

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 381



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

RECENT REPORTS JULY AND AUGUST 2005

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records, and comments are made by Bruce Martin (Wildfowl, Divers to Herons), Mark Hawkes (Gamebirds, Raptors, Rails), 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).

JULY & AUGUST

This bulletin reports the occurrence of 166 species (excluding hybrids and exotics). Interesting records include breeding Red-crested Pochard (possibly a first for the county), Sabine's Gull, Raven and Fieldfare. The Cattle Egret at Hinchingsbrooke Lake created much interest – an account by its finder appears on page 7.

Indoor meetings

We are looking for volunteers to help run indoor meetings – putting out and replacing chairs, supplying/making tea and coffee etc. Helping at one or two meetings would be a worthwhile contribution. If you would like to help, please ask Louise Bacon (contact details on back page).

Marsh Harriers by Graham Easy



Numbers in brackets indicate March and April maximums.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Fen Drayton GP (181, 142) and at Needingworth GP, 137 were recorded on the July WeBS count. Small numbers were also reported from 11 other sites.

Whooper Swan A single bird was again seen on the Ouse Washes during July and another at the Dog in a Double on Aug 21st.

Bean Goose A single bird of unknown origin was at Wicken Fen on Aug 4th.

Greylag Goose Notable counts were from Fen Drayton GP (218), Needingworth GP (172), Ouse Fen (285), Paxton Pits (447), Shropshire's Res (145), Sutton North Fen (400) and Wicken Fen (180).

Canada Goose Three-figure counts were noted at Cambridge Research Park (322), Eau Fen (133), Granta Park Abington (100), Needingworth GP (191) and Shropshire's Res (290).

Barnacle Goose Up to 3 feral birds were noted at 6 sites.

Egyptian Goose Two birds were present at Ouse Fen on Jul 26th and 2 at Kingfishers Bridge on Aug 11th to the months end.

Ruddy Shelduck A single bird was at Wicken Fen on Jul 23rd and 1 at Fen Drayton GP on Aug 30th.

Common Shelduck Of the 45 birds at the Nene Washes on Jul 14th, 42 were juveniles. Juveniles were also reported from Cam Washes Upware (4, with 6 adults), Eau Fen (3), Grafham Water (11), Kingfishers Bridge (1) and Sutton North Fen (4).

Mandarin A female with 2 young was seen at Grafham Water on Jul 3rd.

Eurasian Wigeon Apart from the two injured birds that had summered at Kingfishers Bridge and Paxton Pits, the first probable migrants were seen at Paxton Pits (2) on Jul 15th and Fen Drayton GP (1) on Jul 24th. Single figures continued to arrive but the first notable flock was 35 at Ouse Fen on Aug 25th.

Gadwall Three broods were reported from Graham Water and one brood at Block Fen GP in July. A moulting flock of 50 birds were at Paxton Pits on Jul 3rd and counts at Fen Drayton GP were (40, 47). The only other site with double figures was Ouse Fen with 22 on Aug 14th.

Eurasian Teal At Eau Fen 16 on Aug 26th, Fen Drayton GP (4, 91), the Nene Washes 12 on Jul 6th and the Ouse Washes 22 on Aug 6th and 30 on Aug 29th were the only sites with double figures. Breeding was not recorded in the county this year.

Mallard Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (275, 215). Double figures were recorded at 7 other sites.

Northern Pintail A single bird was seen at Fen Drayton GP on Aug 22nd.

Garganey Two were present at the Nene Washes on Jul 5th and Kingfishers Bridge on Aug 24th. And singles were seen at Grafham Water on Jul 24th and Paxton Pits mid and late August.

Northern Shoveler Numbers in the teens were present at Eau Fen and Fen Drayton GP and single figures at 3 other sites during the period.

Red-crested Pochard A pair bred at Paxton Pits with 3 juveniles still present at the period end. Is this a new breeding record for the County? A male was present on two dates at Grafham Water in July. Four birds were at Needingworth GP on Jul 24th and up to 6 birds at Paxton Pits during August.

Common Pochard The counts at Fen Drayton GP (103, 168) was the favoured site for returning birds, as apart from 87 at Paxton Pits by the end of August, single figures were seen at only 2 others sites.

Ferruginous Duck A moulting male was present at Fen Drayton GP from Jul 16th until Aug 22nd.

Tufted Duck Broods were reported from 6 sites. Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (395, 710), Needingworth GP (84, 30) and Paxton Pits 155 in July. Small numbers were also noted at 6 other sites.

Common Scoter Six males and a female were at Grafham Water on Jul 27th and a female at the same site on Aug 10th.

Goldeneye A female summered at Paxton Pits and 1 bird was present at Needingworth GP on Jul 24th.

Ruddy Duck Singles were noted at 6 sites and up to 5 birds were present at a seventh site.

GAMEBIRDS

Red-legged Partridge Reported from just 6 sites, numbers ranging from 1–28 birds.

Grey Partridge Recorded at 11 sites, with numbers ranging from 1–15birds.

