Washes (10, -) and Wicken Fen (6, 10), otherwise 1-4 birds.

Peregrine Singles seen at Wicken Fen on May 1st, Linton on Jun 24th and Stretham on Jun 25th – mid-summer records still remain rare in the county.

RAILS

Water Rail Poorly reported - two at Kingfishers Bridge on May 27th, and singles at Wicken Fen on May 1st, Ouse Washes on May 15th and Nr. Upware on May 28th.

Corncrake At one site a calling male was present from May 25th-27th, with possibly the same (although 2km away) calling from Jun 7th until the end of the month.

Spotted Crake No reports received.

Moorhen Reported from 13 sites, with numbers ranging from 1-30 birds.

Coot Reported from 12 sites, peak numbers included Fen Drayton GP (131, 449), Barleycraft GP (87, 128) and 101 at Kingfishers Bridge on May 26th. Otherwise numbers ranged from 2-62 birds.

WADERS

Oystercatcher Breeding reported from Paxton Pits (3), Barleycraft GP (3), Godmanchester GP, Kingfishers Bridge, Long Drove (Cottenham), Over Fen GP, Nene Washes, Weybridge GP and ARC Quarry (Upware).

Pied Avocet In May, up to 3 at Ouse Washes, 4 at Kingfishers Bridge, 2 Over Fen, 1-2 Nene Washes, 2 at Wicken Fen on 1st and 29th and Isleham Water Meadows on 17th. In June, up to 7 at Nene Washes and single at Wicken Fen on 7th.

Collared Pratincole One at Wicken Fen on May 28th for 3 hours, later that day it was seen on the Norfolk coast. If accepted, this will be the county's third record, the last at Ouse Washes in June-July 1983.

Little Plover Breeding reported at 6 sites with a total of 9 pairs.

Ringed Plover Breeding reported from Paxton Pits and Over Fen. Highest counts also from these sites with 17 at Paxton on May 17th and 12 at Over Fen on May 29th, most of these birds showed characteristics of the Arctic Ringed Plover.

Eurasian Dotterel Only 1 record of 6 at the regular Honey-pot Farm fields near Chatteris.

Golden Plover Singles at Ouse Washes on May 2nd and at Over Fen GP May 13th to 26th.

Grey Plover In May, at Wicken Fen on 1st, Fen Drayton GP, Ouse Washes and Paxton Pits on 13th and Grafham Water on 17th.

Lapwing Breeding numbers lower at some sites as follows – Nene Washes 240, Kingfishers Bridge 7, Over Fen 3, Paxton Pits 1-2, quite a few reported from farmland though e.g. Gamlingay 4, Grange Farm (Hamerton) 4, Holme Fen area 4+. Post breeding movements at Elm on June 19th and build-up at Paxton Pits to 370 on 27th.

Sanderling In May, at Paxton Pits on 8th, 12th, 2 on 15th to 16th, 18th and 2 again on 19th. At

Grafham Water 2 on 17th (possibly from previous site?) and one on 23rd. In June at Paxton Pits on 14th.

Little Stint Singles at Over Fen on May 2nd and Paxton Pits on June 11th.

Temminck's Stint At Paxton Pits, 1 on May 16th was joined by another from 17th to 18th (or were possibly two fresh birds?).

Curlew Sandpiper At Paxton Pits on May 1st and Over Fen GP on May 28th arrived with Tundra Ringed Plovers.

Dunlin Peak passage between May 8th and 11th with max. of 53 at Paxton Pits, 38 at Ouse Washes and 29 at Over Fen. 1-9 at a few sites throughout May. In June, 1-6 at Paxton Pits and a single at Grafham Water on 15th.

Ruff Up to 12 at Ouse Washes on May 1st-2nd and one male through May. At Paxton Pits, 1-2 males May 29th to June 29th, Cam Washes (Upware) 4 males on June 26th, Wicken Fen 9 reported on June 26th. Nene Washes 1-2 occasional in May.

Common Snipe Nene Washes: 198 drummers was the highest since 1983 (244). Elsewhere very worrying with single drummers at Wicken Fen, Kingfishers Bridge and Cam Washes (Upware).

Woodcock Roding birds at Monks Wood (2), Wicken Fen (2), Woodwalton Fen (5).

