

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 387



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

RECENT REPORTS JULY AND AUGUST 2006

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records; comments are made by Bruce Martin (Wildfowl, Divers to Herons), Mark Hawkes (Gamebirds, Raptors, Rails), Jonathan Taylor (Waders), Colin Kirtland (Gulls and Terns), Jon Pavey (Pigeons to Woodpeckers), Stuart Elsom (Larks to Thrushes), Mike Foley (Warblers to Tits), and Vicki Harley (Wood Nuthatch to Buntings and Hybrids and Exotica). If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the county recorder (address on back page).

New County Recorder

Welcome to Mark Hawkes as the new County Recorder. Please read the announcement on p13 for details.

Wild Bird Food – 10% discount

Cambridgeshire Bird Club can buy wild bird food at a 10% discount from Rectory Farm, Landbeach (on the A10, 1km N of the A14). Just show your most recent Bulletin or Annual Report as proof of membership.

Grey Herons by Graham Easy



Numbers in brackets indicate July and August maximums.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Fen Drayton GP (138; 133), Grafham Water (148) and Ouse Fen (82; 84). From 11 nests at Paxton Pits, there were 29 young of which 19 fledged. At Landbeach GP, a pair reared a brood of 9 to fledgling size, whilst a pair at the Cam Washes Upware had just 1 young which was of the Polish type.

Greylag Goose At Fen Drayton GP (220; 21), Ouse Fen (470; 530) and Paxton Pits (398; 490). The Nene Washes had the only other three-figure count with 150 on Aug 13th. At Paxton Pits, 44 nests produced 168 young of which 104 were fledged.

Canada Goose At Fen Drayton GP (61; 60), Ouse Fen (68; 240) and 390 at Kingfishers Bridge. At Paxton Pits, 10 nests produced 48 young of which 34 were fledged.

Barnacle Goose Two birds were at Grafham Water during the period and 2 were at Paxton Pits on Aug 22nd.

Egyptian Goose Single birds were at Fen Drayton GP on Jul 31st and Kingfishers Bridge on Aug 27th. Two at the Cam Washes on Aug 20th and up to 6 birds were seen at Ouse Fen the latter part of August.

Ruddy Shelduck A bird was seen at Wicken Fen on July 21st.

Common Shelduck In addition to the broods reported previously from the Cam Washes and Ouse Fen, two broods were seen Grafham Water.

Mandarin At Grafham Water a female was present on Jul 2nd with 2 on Aug 2nd and 1 again on the 10th and 16th. And at Paxton Pits 2 males were present on Aug 9th with 1 remaining until the 21st.

Eurasian Wigeon Twelve birds at Paxton Pits on Jul 9th was the highest count during the period. Single figures were reported from 9 sites.

Gadwall At the Cam Washes 119, Fen Drayton GP (17; 74) and Paxton Pits (150; 250). Breeding was successful at 7 sites.

Eurasian Teal Counts of 108 at the Cam Washes on Aug 31st, 100 at the Ouse Washes on Aug 22nd and 96 at Paxton Pits on Aug 28th were the most notable. Double figures below 50 were recorded at 5 other sites. No breeding records were received again from the county this year.

Mallard At Fen Drayton GP (158; 363). Other three-figure counts were at the Nene Washes (760), the Ouse Washes (240), Paxton Pits (127) and Shropshire's Reservoir (175).

Northern Pintail A juvenile was at Paxton Pits on Aug 26th to the 31st. Three birds were at Kingfishers Bridge on Aug 27th increasing to 5 by the 30th.

Garganey At Grafham Water, 3 birds were present on Aug 10th, at Ouse Fen the maximum in August was 4, the Ouse Washes had 2 on Aug 22nd, and at Paxton Pits 1 on Jul 26th, 2 on Aug 17th with a different bird on the 31st.

Northern Shoveler Double figures were noted at 5 sites with a count of 65 on the Cam Washes the highest. Five broods were noted on the Ouse Washes.

Red-crested Pochard A male was present at Paxton Pits on Jul 10th, 5 birds on Aug 3rd and 1 on the 9th.

Common Pochard At Fen Drayton GP (34; 345). Double figures were noted at Ouse Fen (53) and Paxton Pits (48).

Ring-necked Duck A moulting male was present at Ouse Fen from Aug 15th to the period end.