Common Quail Three calling at Woodwalton Fen on July 30th, with 1–2 calling until Aug 11th.

Otherwise singles at Waresley Wood on Jul 2nd, Bedford Purlieus on Jul 3rd, Nene Washes on Jul 11–12th, Longthorpe (Peterborough) on Jul 14th and Ouse Washes on Jul 23rd.

Common Pheasant Reported from 5 sites, with numbers ranging from 2 to 22.

DIVERS TO HERONS

Little Grebe Birds were noted at 13 sites with double figures at Paxton Pits (25), and Ouse Fen (10).

Great Crested Grebe Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (98, 107), the latter figure includes 7 broods. Double figures were also noted at Paxton Pits (66), Needingworth GP (30) and Roswell Pits (15). Also reported from 8 other sites.

Black-necked Grebe One bird was present at Fen Drayton GP from Aug 14th to the 25th.

Great Cormorant At Fen Drayton GP (41, 30). Also reported in small numbers at 10 other sites, including Paxton Pits where there were 10 nests still with young on Jul 23rd.

Great Bittern Singles were seen at 3 sites. One of them was at Fen Drayton GP where it is unusual to see a bird at this time of the year.

Cattle Egret An adult in summer plumage was

found in the Hinchingsbrooke/Brampton area on Jul 28th and was still present at the end of the period. Although there had been a well-publicised escape of 5 birds from a collection at Pensthorpe in Norfolk around this time, those birds were ringed. But to the delight of the county listers who hadn't this species on their lists, this bird had no rings and is presumed to of a wild origin. [For an account of the finding of this bird, see p7].

Little Egret Single figures reported from 15 sites, with the highest count of 8 at St Ives.

Grey Heron Reported from 21 sites with the highest count recorded at Fen Drayton GP with 13 in August.

White Stork A bird was reported over Cambourne on Aug 8th.

RAPTORS

European Honey-buzzard One flew over Castor Hanglands on Aug 2nd.

Red Kite Just two records received: 2 at Bedford Purlieus on Jul 3rd and a single over Hemmingford Grey on Jul 14th.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier Recorded at 25 sites, with peak counts including 8 along Nene Washes and 7 at Farcet Fen, both during August. Away from breeding areas, presumed migrants were seen at Fen Drayton GP, Fowlmere, Godmanchester GP, Gorefield, Grafham Water, Great Eversden, Paxton Pits, mainly during August.

Hen Harrier A male reported at Woolley on Aug 30th.

Montagu's Harrier Migrant males were seen at Buff Wood on Aug 10th and Nene Washes on Aug 24th.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk Recorded at 23 sites, with numbers ranging from 1 to 4 birds.

Common Buzzard Recorded at 22 sites, with numbers ranging from 1 to 5 birds.

Osprey Singles were seen at Paxton Pits on Aug 21st, Grafham Water on Aug 28th and Woodwalton Fen on Aug 28th.

Common Kestrel Recorded at 25 sites, with numbers ranging from 1 to 4 birds.

Merlin One at St. Neots on Aug 7th.

Eurasian Hobby Very widespread (and well reported) being recorded from 44 sites, with the peak numbers at Hemmingford Grey (8) Little Paxton and Farcet Fen (5) and Grafham Water (4) – all during August. Otherwise records involved 1–3 birds.

Peregrine A single seen at Great Gidding on Jul 15th.

RAILS

Water Rail Poorly reported – recorded at 5 sites, all involving 1–2 birds, apart from 5 at Fowlmere on Aug 17th.

Spotted Crake A juvenile showed well at Pocket Park (Eynesbury) on Aug 6–7th, with another at Wicken Fen on Aug 12th, and an unconfirmed report from Abbotsley on Aug 25th.

Common Moorhen Reported from 7 sites, with numbers ranging from 1 to 37 birds.

Common Coot Reported from 9 sites, peak numbers included Fen Drayton GP (616, 800), Barleycraft GP (542, -) and smaller numbers at other sites, ranging from 2 to 70 birds.

WADERS

Eurasian Oystercatcher Last date was Aug 8th at Paxton Pits.

Pied Avocet In July, up to 3 at Ouse Washes.

Little Plover Family groups present at 5 sites, mostly departed by end of July. In August barely any passage with singles at 4 sites and still 3 at Paxton Pits on 4th.

Ringed Plover Peak counts of 13 at Paxton Pits on Aug 4th, Grafham Water (5, 9), Eau Fen (Ely) and 6 at Kingfishers Bridge in late August.

European Golden Plover Early bird at Wicken Fen on July 1st. In August, 36 at Sutton North Fen on 21st, 20 at Stretham on 28th and singles from 5 sites.

Northern Lapwing Largest gatherings in July at Nene Washes 800, Abbotsley 700, Barleycraft GP 476, Paxton Pits 370, Eau Fen 340. In August Kingfishers Bridge 610, Sutton North Fen 600, Swaffham Prior Fen 305 and several groups of 50–300.