Black-tailed Godwit Breeding numbers at Nene Washes increased to 45 pairs, 15-20 juveniles fledged. Very sad to report no breeding at Ouse Washes (Cams section) for the first time since 1952. In May, up to 47 at Ouse Washes and Barleycraft GP and 25 at Nene Washes were of the Icelandic race. Also at Paxton Pits were 4 on May 9th, 16 on 14th and single June 20th-21st.

Bar-tailed Godwit Singles in May at Kingfishers Bridge on 1st, Isleham Water Meadow on 13th, Paxton Pits 15-17th and 27th.

Whimbrel Singles in May: Milton CP on 1st, Ouse Washes on 2nd, Paxton Pits on 11th and Wicken Fen on 15th.

Eurasian Curlew Singles at Kingfishers Bridge on May 1st, Paxton Pits on May 15th and June 21st.

Spotted Redshank Paxton Pits on June 19th and 2 possible reported on 26th.

Common Redshank Breeding population at Nene Washes remained stable with around 160 pairs, elsewhere up to 5 pairs at Kingfishers Bridge, Over Fen up to 8 birds, Paxton Pits 8, Wicken Fen 7, Barleycraft GP up to 4.

Common Greenshank Light passage in May with 1-5 at Wicken Fen, Ouse Washes 1-2, Over Fen GP 1-2, Swaffham Prior Fen, Fletton BP, Kingfishers Bridge. Return Passage from June 22nd at Paxton Pits and Grafham Water and Ferry Meadows on 30th.

Green Sandpiper Return passage from June 5th at Over Fen. Peaks of 6 at Paxton Pits on 22nd, 5 Maxey/Etton on 28th and 4 Cam Washes (Upware) on 26th, 1-2 at a further four sites.

Wood Sandpiper In May, Over Fen from 1st to 2nd and 2 on 13th, Wicken Fen 4th to 10th, Fletton and Godmanchester GPs on 15th and Paxton Pits 30th to 31st.

Common Sandpiper In May, recorded to the 20th. Highest counts Grafham Water 3, Godmanchester GP, Paxton Pits, Roswell Pits, Over Fen, Impington Lake 2 and singles from a further 10 sites. In June, at Grafham Water on 14th and 28th.

Turnstone In May, Wicken Fen on 1st, Paxton Pits 6th to 8th with 2 on 30th, Kingfishers Bridge on 8th, Ouse Washes on 10th, Fletton BP on 16th, Over Fen GP 5 on 16th and 2 on 30th and Grafham Water 2 on 18th.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull No records.

Little Gull At Paxton Pits, 3 noted on May 4th then a 2cy from May 20th to June 28th.

Black-headed Gull Kingfishers Bridge had at least 123 nests in May but unfortunately it appears that breeding was abandoned at Godmanchester GP by early June. Barleycraft GP produced counts of (178, 133) during the period but no details of breeding numbers were received.

Common Gull During May singles noted at Grafham Water, Ouse Washes and Shropshires Res. up to the 15th, all were 2cy birds. The first returning adult was noted at Grafham Water on June 21st.

Lesser Black backed Gull Breeding pairs at Godmanchester GP increased to 6 pairs this year; breeding was also recorded at Paxton Pits for the first time with 3 pairs nesting. Up to 450+ noted at Long Drove Cottenham during the period including birds ringed in Suffolk and Rotterdam.

Herring Gull At Paxton Pits, a pair nested for the first time and a pair in a Wisbech wood yard was also showing signs of breeding behaviour. Only 10+ birds noted at Long Drove Cottenham during the period.

Western Yellow-legged Gull At Long Drove Cottenham, regular visits revealed over 30+ different individuals during the period.

Caspian Gull June records of this gull are rare so birds seen at Dogsthorpe Tip on 13th, 26th, 28th Long Drove Cottenham on 10th and Paxton Pits on 14th are noteworthy but occurred when there is considerable influx of non-breeding birds into Cams particularly 2cy and 3cy age groups. All records were of 2cy birds so perhaps this gull too is becoming an all year round feature mirroring the previous gull in its rapidly changed status.

Iceland Gull A 2cy was at Flag Fen on May 5-6th becoming the latest Cams record and the first for that month.

Greater Black-backed Gull High numbers for the time of year were present at Long Drove Cottenham with up to 30+ present into late May including 2 adults on 14th.

Black-legged Kittiwake An extraordinary record of two adults resting with other gulls at Landbeach Tip

on June 17th.

Sandwich Tern Two were noted on the Ouse Washes on May 18th.

Common Tern At Paxton Pits, 30 pairs nesting.