Tufted Duck Counts of (266; 585) at Fen Drayton GP and 327 at Grafham Water were the highest counts. Broods were noted at 6 sites, one of which was Paxton Pits, where 44 birds were fledged from 27 nests.

Greater Scaup A male was at Grafham Water on Aug 13th.

Common Scoter A female was at Grafham Water on Jul 5th and 3 birds on Jul 15th.

Goldeneye Two birds were at Ouse Fen on Jul 1st.

Ruddy Duck Noted at 4 sites.

GAMEBIRDS

Red-legged Partridge Reported from 5 sites, numbers ranging from 1 to 18 birds.

Grey Partridge Recorded at 11 sites, numbers ranging from 1 to 14 birds.

Common Quail One at Little Paxton on July 2nd (found dead), with calling males recorded at Peterborough on July 2nd, Farcet Fen on July 5th, Grunty Fen on July 21st, Worsted Lodge on Aug 4th, Comberton on Aug 15th, Ashwell on Aug 18th and Nene Washes from Aug 22nd to 28th.

Common Pheasant Reported from just 5 sites, with numbers ranging from 1 to 36 birds.

DIVERS TO HERONS

Little Grebe The highest count was 26 at Paxton Pits in August. Breeding noted at 8 sites.

Great Crested Grebe Breeding was reported at 13 sites. Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (81; 116).

Red-necked Grebe The bird first seen at Fen Drayton GP in December 2005 is back on Ferry Lagoon after spending most of the summer at Ouse Fen.

Black-necked Grebe Single birds were reported from Grafham Water on Jul 17th, Kingfishers Bridge on Aug 26th, Paxton Pits on Aug 27th and Must Farm Pit, Kings Dyke on Aug 30th.

Manx Shearwater A bird was present at Grafham Water from Jul 21st to 29th.

Great Cormorant At Paxton Pits the last active nest still contained 2 large young on Aug 13th. At the same site, a juvenile bird was seen demolishing a Great Crested Grebe's nest even though 2 adults were defending it. Double figures noted at 3 sites.

Great Bittern Just 1 record from Fen Drayton GP on Jul 20th.

Little Egret The colonisation of this species continues apace in the county with downy young

seen at Wicken Fen this year, making at least 2 breeding sites now known. Birds were reported from 15 sites with double figures at Wicken Fen (35), Ouse Fen (17), Nene Washes (15) and Paxton Pits (14).

Grey Heron Noted at 15 sites with double figures at the Nene Washes (43), Grafham Water (32) and the Cam Washes Upware (12). Forty-two of those on the Nene Washes were in one flock spread over two fields. What a sight that must have been!

White Stork A bird was seen circling low half a mile north of Wentworth village on Jul 16th.

Eurasian Spoonbill Two birds were seen for a short while at Ouse Fen on the evening of Aug 31st before they flew off across the river in the Needingworth direction.

RAPTORS

European Honey Buzzard One was seen over Water Newton on July 24th.

Red Kite Just three reports – Cambridge on July 8th, Paxton Pits on July 23rd and Froghall Bridge on Aug 29th.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier Recorded at 18 sites. The majority were seen around, or near, breeding sites, with peak counts of 7 at Nene Washes on Aug 27th and 5 at Ely BF on July 19th. Migrants noted at Barton, Fowlmere, Grafham Water and Paxton Pits.

Northern Goshawk Singles seen at Orton Wistow on July 21st and Fowlmere on Aug 17th.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk Recorded at 24 sites, with all counts involving 1–4 birds.

Common Buzzard Recorded at 24 sites, with all counts involving 1–6 birds.

Osprey Singles at Nene Washes from July 1st to 15th, Grafham Water on July 2nd & 27th, Elton on July 9th, Waterbeach on Aug 20th, Paxton Pits on Aug 21st and Ferry Meadows on Aug 27th.

Common Kestrel Recorded at just 13 sites, with counts of 1–5 birds.

Eurasian Hobby Recorded at 29 sites, with counts of 1–3 birds.

Peregrine Singles at Paxton Pits intermittently from July 9th until Aug 20th, with another on Aug 28th, and probably the first bird at Grafham Water from Aug 17th to 26th. Others at Fowlmere on Aug 1st, Nene Washes on Aug 9th, 16th & 31st and Farcet Fen on Aug 17th. Summer records are increasing.