Sanderling At Grafham Water, July 19th–21st and 2 at Paxton Pits on Aug 2nd.

Little Stint At Grafham Water, 4 on July 30th, singles at Paxton Pits on July 28th (moulted adult) and 31st and a juvenile at Eau Fen (Ely) on Aug 26–27th.

Curlew Sandpiper A summer plumage bird at Grafham Water on July 12th also single on Aug 23rd. Eau Fen up to 2 from Aug 20th to 25th and Sutton North Fen on Aug 20th.

Purple Sandpiper A juvenile at Grafham Water, Aug 20–26th.

Dunlin Highest counts as follows: Paxton Pits (12, 11), Grafham Water (3, 10); 1–4 from a further 9 sites.

Ruff Highest counts from Eau Fen (21, 20), 1–5 from a further 8 sites.

Jack Snipe One at Priors Fen on Aug 7th, (if accepted will beat the earliest date by 12 days, a record set in 1961).

Common Snipe A few breeding birds still incubating at Nene Washes to late July. A sprinkling of birds in August with peaks of 24 at Eau Fen, 11 at Paxton Pits and 8 at Priors Fen GP.

Eurasian Woodcock Up to 4 at Wicken Fen.

Black-tailed Godwit Breeding birds at Nene Washes raised a low maximum of 15 young. A flock of 54 'Icelandic race' at Nene Washes on July 6th was unusual. A group of 8 at Paxton Pits on Aug 4th, 6 at Welches Dam on July 31st, 4 at Godmanchester GP on July 17th and a scattering of 1–3 birds at several sites.

Whimbrel Sightings from July 12th at Grafham Water with 4 on 19th and 1 on Aug 31st (with a

Curlew), 4 west at Nene Washes on July 23rd and Priors Fen 1 on Aug 9th and 5 on 19th.

Curlew In July, 3 at Tick Fen on 3rd and singles from 6 sites. In August, 14 at Grafham Water on 30th and 24 on 31st were the largest groups in the county for several years. Other groups included 6 at Farcet Fen, 5 at Paxton Pits, 3 over Gt. Eversden and 1–2 from a further 3 sites.

Spotted Redshank Singles from Fen Drayton GP on July 23rd, Priors Fen GP on Aug 7th, 19th and 23rd, Eau Fen on Aug 18th and Sutton North Fen on Aug 20th.

Common Redshank Breeding populations had departed by early July. In August, 1–3 at Eau Fen and Paxton Pits and singles at a further 6 sites.

Common Greenshank Main passage from Aug 9th to 29th. Highest counts as follows: Grafham Water (2, 10), Eau Fen (0, 8), Priors Fen GP (2, 6), Paxton Pits (3, 3), Nene Washes (3, 1) and 1–2 from a further 5 sites.

Green Sandpiper Highest counts as follows: Maxey GP (2, 13), Paxton Pits GP (8, 5), Wicken Fen (6, 8), Fen Drayton GP (6, 4), Over Fen GP (6, 3), Cam Washes (6, 0), Eau Fen (1, 5), Priors Fen GP (3, 5), Kingfishers Bridge (1, 5), 1–3 from a further 9 sites.

Wood Sandpiper In July, 1–2 at Nene Washes 1st–10th, Wicken Fen on 15th, Ouse Washes on 31st. In August, 1–2 at Priors Fen GP from 9th to 20th and Grafham Water on 22nd.

Common Sandpiper Main passage from July 16th to Aug 4th. Highest counts as follows: Grafham Water (10, 12), Paxton Pits (7, 12), Eau Fen (4, 2), Sutton North Fen (0, 4) and 1–3 from a further 14 sites.

Ruddy Turnstone Grafham Water: singles on July 24th, Aug 12th and 7 on 31st, Paxton Pits 2 on July 18th and singles on Aug 8th and 23rd.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull At Grafham Water, 4 (ad, 2cy, 2 juvs) were noted together in the Lagoons on Jul 17th also 3 juveniles were noted in the roost on 31st. In August, 1–2 birds could regularly be found in the roost. Elsewhere an adult was at Paxton Pits on 3rd and a juvenile was noted at Melbourn on 5th.

Little Gull The first juvenile of the year was noted at Grafham Water on Aug 31st.

Sabine's Gull A superb adult in summer plumage frequented Grafham Water on Aug 21st.

Black-headed Gull Flooded arable at Eau Fen held up to 600+ birds more traditional arable ploughing attracted 250 birds at Melbourn on Aug 5th.

Common Gull Day roosting birds were noted at Paxton Pits (20, 26).

Lesser Black-backed Gull In July, 2500+ were noted roosting at Grafham Water. In August, Milton Tip attracted up to 450+ birds and 350+ birds were regular in the Melbourn area from 5th.

Herring Gull Parents and young were still present at Paxton Pits and Wisbech Docks. At Priors Fen,

100 on Aug 9th was a good count for the time of year.

Yellow-legged Gull At Grafham Water, 34 were noted roosting from only half of the reservoir so the true numbers roosting could well be over 60+ birds.