Arctic Tern Peak passage this spring occurred on May 4th when 100 passed through Paxton Pits (also 20 the next day), 71+ flew north west at Grafham Water, 31 were seen from a living room window at Witcham and 10 noted at Roswell pits.

Little Tern In May, 2 noted at Fen Drayton GP on 1st and 4 flew north at Paxton Pits on 12th. On June 21st, 2 were noted to display briefly at Paxton Pits.

Black Tern A poor spring passage with a peak count of 7 at Paxton Pits on May 1st. 1–4 noted at Fen Drayton GP, Kingfishers Bridge and Paxton Pits on May 10–16th. The only record from Grafham Water for the period was of 4 on June 11th.

PASSERINES

Feral Pigeon Largest counts again from Wisbech Town Centre (100+, 180+) and Elizabeth Bridge Cambridge (58).

Stock Pigeon Largest flock reported was of 32 at Elm on June 26th. It is pleasing to note a few breeding records including 11 pairs at Priory Park and 6 at Paxton Pits.

Wood Pigeon Forty breeding pairs noted at Paxton Pits and 20 in Priory Park.

Collared Dove Thirteen breeding pairs noted in Priory Park.

Turtle Dove Seventy-five records received 47 from sites including 13 singing birds at Paxton Pits (a slight decline) and 9 around Mepal.

Cuckoo Still good numbers noted at Isleham this year peaking at 11 in June. Elsewhere very few records away from reed bed/fen and gravel pit habitat, this species seems to be lost as a sound of spring in many parishes.

Barn Owl Thirty-five records received from 24 sites.

Little Owl Thirty-seven records from 29 sites.

Tawny Owl Only 20 records received including confirmed breeding at 3 sites in Brampton.

Long-eared Owl **Breeding confirmed at 4 sites also reported from 6 additional sites.**

Short-eared Owl. A single was noted at Wicken Fen on May 1st

Common Swift Larger concentrations noted in the first half of May at Orton BP 100+ on 4th, Ouse Washes 150 and Upware on 5th, Fen Drayton GP 230 on 10th, Wicken Fen 300 on 11th and Over Fen 100+ on 13th. In June 1000+ gathered at Grafham water on 11th. No breeding records received.

Kingfisher Reported from 15 sites.

Hoopoe A bird was reported from the Gog Magog GC on May 2nd.

Green Woodpecker Breeding pairs increased to 10 at Paxton Pits.

Greater Spotted Woodpecker Breeding pairs included 8 at Paxton Pits and 3 in Hardwick Woods. At Wicken Fen 8 different birds were ringed there during June.

Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker A pair fledged at least two young in Priory Park but a nest hole at Wimpole was sadly predated; elsewhere reported from Glington and Monks Wood.

Skylark Reported from 15 sites with a maximum of 30 at Lark Rise Farm, Barton during June.

Sand Martin Reported from 18 sites. Maximum was 50 at Maxey on May 24th.

Barn Swallow Recorded from 20+ sites. The maximum record was 170 at Fen Drayton on May 10th.

House Martin Recorded from 13 sites with a maximum of 80 at Godmanchester on May 14th.

Meadow Pipit Records were received from 17 sites with the highest count coming from Barleycraft with 10 present on June 12th.

Yellow Wagtail Noted throughout April and May at 12 sites with a maximum of 24 at Blackbush Drove on May 2nd. Males of the blue-headed subspecies *flava* were noted at Blackbush Drove and Sutton North Fen.

Grey Wagtail Reports were received from 11 sites with the majority of records concerning breeding pairs.

Pied Wagtail Counts received from 10 sites with a maximum of 46 at Granta Park, Abington on Jun 24th.

Nightingale Records were received from 10 sites. The maximum as would be expected was at Paxton Pits with up to 26 singing males by mid June.

Black Redstart Four seen during the period. Due to the time of year and the potential of breeding, the locations have been withheld.

Common Redstart A single was reported at Paxton Pits on May 7th and was the only report of this species during the period.

Whinchat Five records received following the main arrival in late April. Individuals were recorded at Paxton Pits (2), Blackbush Drove (2) with singles at Gamlingay and Sutton North Fen.

Stonechat Singles noted from Wicken Fen during May and June were the only reports of this species in the period.

Northern Wheatear Following on from the large movement in April, many more birds were noted as they headed north. Noted from Blackbush Drove (7), Ferry Meadows (6), Chain Corner (5), Haddenham (5), East Fen Isleham (4), Swaffham Prior (4), Fowlmere (3), Farcet Fen (2), Wicken (2) and Sutton North Fen (2). Further singles were noted at Paxton Pits, Comberton, Barleycraft, Fletton BP and Over Fen Many records referred to birds of the Greenland race *leucorhoa*.