RAILS

Water Rail Recorded at 6 sites, numbers ranging from 1 to 3 birds.

Common Moorhen Reported from 8 sites, numbers ranging from 1 to 28 birds.

Common Coot Reported at 12 sites, numbers ranging from 1 to 248 birds.

WADERS

Eurasian Oystercatcher Fledged young seen at Paxton Pits with 4 from 3 nests, one seen at Nene Washes (from arable nest), also 3 young at Priory

Park (St Neots). Highest count was 13 at Paxton Pits on July 11th, latest at Ouse Fen on Aug 28th.

Avocet Only record was of 2 at Nene Washes on July 7th.

Little Plover Recorded from 7 sites during the period, highest counts from Paxton Pits with 13 on July 7th–8th and 6 in August and Maxey GP with 10 on July 12th, scarcer in August with peak of 3 at Maxey GP and singles at Nene Washes and Kingfishers Bridge.

Ringed Plover Main locality was Paxton Pits with up to 19 in July and peak count of 33 on Aug 22nd in addition. Three at Ouse Fen throughout July. Single at Nene Washes on Aug 1st.

Tundra Ringed Plover One identified at Paxton Pits on Aug 24th.

Eurasian Dotterel Eleven at Farcet Fen on Aug 23rd was an excellent autumn record.

European Golden Plover Recorded from July 18th when 2 at Nene Washes, 200 at Paxton Pits on July 24th was a large gathering for July. Small groups mainly in the south through August with a high of 200 at Wicken Fen.

Northern Lapwing Welcome additional breeding figures from Farcet Fen (18 pairs) and Blackbush (Whittlesey-Pondersbridge) (9 pairs). In July, groups of 100–650 from 7 sites. In August, highest counts from Ouse Fen 1800, Kingfishers Bridge 1750, Nene Washes 900, Farcet Fen 850 and Paxton Pits 600.

Red Knot Singles at Paxton Pits on July 3rd and Grafham Water on Aug 12th to 13th.

Sanderling At Paxton Pits on Aug 1st–2nd, 2 on 3rd, 1 on 4th and 2 from 14th to 15th and singles at Grafham Water on July 27th and Aug 9th.

Little Stint Paxton Pits one from July 22nd to 24th and Aug 2nd and 2 juveniles at Grafham Water on Aug 8th.

Dunlin Highest counts from Paxton Pits where peak of 22 on July 22nd with daily counts of 1–19 through July, in August peak of 25 (small numbers daily), elsewhere 3 at Grafham Water on July 23rd and 2 at Kingfisher Bridge on Aug 3rd.

Ruff Main localities Kingfishers Bridge where 2–7 on 11 dates in August mostly involving adult birds and Paxton Pits with peak of 13 on Aug 21st with up to 11 to month's end. Elsewhere, 8 from Stretham railway station on July 31st, and 1–3 on single dates from a further 6 sites

Jack Snipe An early record from Nene Washes on Aug 22rd.

Common Snipe Recorded from 6 sites with highest count from Nene Washes of 70 on Aug 28th, Kingfishers Bridge with 18 on Aug 23rd. Of note was half-grown chick on Aug 8th at Nene Washes.

Eurasian Woodcock One at Monks Wood on Aug 17th.

Black-tailed Godwit (Not assigned to a race). Largest groups were 40 at Ouse Washes on July 3rd, 16 at Maxey GP on Aug 3rd, 11 at Nene Washes on July 17th and 10 at Grafham Water on Aug 7th with 1–4 from a further 4 sites.

Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit At Paxton Pits in July 1–16 on many dates with a peak of 64 on 3rd and in August 3 on 4th, 11 on 7th and singles on several dates to month's end.

Whimbrel Five at Paxton Pits on July 2nd were early, main passage from July 20th, involving four groups of 5, one of 4, one of 3 and 8 singles. (only one was seen to land).

Eurasian Curlew In August: Paxton Pits 6 on 3rd, 5 (Juveniles) on 13th and 2 on 26th. Three south over Ouse Washes on 22nd, 2 at Fen Drayton GP on 14th and singles from a further 7 sites were the only records. late summer was formerly the best time for this species.

Spotted Redshank In August: at Paxton Pits 4th–6th, 13th, 2–3 from 16th to 22nd, 4 on 24th and one 25th–29th (all juveniles) and Kingfisher Bridge on Aug 3rd and 30th.