Caspian Gull A juvenile was noted at Paxton Pits on Aug 21st.

Greater Black-backed Gull The first returning adult was noted at Grafham Water on July 31st.

Sandwich Tern A single was noted at Grafham Water on Aug 20th.

Common Tern At Grafham Water, the annual autumn build up of post breeding birds peaked at a record 283 on Aug 4th. Paxton Pits attracted 111 adults birds on Jul 17th.

Arctic Tern During August a single was at Paxton Pits on 1st and at Grafham Water 4 were noted on 10th with a juvenile noted there on 26th.

Black Tern A single was at Grafham Water on Jul 30th and Aug 2nd but the main autumn passage occurred from Aug 20th with 1–6 at Eau Fen, Fen Drayton GP, Grafham Water, and Priors Fen the exception being 15 at Grafham on Aug 31st.

PASSERINES

Feral Pigeon Largest counts again from Wisbech Town Centre (130+, 130+) and Elizabeth Bridge Cambridge where numbers were down to 38 birds.

Stock Pigeon The largest flock by some way was 172 at Swaffham Prior fen on Aug 28th.

Wood Pigeon Largest flock noted was 180 at Elm on Aug 31st.

Collared Dove A flock of 210 at Elm was the largest count in the county for some time.

Turtle Dove Well reported again with 62 records received from 32 sites. In August flocks of 27 noted at Swaffham Prior Fen and 20 at Over Fen GP.

Cuckoo Juvenile birds were only reported from Kingfishers Bridge and Swaffham Prior Fen.

Barn Owl Eighteen records received from 13 sites.

Little Owl Sixteen records received from 14 sites.

Tawny Owl Only 16 records from 12 sites.

Long-eared Owl Confirmed breeding at a fifth site in the county.

Short-eared Owl. A single was noted at Paxton Pits on Aug 11th and 22nd.

Common Swift No breeding records received but gatherings of up to 50–100 birds noted at Barrington, Elm, Fowlmere, Melbourn, Priory Park and Stretham in July.

Alpine Swift A single bird at Fowlmere NR on Jul 12th was present for only a couple of minutes.

Kingfisher Reported from 17 sites including Wicken Fen where 10 different birds were ringed during August.

European Bee-eater A single bird performed for one fortunate observer at Ely on Aug 1st.

Green Woodpecker Forty-four records received from 24 sites.

Greater Spotted Woodpecker Twenty-four records received from 15 sites.

Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker Reported from Eaton Ford, Monk's Wood, Whittesford and Wicken Fen during the period.

Skylark Reported from 7 sites with a maximum of 28 at Monks Hardwick on Jul 17th.

Sand Martin Reported from 9 sites with obvious movement in early July. Peak counts during the period included 150+ at Eau Fen and at Stirtloe. A movement involving thousands was noted at Paxton Pits on Jul 5th.

Barn Swallow Noted from at least 16 sites with many reports of breeding received. Peak counts during the period were from Priory Park, St. Neots with 400 on Aug 23rd. Many groups of up to 80 birds were noted throughout the period across the county.

House Martin Recorded from at least 15 sites with some large flocks heading south in late August. Of note 40 pairs bred at Granta Park, Abington with 150 noted there on Aug 18th. Other counts received were on Aug 27th with 140+ at Priory Park, St. Neots and on Aug 29th with 150+ at Barford Road Pocket Park, St. Neots.

Meadow Pipit Records were received from only 3 sites with the highest count coming from Monks Hardwick with 12 present on Jul 17th.

Yellow Wagtail Noted right across the county in below average numbers. Records received from at least 20 sites. The maximum recorded was 40 at Grafham Water on Aug 12th. This is in stark contrast to last year, when the peak counts in August were 200 at Grafham Water and 168 at Ouse Washes.

Grey Wagtail Reports were received from 5 sites with the majority of records concerning breeding pairs. The maximum was 2 at Whittlesford on Jul 5th.

Pied Wagtail The only records of note received were 64 at Barleycraft on Aug 26th.

Nightingale Two records received from Paxton Pits concerned an adult and juvenile both seen on Jul 3rd.

Common Redstart The only record in the period concerned a single at Monks Wood on Aug 15th.

Whinchat Singles noted in August from Haddenham, Paxton Pits and Farcet Fen. The maximum count was from Nene Washes in August with 5 present.

Stonechat Two were noted in the period; the first was at Wicken Fen on Jul 17th and the second was from Nene Washes on Aug 29th.

Wheatear Only a few noted compared with the large scale movement noted in the spring. Single birds were noted at Grafham Water, Toft, Eau Fen and East Hatley with 2–3 birds present at Paxton Pits and Over Fen.

Blackbird Records were received from 11 sites with maximum of 23 noted at Monks Hardwick on Jul 17th.

Fieldfare A very unseasonal record of one photographed in a garden near Ely was noteworthy.

Song Thrush Records were received from 10 sites with 1–3 individuals being the norm at most sites.