Ring Ouzel Two recorded, both on May 1st, at Ferry Meadows and Over Fen.

Blackbird Records were received from 13 sites with maximum of 54 territories identified during the

breeding birds survey, carried out in early May and late June.

Song Thrush Records were received from 12 sites with 1–3 individuals being the norm at most sites. At least 22 breeding territories were confirmed from Paxton Pits

Mistle Thrush Reports were received from 8 sites with 1–2 being the norm. Twelve were noted at Ely on Jun 15th.

Cetti's Warbler Reported from 4 sites. At Fen Drayton GP, 1 singing male was present throughout May and into early June. At Paxton Pits, a male was noted from May 8th until June 17th (none reported there since 1997). At Wicken Fen, singing was noted throughout the period (usually only 1 male, with 2 males present on May 7th). It was very probable that breeding occurred at Wicken or nearby, especially as 2 juveniles were present, and ringed, in June. Elsewhere in the county, breeding was reported from 1 fenland site.

Common Grasshopper Warbler From 16 sites, Castor Hanglands held 10 birds on June 8th, with 5 present on June 27th. Three birds at Paxton Pits during June were a welcome increase. Woodwalton Fen had 4 in May; elsewhere 1–3 birds were reported.

Sedge Warbler Reported from 13 sites, 55 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits in June were considered to be a 'marked' decline. Good numbers were present at Little Wilbraham Fen; at Kingfisher's Bridge 23 singing males were noted; 10 birds were present at East Fen (Isleham) on May 1st (with 3 being noted on June 6th).

Eurasian Reed Warbler Records from 17 sites included 59 singing males at Paxton Pits (June) – a 'slight' decline; 59 singers at Kingfisher's Bridge on May 11th; 33 males at Fen Drayton; 13 birds at East Fen (Isleham) on June 6th; 7/9 singing males at Landbeach GP in May/June; and good numbers at Little Wilbraham Fen. Two birds were noted at Sanger Centre scrapes (Ickleton) on June 22nd.

Lesser Whitethroat Records comprised mostly 1–2 from wide-ranging locations. Paxton Pits held 10 pairs in June – an increase. Three were present at Lark Hall Farm (Barton) on May 3rd, 3 at Milton CP (Cambridge) on May 15th, and 3 at Orton BP on May 4th.

Common Whitethroat Widely distributed, 41 breeding pairs were counted at Paxton Pits for June (an increase). Several other sites held populations in double figures: East Fen (Isleham), Fen Drayton GP, Kingfisher's Bridge and Lark Rise Farm (Barton). Unusually low numbers were noted at Linton by one observer.

Garden Warbler From 13 sites, 56 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits was an increase. Twelve singing males were noted at Fen Drayton on May 10th, 6+ at Wicken Fen on May 11th, and 6+ at Woodwalton Fen on May 1st.

Blackcap From 19 sites, with 53 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits (considered to be a stable population).

Common Chiffchaff With fewer than usual records received for this species for this period, reports were mostly 1–2 birds with higher numbers at Paxton Pits (36 breeding pairs – a 'decline'); 6 birds at East Fen (Isleham) on May 1st, and 3 singing males at Fen Drayton GP on May 10th.

Willow Warbler From 11 sites, 62 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits were an increase. Ten singing males were at Fen Drayton on May 10th, and Castor Hanglands held 10 on June 8th.

Goldcrest Records mostly comprised singing males, or evidence of breeding, from 10 locations,

Firecrest A single record of a singing male was received from the south-west of the county.

Spotted Flycatcher At 27 sites, maximum numbers were 3 pairs at Brampton RAF.

Bearded Tit This bred at 1 fenland site; adults and 2 juveniles were present there throughout June.

Long-tailed Tit Reported from 10 sites, breeding numbers are on the up at Paxton Pits (18 pairs, June). Sightings of 15 birds were made at Elm and Fen Drayton GP in late June.

Marsh Tit Noted at Paxton Pits (only 1 May record; 2 in June); The Gloucesters (Wimpole) – 4 birds in May, 2 in June; and Wimpole Hall (1 in May).

Coal Tit At 8 sites, reports consisted of breeding birds (maximum 3 pairs at Priory Park, St Neots), singing males and occasional garden sightings.