Common Redshank In July: 20–30 at Nene Washes, up to 10 at Paxton Pits, and 4 at Priors Fen GP. In August, peak of 10 from Paxton Pits and 1–2 from a further 7 sites.

Common Greenshank Highest counts as follows: Paxton Pits 10 on July 9th and 21 on Aug 21st (with 10+ daily from 13th to 31st), Priors Fen GP (1; 6), Kingfisher Bridge 1–5 in August, Nene Washes 1–4 from Aug 13th to 31st, Cam Washes peak of 4 on Aug 27th and 1–2 from a further 7 sites.

Green Sandpiper Highest counts: Paxton Pits (11; 21), Maxey GP (5; 7), Kingfishers Bridge (0; 7), Nene Washes (1; 6), Must Farm Pit (Stanground) (1; 6), 3–4 from Fen Drayton GP, Ouse Fen, Nene Washes and Wicken Fen and 1–2 from a further 5 sites.

Wood Sandpiper An early returning adult at Godmanchester GP on July 5th, very good autumn counts from Nene Washes with 1–5 from Aug 17th to 28th and Paxton Pits with records on 14 dates peaking at 5 on 22nd, further singles from Kingfisher Bridge and Ouse Fen.

Common Sandpiper Records from July 11th, highest counts from Paxton Pits with 15 on July 30th and 11 on Aug 1st; at Grafham Water, 5 on July 11th, and 1–3 from a further 9 sites.

Ruddy Turnstone In July: from Paxton Pits one from 20th to 22nd and 2 from 27th to 31st and Grafham Water on 22nd and 27th. In August: from Paxton Pits on 9th, 2 on 12th, 5 on 26th, 2 from 28 to 29th and a single on 30th to 31st, one at Kingfisher Bridge on 3rd.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull An ad. at Paxton on Jul 16th, 2 on 22nd, then August records of juvs on 2nd, 10th and 14th and a 1st winter on 29th. At Grafham there were 6 on Aug 5th and single juvs. on 17th and 19th. Only others reported were singles at Stanground on July 17th and Hilton on Aug. 16th. This encouraging series of records gives rise to the hope that breeding may be attempted again in the near future. Paxton would seem the likeliest locality.

Little Gull A 1st summer at Grafham on July 3rd, followed by an ad. on Aug. 16th and a juv. on 18th–

25th.

Black-headed Gull A good breeding season at Paxton, with 345 young fledging from 43 nests. The max. count there was 1000 on July 11th. Several pairs also bred at Godmanchester Pits. In the north of the county, hundreds were seen feeding on flying ants on July 20th and 28th; the largest flock was 1300 at Farcet on the latter date.

Common Gull A post-breeding influx noted at Paxton where numbers rose to 24 on July 26th and peaked at 60 on Aug. 2nd. Very few reported elsewhere.

Lesser Black-backed Gull Bred successfully at Paxton where 4 young fledged from 4 nests. A good count of 2232 there on Aug 24th, which flew west in the evening to roost at Grafham. Breeding also occurred at Godmanchester Pits with 37 ads. and 12 recently fledged young on July 6th. Milton tip attracted 70 feeding birds on Aug 26th.

Herring Gull Bred at Paxton where 3 young hatched from 2 nests and 2 fledged successfully. Otherwise only one record of a 1st summer bird at Grafham on July 2nd.

Yellow-legged Gull July and August are usually peak months for this species in Britain and numbers are still growing. Grafham and Paxton are the main centres: the former held 22 on July 2nd and the latter attracted 60 on the same date, a new county record. There were still 22 at Paxton on Aug 8th but numbers declined markedly from mid-month.

Caspian Gull By contrast this race (or species if you prefer) is recorded most frequently in winter. Hence there was only one report of an ad. at Paxton on July 15th.

Greater Black-backed Gull A scarce visitor in mid-summer: there were 1–3 at Paxton throughout July, peaking at 4 on Aug. 10th.

Franklin's Gull An adult at Grunty Fen on Jul 29th was a remarkable find and the first for the county. The first for Britain and Europe was as recent as 1970, but there are now over 40 British records. This could well be due to increasing observer familiarity and awareness as the species has reportedly declined on its prairie breeding grounds and is still a rarity on the Atlantic coast of the USA.