Many records concerned recently fledged juveniles.

Mistle Thrush Reports were received from 11 sites with 1–2 being the norm. Several large groups were noted including 42 at Priory Park, St. Neots on Aug 10th.

Cetti's Warbler There was evidence of 2 breeding pairs at Wicken Fen, with juveniles present in July.

Common Grasshopper Warbler Reeling birds were located at Hemingford Meadow, Paxton Pits, Wicken Fen and Woodwalton Fen, all in July.

Sedge Warbler 1–2 birds frequented Over Fen GPs in the period, 3 singing males were noted at Wisbech, and 2+ birds were still present at Paxton Pits on Aug 28th.

Eurasian Reed Warbler Reported from 5 sites with a maximum of 6 at Fen Drayton.

Lesser Whitethroat Noted at 8 sites, with 5 singing males reported at Paxton Pits in early July. During August, 22 individuals were ringed at Wicken Fen.

Common Whitethroat Reports from 10 sites included 14 birds at Monks Hardwick (St Neots) on July 31st. Ringing records for Wicken Fen included 3 and 10 birds trapped for July/August respectively.

Garden Warbler Few records for the period; 9 different birds were ringed at Wicken Fen, while at Paxton Pits the latest record was 1 on Aug 30th.

Blackcap At 9 sites, 1–3 birds noted.

Common Chiffchaff Scattered reports with a maximum of 4 recorded at Fen Drayton GP on Aug 23rd.

Willow Warbler Reported from 5 sites; 2 males still singing on Aug 23rd.

Goldcrest From 5 locations with a highest count of 2+ at Fordham Woods.

Spotted Flycatcher Thirty-three individual reports from 27 sites included 14 sites with family groups or suspected breeding. A second brood was noted at Priory Park (St Neots) in early August.

Pied Flycatcher Single birds were reported from Barway and Fowlmere NR, both on Aug 18th.

Bearded Tit The only record was one of 2 juveniles at Ely ex-Beet Factory on Aug 2nd.

Long-tailed Tit Reported from 9 locations, groups of more than 10 birds were seen at Barleycraft GP, Elm and Paxton Pits (30).

Marsh Tit Noted at Paxton Pits throughout July/Aug (1–2 birds), at Woodwalton Fen in July (1), and at Fordham Woods (2+) and the Gloucesters (Wimpole, 4) in August.

Coal Tit Small numbers were reported from 4 sites, mostly from gardens or a churchyard.

Blue Tit From 7 sites, with a maximum of 23 reported at Monks Hardwick (St Neots) on July 31st.

Great Tit From 6 sites, Monks Hardwick (St Neots) topped the charts with 14 present on Aug 14th.

Wood Nuthatch Recorded only from Brampton RAF, where a bird was calling on several dates at the end of August, and the Gloucesters (Wimpole), where 2 were noted in August.

Eurasian Treecreeper Records from 7 sites. Four

individuals ringed at Wicken Fen during August represented the highest count.

Eurasian Jay Recorded from just 6 sites. Over 6 individuals at Elm during August was the highest count.

Black-billed Magpie Reported from just 8 sites. High counts were of 15+ at Elm during both months.

Eurasian Jackdaw Records received from 7 sites, with 200+ roosting at Paxton Pits on Jul 6th, and 100 at roost in Toft on Jul 7th being the highest counts.

Rook A record of 70 in a ploughed field in Toft (near Hardwick wood) on Aug 27th was the only notable record.

Carrion Crow Records received from 8 sites, with 49 at Westfield Farm (Comberton) being the highest count.

Common Raven A bird reported flying west over Paxton Pits on Jul 11th is an excellent county record, and mirrors (in terms of date and direction) last years' record from Paxton on Jul 21st.

Common Starling The highest count received was of 1,000 on a set-aside field at Mepal Fen on Jul 16th.

House Sparrow Records received from 8 sites. Maximum counts of 90–120+ at Elm throughout the period, and 35–60 at Toft during August were significant.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow Recorded only from Elm, where 8+ birds during July decreased to just 2+ in August.

Chaffinch Records received from 7 sites, with all counts relating to 11 or fewer birds.

European Greenfinch Records of 50+ at Lode during August, and 45+ at Elm on Aug 28th were the only notable counts.

European Goldfinch Noted from 10+ sites, with counts of 140 at Eau Fen (Ely) on Aug 29th and 120 at Cawdle Fen on Aug 26th being significant.

Contributors: Colin Addington, Louise Bacon, Rowena Baxter, James Cadbury, Robin Cox, Ian Delgado, Steve Dudley, Dr Mike Foley, John Harding, Kevin Harris, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Peter Herkenrath, Michael Holdsworth, Julian Hughes, Bill and Ann Jordan, Vince Lea, Jono Leadley, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Bruce & Gwen Martin, Mark Missin, John Oates, Rob Partridge, Mark Peck, Michael Price, Dr Gareth Rees, Tony Roberts, Bob & Ann Scott, Ellis Selway, Chris Thorne, P. M. Warrington

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.