Blue Tit Twenty-seven pairs nested at Priory Park (St Neots), exceeded only by Paxton Pits which held a stable June population of 55 pairs.

Great Tit Records from 12 sites included 1 pair with 8 fledglings at Stapleford, 24 pairs nesting at Priory Park (St Neots), and 37 pairs at Paxton Pits.

Wood Nuthatch A bird recorded for a week in June at Paxton Pits was only the sixth record from this site. No other records received.

Eurasian Treecreeper Up to 3 pairs were recorded from Paxton Pits (where breeding was confirmed) throughout the period. Breeding (1 pair) was also confirmed for Priory Park (St Neots), and for Wicken Fen, where 7 juveniles were ringed in June.

Eurasian Jay Records of 1 and 2 birds came from 18 sites. Between 4 and 7+ birds were at Elm throughout the period.

Black-billed Magpie Reported from just 8 sites. Paxton Pits supported 17 breeding pairs through May and June. 12-15+ at Elm throughout the period was also noteworthy.

Eurasian Jackdaw Records received from just 6 sites, with 20+ birds at Elm in June being the highest count.

Rook Records received from 3 sites! Maximum counts were of 50–80+ at Elm (the higher counts being in June).

Carion Crow Records received from 9 sites. Twenty-seven at Westfield Farm (Comberton) on June 28th was the highest count.

Common Raven An exceptional succession of records started with an unconfirmed report from St Neots on May 12th, followed by single birds seen at Paxton Pits on May 15th (flying south-east), May

18th, May 24th (flying north) and lastly on May 27th.

Starling Highest counts received were of 600 (at dusk) at Fen Drayton GP on June 25th, 250 at Over Fen GP on May 22nd, and 250 roosting at Paxton Pits on June 13th.

House Sparrow Records received from 12 sites with a maximum count of 85+ at Elm in June.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow Recorded from 6 sites. The maximum count was of 7–8+ at Elm throughout the period.

Chaffinch Records received from 12 sites. At Paxton Pits, 82 pairs were recorded as breeding; otherwise there were no counts over 15 birds.

European Greenfinch Noted from 10+ sites. Twenty-four pairs bred at Paxton Pits. No counts were received of more than 16 birds.

European Goldfinch Noted from 15 sites, although no counts were of more than 11 birds.

Eurasian Siskin A single bird at Ferry Meadows CP on June 25th was a good record.

Common Linnet Recorded from just 10 sites. The maximum count was of 20 at Over Fen GP on May 22nd.

Lesser Redpoll Just 1 record of a displaying bird at Wandlebury CP on May 21st.

Common Crossbill An unconfirmed report of a bird at Orton Brimbles on May 12th, was followed by a juvenile at Woodwalton Fen on June 27th.

Common Bullfinch Reported from 14 sites. Nine pairs bred at Paxton Pits.

Yellowhammer Recorded at just 10 sites. Highest counts were of up to 13 birds at Lark Rise Farm (Barton) throughout the period.

Ann Asher, Paul Atkinson, Matt Best, Peter Bircham, James Cadbury, Pat Doody, Dr Mike Foley, Kevin Harris, Brian & Sheila Harrup, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Fred Heath, Peter Herkenrath, Michael Holdsworth, Pete Holt, Keith Honner, David Hopkins, Julian Hughes, Michael Jennings, Charlie Kitchin, Jim Lawrence, John Le Gassick, Jono Leadley, Stuart & Rita Lingard, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Bruce & Gwen Martin, Mark Missin, Clare Neville, Dick Newell, John Oates, Rob Palmer, Rob Partridge, Richard Patient, Mark Peck, Mark Pettit, Michael Price, Doug Radford, Dr Gareth Rees, Tony Roberts, Paul Rule, Bob & Ann Scott, Clive Sinclair, Brian Stone, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne, Ruth Tubbs, Alan & Brenda Wadsworth, P. M. Warrington, David White

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.

Cambridgeshire Bird Club records committee – recent decisions

The following records have been accepted by the CBC Records Committee:

Tundra Bean Geese (7), Wicken Fen 12/12/2004
Tundra Bean Geese (18), Oxlode 22/12/2004
Tundra Bean Goose (2), Ouse Washes 30/1/2004
Leach's Petrel, Cambridge, 16/10/2004
Manx Shearwater, Grafham Water, 19/9/2004
Night Heron, Ouse Washes, 10/8/2004
Honey Buzzard, Stretham 31/5/2004
Iceland Gull, Fen Drayton 28/11/2004
Glaucous Gull, Grafham Water 7/2/2004

Reed Bunting Recorded at 15 sites, with 42 pairs noted as breeding at Paxton Pits. Good counts of singing birds were noted from Kingfishers Bridge on May 11th (15 birds), Fen Drayton GP on May 10th (14 birds) and Over Fen GP on May 29th (10+ birds).