Linnet Recorded from 10+ sites. Peak counts of 85+ at Elm during August and c.40 at Nine Wells on Aug 27th were the highest counts.

Common Crossbill Recorded from 10 sites during July and early August, with the highest counts coming from Gamlingay (20–25 on Jul 31st), Farcet Fen (23 on Jul 16th), Fulbourn (20 on Jul 28th) and Cambourne (15 on Jul 19th).

Common Bullfinch Reported from over 10 sites, the highest count being of 8 at Fen Drayton GP on Aug 23rd.

Hawfinch A single bird was recorded from Cavell Hospital, Peterborough on Jul 26th.

Yellowhammer Recorded from 8 sites. Highest counts were of up to 23 at Monks Hardwick (St Neots), and 15 at Mepal, both during July.

Reed Bunting Recorded from just 6 sites, the highest counts being of 9 at Lark Rise Farm (Barton) on Aug 17th, and 8 at Mepal during July.

Corn Bunting Recorded only from Fowlmere, where 2 territories were noted on Jul 12th.

HYBRIDS

None reported!

EXOTICA

Black Swan Still present at Jesus Lock Cambridge.

Snow Goose A white phase bird was present in the Wicken area during August.

Muscovy Duck A single noted at Fen Drayton GP on Aug 23rd.

Wood Duck A female was noted at Paxton Pits on Jul 13th.

Purple Swamp-hen Noted residing at Overcote during August.

Eastern Rosella A single present at Hemingford Grey for several days around Aug 21st.

Bulletin bird: Cattle Egret at Hinchingsbrooke

John Lindsell

I had the week off to do some birding on my local patch, the Hinchingsbrooke lake complex, but due to the inclement weather it wasn't until the afternoon of Thursday July 28th, that I had the opportunity to actually get out. My route takes me along the A14 and into the Hinchingsbrooke park and a circular route back around the lakes.

Whilst scanning the small island on the lake adjacent to the A14, I noticed a white object in the willow trees which initially I dismissed as a plastic bag, then saw it was a bird. I assumed it was a Little Egret which I have seen at the lakes on several occasions. I then scoped the bird more closely. It was roosting in trees approximately 150 yards away; I noticed that the bird had a yellow bill, and orange buff crown and mantle, which was not indicative of a Little Egret but a Cattle Egret. I could also see that the bird had a yellow iris and a well-pronounced feathered jowl. Other observations noted at the time were the bird was preening its beautiful buff-coloured filoplumes while it was perched in the tree, and its leg colouration was a greenish-blue colour. No leg rings were visible but it was hard to determine that for sure at that point.

I then needed confirmation that I was watching was a Cattle Egret because I had never actually seen one before, so I rang a close birding friend Simon Henderson and he came down to see it and confirmed the identity. At the time Simon was there, the bird flew into the adjoining field and proceeded to feed among the herd of cattle. At that stage we could see that the bird had indeed no leg rings. It was quite comical to see the egret feeding among the cattle in a field in Brampton, and it had a amusing way of walking and holding its head while feeding. It seemed to be eating grasshoppers and other insects disturbed by the cows and showed a true symbiotic relationship with the cattle as they grazed in the field.

Other local birders and Birdline East Anglia was informed of the news. Several locals came that evening and it was at this point that the matter of escaped birds from the Pensthorpe collection came into the conversation. John Oates kindly rang them to ask if any of these escaped birds were unringed or uncaptured. Next morning we had confirmation that all of their birds were in fact ringed, making it more likely that 'our' Cattle Egret was in fact of wild origin and not an escapee.

That evening the bird flew off in a southerly direction. The next morning I went back about 8.00 am and fortunately the bird had returned and was busy feeding with the cattle again. During the weekend lots of people had the pleasure of seeing the bird which showed well throughout. The bird was well photographed (see www.surfbird.com for some quality pictures by Nigel Blake). The bird remained throughout August and was still there on September 14th. In fact the bird even got a mention in the Saturday Times newspaper. It should be noted that several Cattle Egret have been seen in this country this summer, so who knows we might have a Little Egret scenario in the foreseeable future!

News from the RSPB in Cambridgeshire

Odd year for breeding birds in the Fens

The Ouse Washes were too wet and the Nene Washes too dry, says the RSPB reporting on a mixed season for breeding birds on its fenland nature reserves in Cambridgeshire.

Spring floods are an all-too regular problem for nesting wading birds on the Ouse Washes and the worst was expected when the floodwaters failed to clear in April this year. These cleared by late May, several weeks later than ideal, but still allowed time for many waders to nest so there was no repeat

of the appalling breeding season in 2004. Final numbers on the RSPB's Ouse Washes nature reserve were 173 pairs of Lapwings, 140 pairs of Redshanks and 207 of Snipe, totalling 520 pairs of these waders. While much improved on last year, that's well down on the 809 pairs in the last good year of 2003. Black-tailed Godwits continued to decline, with none on the RSPB's reserve and just three pairs at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's Welney reserve.

Little Egrets, which last year nested for the first time in Cambridgeshire at the Ouse Washes, were present in a heronry through spring and summer this year and are thought to have bred again. There were two pairs of Avocets on the reserve this year.

On the Nene Washes, two years in row without winter floods meant that conditions were mostly rather dry. However, on artificial floods on the 'low wash' on 80 hectares of the RSPB nature reserve, the birds responded well. Here four-fifths of the Redshanks (127 pairs here of a total of 158 pairs) were on just a fifth of the area of the Nene Washes.

Black-tailed Godwits increased from 42 to 45 pairs, and cemented the Nene Washes as the most important breeding site for this wader in the UK. Other waders were 242 pairs of Lapwings and 197 of Snipe (figures are for the whole of the Nene Washes, not just the RSPB nature reserve).

For ducks, the wet areas attracted 70 pairs of Shovelers, and two broods of Garganeys were seen. Other highlights included six nests of Marsh Harrier, one of which was on the reserve, and two calling Spotted Crakes.

'Wet grassland is hugely valuable for birds, breeding waders especially, and Cambridgeshire is England's most important county for the birds of wet meadows,' said Graham Elliott, Fens Area Manager. 'The Nene and Ouse Washes are a great challenge to manage and so influenced by water supply – often outside our control. It took the skill of our reserves' staff to ensure we had a fairly good nesting season, despite too much water on the Ouse Washes and not enough on the Nene Washes.'

Source: *RSPB Eastern England Regional Office*, 26 August 2005

The Corncrake Project – 2005

Charlie Kitchin

In 2005 we had to wait until the 25th May to hear a singing male Corncrake at the Nene Washes, but he went silent after only three days. Then on the 7th June a bird started singing from one of our hay fields and we were able to capture him and confirm from his ring that he was a bird we released in 2004. We were not able to prove that he bred and a recent record of a singing Corncrake near the washes in the period when he was quiet reduces that possibility further. This may not seem like much success but there had been a question about whether what we were doing could work at all, and this returning bird demonstrates that it should be possible. During the summer we managed to release another 78 juvenile birds which had been captive-bred at Whipsnade, making a total of over 200 released in total since the project began.

Changes and improvements to the project for 2006 will include acquiring new, unrelated birds for the breeding stock, returning to a certain amount of parent rearing and having breeding birds based at the washes as well as Whipsnade.

BTO Projects – Winter 2005/06

BTO Winter Pilot Atlas 1st November 2005–28th February 2006

In preparation for the new Atlas (2007–2011) the BTO is to trial two different methods of assessing the distribution and abundance of birds in winter. The 10Km square to be used in Cambridgeshire for this trial is TL56.

The two methods are:

- (a) The Roving Recorder method where twenty (or more) visits are made to the 10Km square recording the birds seen.
- (b) The Timed Visit, which involves two visits of no more than three hours duration to individual (allotted) tetrads within the 10Km square.

I hope that there will be plenty of volunteers to enable the BTO to carry out a thorough assessment of the two methods. Anyone interested please get in touch.

John Le Gassick, BTO Regional Representative, Cambridgeshire (contact details on back page).

Wintering warblers survey 2004–2006

ARE MORE WARBLERS OVERWINTERING IN THE UK IN RECENT YEARS?

The following is extracted from the following page of the BTO website
www.bto.org/survey/special/wintering_warblers.htm

The BTO want to find out what's happening to overwintering numbers of warbler species; this autumn being the start of the second year of a National Survey.

Six species of warblers can be found regularly wintering in Britain and Ireland. These include two mainly resident species: Cetti's Warbler and Dartford Warbler; plus four mainly migratory species: Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Firecrest and Goldcrest. Very little is known about the current status of our wintering warbler populations at a national level. The most recent population estimates are given in the BTO winter Atlas 1981–1984, as follows: Blackcap (3,000); Chiffchaff (500–1,000); Cetti's Warbler (500–1000); Dartford Warbler (1,500–1,800); Firecrest (200–400); Goldcrest (2–4 million).

With the exception of Goldcrest, the majority of species are distributed along the southern and western coastal counties, where the winter climate is mildest. This is particularly true of the Chiffchaff and Firecrest, which remain entirely insectivorous throughout the winter. Since the early 1980s, the number of Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Firecrest, (as noted in county bird reports) have all shown further increases. Two major factors associated with the increases have been the expanding breeding populations together with a run of mild winters, thus assisting winter survival.

Given the increasing numbers, the BTO now want an up-to-date picture of where these birds occur during the winter and what numbers are involved. This new survey will provide a baseline against which to monitor future changes.

How the Cambridgeshire Bird Club could help:

The survey period is 1st November 2005 to 31st March 2006 (15th April for Blackcap only).