Corn Bunting Records were received from just 10 sites. The maximum count was of 8+ birds singing at Friday Bridge on June 20th.

HYBRIDS

Greylag x Canada Goose Up to 3 noted at Paxton Pits and singles noted at Godmanchester GP and Barleycraft GP throughout and at Long Drove Cottenham on May 27th.

Barnacle x Canada Goose A single noted at Barleycraft GP on May 7th.

Herring x Caspian Gull In June, single colour ringed birds from a Polish colony were noted at Long Drove Cottenham on June 6th and Kingfishers Bridge on 7th.

EXOTICA

Black Swan Still present at the usual sites Cambridge, Ely and Ouse Washes.

Wood Duck In Cambridge, a male was still present in Jesus ditch up to mid-May. A male was at Paxton Pits on May 4th and June 22nd. Also reported from Grantchester Meadows on May 15th.

Lady Amherst's Pheasant A singles was reported at Floods Tavern St Ives on May 11th.

Laughing Kookaburra A single at Witcham on May 1st, wow!

Dotterel, Fidwell Fen, 3/11/2004
Ring-necked Parakeet, Ferry Meadows 9/9/2004
Wryneck, Dry Drayton, 12/9/2004
Cetti's Warbler, Chain Corner, 5/1/2004
Cetti's Warbler, Fen Drayton 27/11/2004
'Eastern' Bullfinch, Fowlmere 2/11/2004
Snow Bunting, Mepal, 28/12/2004

The 'Eastern' Bullfinch may be the first of this form in Cambridgeshire. Some of these records may have occurred on subsequent dates.

There are still a number of records from 2004 that haven't been submitted so if you saw a rarity last year and haven't sent it in, please do. Details of what species require descriptions can be found in the CBC 2003 report and the CBC website.

Bulletin bird 1: Collared Pratincole at Wicken Fen

John Oates

Having woken up early on 28th May, I headed for the Cam Washes at Upware. From here I walked to Wicken Fen and eventually arrived at Baker's Fen at about 06.30am. Other than a Little Egret it was rather quiet. After about 15 minutes, while scanning with binoculars and contemplating heading back to Upware, I noticed an unusual bird walk out from behind a Mallard. I was pretty sure it wasn't a Redshank or Lapwing chick (which is what most of my 'rare' birds at this time of year turn out to be!) and my thoughts turned to it being a pratincole. With hands trembling I trained my scope on it and was soon watching a stunning pratincole. I was incredulous!

Very quickly I realised that although I had found a pratincole, I might not be able to identify it. The low sun was harsh and I was concerned that it might be impossible to determine important plumage features if it disappeared towards the sun. I couldn't see the tail very well but the bill base was extensively red and the upperparts weren't particularly dark, so I thought it was most likely a Collared. After a few minutes it was disturbed by a Lesser Black-back and then gave me a superb fly past. The underwing was reddish and the wings had a white trailing edge – it was a Collared and I could now relax a little! On many occasions I have imagined what it must be like to find a pratincole. Now I knew and it felt very good, especially because it was my local patch.

The Collared Pratincole stayed on Baker's Fen until 09.20am, often running around like a plover and occasionally flying about like a tern. It was seen by quite a few local birders, but sadly some didn't get there in time. It was last seen flying off high to the east. Presumably the same bird was found at Cley in Norfolk during the late morning, where it remained into June.

If accepted, this will be the third Cambridgeshire record, following individuals at Quy during May 1835 and at the Ouse Washes from 19th June to 3rd July 1983.

(From the Editor. The Collared Pratincole remained in north Norfolk until 9th June. Perhaps the Pratincole that arrived at the National Wetlands Centre, Camarthenshire, on 14th June and remained until 13th July was the same individual. There were also reports of Collared Pratincole from Hampshire, Lincolnshire and Lancashire on May 1st, 12th and 23rd respectively. According to the British Birds Record Committee, 54 Collared Pratincoles were recorded in Great Britain between 1958 and 2002 – an average of just over 1 per year. Photos of the Wicken Fen Pratincole appear on the Club website.)

Moths – just boring brown things, really hard to identify and no fun!

Louise Bacon

Well, think again. Moths are an amazingly diverse group of insects which in part are not that difficult to learn now with the improved literature recently available.

Just boring brown things? You wouldn't say that if you held an Elephant hawk moth in your hand – its pink and olive green! The Brimstone moth is bright yellow, and guess what, the Emerald moths are all green! Many have intricate patterns and a glossy sheen. We have been moth trapping regularly in our garden and in one or two other places for about 18 months now, and thought it was timely to write a little bit about them for those of you out there who aren't already hooked on this.

Moths are a large group of insects, with over 2000 species in the country. However, they are split into two groups, macro-moths and micro-moths. Whilst this is roughly a division in size terms, it's actually a taxonomic division. Most people starting out get to know the macro-moths, of which there are about 1600 in the country and about 580 recorded in Cambridgeshire. These tend to be easier to learn than the others, which can often be small, brown and boring at first glance. In 2003 a new field guide was published which has made the study of macro-moths much more accessible. All old guides showed pinned individuals opened out to show all four wings, not folded up like moths always sit. This new guide illustrates them life-size, in the position you are likely to observe them! The new guide is *The Field Guide to Moths of Britain & Ireland*, by Waring, Townsend and Lewington and is published by British Wildlife Publishing.

The other question I can hear you all asking is 'Well, don't you need lots of complex equipment, lights, etc?' Well, in some ways, that is true – to get really good results from moth trapping it is best to attract them with a special kind of light which is much bluer than the normal lights we are used to. These lights are produced by actinic and mercury vapour bulbs, and many people run them with a purpose-built light-trap (a box which holds the light and somewhere for the moths to go). This is the best way to do moth trapping, as you can set the light up, leave it on overnight and come back to it in the morning if you don't want to watch the moths come in to the light. You can get a moth trap and light from several different suppliers, and would pay around £150.

There are even cheaper ways of studying moths. One is by just seeing which ones come to a normal light – e.g. a lighted window or porch light left on – you will get a few that way, and it is a good way to start to learn moth families as you will probably be looking at only a few species making identification less daunting. The other way is to go 'sugaring'. This involves luring moths to a feeding point of very attractive liquid, often with a component to slow them down such as alcohol. Two main techniques here – sugaring using a treacle or molasses-based solution – very thick and sweet with some beer in it to make it just liquid enough to be brushed on a gate post, tree stump or similar. The other technique, which we have found to work well, is to use wine ropes. This is basically thick string or rope soaked (stored till required) in a solution of very cheap red wine with sugar, old jam which has gone off, etc, stirred in it, boiled for a while to make it thick, and then a dash of cheap rum added at the end. We have found that the best success with sugaring was last year, baiting the same point regularly from mid July through to the autumn (a wine rope was still being used for feeding after about 3 days, and as we had 3-4 in storage, just swapping them over twice a week was sufficient). The key appeared to be repeat use of the same point, although we took this technique to other sites and got results the first evening of having them out. Several species of moths are attracted to sugar and never come to a light, even if you have both in the same area. The main hazard of this technique is wasps – they love wine ropes at least as much as the moths do! The third way to attract moths to 'sugar' is to have lots of nectar-producing plants – many things which are popular with insects by day are equally popular at night. Just go out with a torch and see what's using them or in the autumn blackberries and ivy flowers are a big draw.

So, to return to the moth-trapping by light. It is fascinating to watch moths come in to light – they will just come in and land, and you can view them before they go into the trap if you want. Some species prefer not to come in to the box — they flutter around and just sit in the vegetation several metres away- this is one reason why sometimes it is worthwhile spending a late summer evening just watching them come in. Some of the best species finds can be species which aren't too keen on the light. Different lights attract different numbers of species – routinely our actinic light gets fewer moths than a mercury vapour lamp, and the profile of species is slightly different. The whole thing is weather dependent. If it is windy, don't bother. A cool, clear night will also reduce your catch substantially, so a calm, cloudy night is best.

Moths fly all year – in winter you don't get many species or numbers, but you can still get a few, and they will be different to the summer ones. It all starts to get going properly in March, as numbers start to increase, and by May you can expect 50–80 moths of 20+ species in a garden if the weather is right (unlike this spring which has been very poor). By June/July it can actually get a bit daunting in terms of numbers of moths in the trap – expect 200–300 at least on a good night, so probably not a good time to start learning on your own.