All records of wintering warblers are required, particularly for the three key species (Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Firecrest), during the survey period; Goldcrest is optional due to its widespread distribution. Observations may consist of daily garden sightings, casual observations or counts made as part of our regular bird watching activities. Other counts are required from the following types of location: i) gardens, ii) sewage works, iii) wetlands/water bodies, iv) rivers/canals and v) coastal sites.

The BTO would also like us to collect information on the following aspects to help understand the actual distributions:

- 1) Number of each sex (mainly Blackcap)
- 2) Number of singing individuals
- 3) The general habitat type in which the bird is situated
- 4) Food items (mainly for Blackcap)
- 5) Number of Chiffchaffs with grey plumage (individuals from Eastern populations)
- 6) Plus any other notes on behaviour.

How to record

(i) paper copies of the instructions and recording forms are also available and can be posted out upon request.

(ii) records can also be submitted on-line using the BirdTrack website: birdtrack.net/ . If you are not already a BirdTrack recorder, register using the link on the BirdTrack homepage 'Register for BirdTrack'.

For further more information on this survey please contact BTO: Greg Conway, Wintering Warbler Survey Organiser, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU. Email: greg.conway@bto.org Tel: 01842 750050.

Thanks to Mike Foley for supplying information on the wintering warbler survey.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2005

Doors open at 7.30pm for an 8.00pm start.

Friday November 11th St John's Church Hall, Cambridge Birding in Cold Places – Arctic & Antarctic by Ian Rowlands

Having worked for the RSPB and wildlife trusts for many years – from the South-west to Suffolk to Scotland –15 years ago Ian set up the Scottish-based wildlife tour company Speyside Wildlife. He heads a team of guides seeking out Scotland's rarest and most difficult to see birds and mammals, with day trips, evening watches and full holidays. The company also run trips all around the world.

In his talk, Ian will take us from Spitsbergen in the Arctic, to South Georgia & the Antarctic Peninsula in the south, drawing on his experiences of bird and wildlife watching here. Two wonderful places and two great contrasts, from 'Pole to Pole'.

Spitsbergen, part of Svalbard to the north of Norway, is only 800 miles from the North Pole yet ocean currents make it one of the most accessible parts of the Arctic. Amidst peaks, glaciers, ice-fields and 16 million Little Auks, Polar Bears stalk seals and incomparable Arctic birds live. Then we travel to South Georgia & the Antarctic Peninsula, the realm of Shackleton amidst the ice at the other end of the Earth. This is a place of superlatives where albatrosses and penguins are the stars amongst incredible seabirds, whales and dolphins are abundant, and the wilderness is breath-taking.

Friday December 10th – St John's Church Hall, Cambridge Christmas Social: member's slides, quiz and refreshments

Members are invited to bring 5–10 slides of favourite birds, birdwatching sites, or anything else about birds that you would like to show to the meeting. A chance to enjoy seasonal refreshments and time to socialise!

For further details and to offer to show slides, please contact Vicki Harley or Dick Newell (contact details on back page).

Friday January 13th 2006 St John's Church Hall, Cambridge A Bird Photographer's Year in Finland by Jari Peltomaki

Full details in the next bulletin and on the Club website.

FIELD TRIP 2006

January 15th 2006, 1000–1200

Guided field trip to the Great Fen Project with Chris Gerrard. Full details will appear in the next bulletin and on the Club website.

GULL IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP

As we feel there is a demand by CBC members for a greater understanding of gull identification, particularly in the light of now regular sightings of Caspian Gulls and Yellow-legged Gulls, we hope to arrange a field meeting on the subject. If gulls are loafing in good numbers in a predictable manner this winter, we may announce a date, time and place for folk to turn up and be given some guidance. We cannot plan this in advance, as we don't yet know which areas will be favoured by gull flocks, but look out for announcements on Cambirds. It would be useful to know how many members might be interested in such workshops and, should anybody spot good numbers of loafing gulls, then please let Dick Newell know (contact details on back page).

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome new member, Tim Hancock of Croydon (near Royston).
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

Cambridgeshire Bird Club members and friends are invited to:

Oriental Bird Club winter meeting with AGM

Saturday 12 November 2005, 11am – 5pm

St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

PROGRAMME

11.00	Doors open - refreshments available
11.30	Opening remarks – The Chairman
11.40	Mongolia's Eastern Steppe – Steve Rowland
12.00	The Giant Ibis – Omaliss Keo
12.30	Annual General Meeting
12.45	Break for lunch - refreshments available
14.00	2005 Conservation Awards
14.15	Bengal Floricans In Cambodia – Tom Gray
15.00	Break for refreshments
15.45	Exploratory Birding In The Philippines – James Eaton
16.30	Day Prize Draw & Quiz Answers
17.00	Meeting Closes

Sales by WildSounds & OBC

Plus the 'Name That Oriental Bird' Quiz, OBC Prize Draw, snacks, cakes and hot drinks.

EVERYONE WELCOME – ADMISSION FREE

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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 email records to: John Oates by November 7th

Please send records by post to: Louise Bacon by November 7th

Next Bulletin due out December 2005, covering September–October 2005

GOOD BIRDING!