Many people I know of in Cambridgeshire who have started moth trapping over the past year have garden lists of 150–200 already – it is that easy, even in a suburban garden. The only problem is some people's neighbours don't like it, but in many areas its OK. And the best bit is, you can very easily find a rarity! Many of us have found species which are nationally scarce, and one or two lucky people have found a species new to the county or not recorded for several decades.

Cammoths is an email contact group on Yahoo where we share our activities and problems; it runs in the same way as Cambirds.

There are often events planned around reserves in the county where you can get the chance to see moth-trapping in action, and they are well worth attending if you think you might be interested in this wonderful group of insects.

BTO – Tawny Owl survey

The BTO is carrying out a survey of Tawny Owls between 15 August and 15 October 2005. The areas are tetrads in the 10 Km squares TL45 & TL48. The survey is in the areas where a similar survey was carried out in 1989. If anyone is interested, especially if they took part in the 1989 survey, please get in touch with John Le Gassick (Tel: 01480 391991 Email: jclegassick@ntlworld.com).

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2005

September 9th – Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre The Indian Vulture Crisis by Debbie Pain

Dr Debbie Pain has worked at the Edward Grey Institute and the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat. She joined the RSPB as a research biologist in 1992 and is now Head of International Research. In the 1980s, the White-rumped Vulture was thought to be the most abundant large bird of prey in the world, but in little over a decade, the population has crashed by more than 99%, with the loss of tens of millions of birds. Huge numbers of the closely related Slender-billed and Long-billed Vultures have also died. The decline of Asian vultures is one of the steepest declines experienced by any bird species, and is certainly faster than that suffered by the dodo before its extinction. In 2000, the three species were classified as Critically Endangered. This status recognises that these species are now more vulnerable to global extinction than the tiger and the great Indian rhinoceros, which are both classified as Endangered. Research by an international team has shown that the vultures had been poisoned by the drug diclofenac and died of gout. Although diclofenac, has been used in human

medicine for decades, it has only recently been introduced for veterinary use in India and Pakistan. Vultures appear to have been exposed to the drug while scavenging livestock carcasses. Measures taken to prevent the extinction of vultures will include banning use of diclofenac in cattle and a captive breeding programme.

October 13th – Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre

How Titchwell Ticks by Adam Rowlands

Adam Rowlands has worked for the RSPB for 17 years and started as a Contract Warden at Minsmere where he is now the Site Manager. He spent nearly 10 years as Assistant Warden at Elmley Marshes, before taking up the posts of Warden on the Gwent Levels and then Site Manager at Titchwell. He spent two and half years at Titchwell before taking on his current role last October. He has traveled extensively in Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and North America in search of birds. His Titchwell talk is about the day-to-day running of this busy and well-known RSPB Reserve and some exciting recent developments.

November 11th St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

Birding in Cold Places by Ian Rowlands

Ian of the wildlife/birdwatching tour company, Speyside Wildlife, will talk about his birding experiences in the Scottish isles of Mull to Skye, plus the Arctic (Spitsbergen) and Antarctic.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new members, Robin Bailey of Cambridge and Graham Elliott of Buckden.
Bruce Martin

CBC E-Communication: bulletin by email and CBC-Announce

More members are receiving their bulletin by email, thus saving paper, postage, and speeding up delivery time. CBC-ANNOUNCE is an emailing list intended to send announcements and important notices about Club matters to any member who asks to go on the list.

If you would like to receive your bulletin by email or be subscribed to CBC-ANNOUNCE, please contact Vicki Harley, email vicki.harley@care4free.net

OBC WINTER MEETING (with AGM)

St John's Church Hall, Cambridge: Saturday 12 November 2005, 11.00–17.00

This annual meeting will take place in a comfortable new venue, 15 mins walk from Cambridge Rail Station. We have three fascinating illustrated talks on:

Exploratory Birding In The Philippines (by James Eaton) Bengal Floricans in Cambodia (by Tom Grey) The Giant Ibis (by Omaliss Keo)

WildSounds will be selling a range of books, CDs and sound-recording equipment, some at bargain prices. Refreshments will be available, and plenty of birders with a wide range of experience of Asia will be around to answer questions and help plan trips.

Entry is free and all Cambridgeshire Bird Club members are welcome, beginners and experts alike.

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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.

Please send records to: John Oates by September 7th
Next Bulletin due out October 2005, covering July and August 2005

GOOD BIRDING!