Kittiwake Six birds were at Fen Drayton on Aug 27th, following a period of northerly winds.

Common Tern Successful breeding was noted at Paxton, where 72 young fledged, Kingfishers Bridge with 36 birds including 17 juvs on Aug 17th and Godmanchester Pits where 'several pairs' were reported. Largest count was 170 at Paxton on July 19th. Fen Drayton had max. of 33 on July 14th and 32 on Aug 12th, and there were smaller numbers at other sites. One dead at Over on Aug 7th was an unusual road casualty.

Arctic Tern One at Grafham on Aug 5th.

Sandwich Tern At Paxton, 3 on Aug 13th were observed departing to the south. West Africa here we come!

Black Tern Four at Grafham on July 3rd included a winter-plumaged adult. However this species starts its moult in late May or early June. One Aug record

there on 22nd. Only other reports were one at Earith on July 3rd and 2 juvs at Paxton from Aug 27th to 31st.

NEAR PASSERINES

Feral Pigeon Flock of 60 in a field off Huntingdon Road, Cambridge.

Stock Pigeon Three counts in double figures, the largest being 37 at Lower Farcet Fen.

Wood Pigeon One hundred and sixty-two recorded at Fox's Bridge Farm, Toft on Aug 24th.

Collared Dove Around 60 recorded at Farcet Fen.

Turtle Dove Records from 21 sites, with typically 1 to 4 birds. Eleven pairs recorded at Paxton Pits.

Rose-ringed Parakeet Singles recorded from Swaffham Prior (Jul 22nd) and Cambridge (Aug 21st).

Common Cuckoo Recorded at 9 sites. Up to 4 birds on the Nene Washes throughout and 6 males at Paxton Pits on 31 Jul.

Barn Owl Reported from 6 sites, including 3 breeding pairs.

Little Owl Singles at 6 sites plus 2 or 3 birds at a further 4 sites.

Tawny Owl Nine records from 6 sites, including 2 records of juveniles.

Long-eared Owl Four sites with breeding pairs.

Common Swift Largest count was 90 over Lode Mill followed by 80 at Toft.

Alpine Swift One at Stretham on Jul 5th with around 20 Common Swift following thunderstorms moving north from France. This would be the 12th record for the county.

Kingfisher Recorded at 16 sites, including birds using a 'Kingfisher bank'.

Green Woodpecker Reports, generally of singles, from 16 sites, including two gardens. 8 pairs at Paxton Pits.

Great Spotted Woodpecker Singles recorded from 7 sites plus 5 pairs at Paxton Pits and 3 birds at Toft.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Singles recorded at Orton BP and Woodhurst.

PASSERINES

Skylark Reported from 7 sites with maximum of 24 at Monks Hardwick in July.

Sand Martin Reported from 8 sites. Maximum was 650 at Woodwalton Fen on August 28th.

Barn Swallow Recorded from 20+ sites. Maximum was 200 at Cam Washes on August 19th.

House Martin Recorded from 5 sites; maximum of 350 at Woodwalton Fen on August 28th.

Meadow Pipit Records were received from 4 sites with most records concerning breeding pairs.

Yellow Wagtail Noted throughout the period at 22 sites with a maximum of 90 moving northwest, presumably to roost, at Cam Washes on August 26th

Grey Wagtail Reports were received from 3 sites with most records concerning breeding pairs.

Pied Wagtail Counts received from 10 sites with a maximum of 50 at Highfield Farm on August 17th.

Nightingale Records were received from 12 sites. The maximum, as would be expected, was at Paxton Pits with up to 28 singing males counted during the Breeding Birds Survey.

Common Redstart Five singles were noted during the period. The first was a juvenile at Werrington on July 12th with further records noted from Ferry Meadows on August 16th, Haddenham Fen on 22nd, a male at Ouse Fen on 26th and finally one at Barton on 29th.

Whinchat Five records received, all in August. Individuals were recorded at Longstowe on 22nd, from 2 locations on Farcet Fen on 29th, Serpentine, also on 29th and from Comberton on 30th.

Northern Wheatear All records were in August; noted from Haddenham, Must Farm Pit, Ouse Fen, Queen Adelaide and Westfield Farm (Comberton).

Blackbird Records were received from 13 sites with maximum of 50 pairs identified during the Breeding Bird Survey.

Song Thrush Records were received from 6 sites with 1–3 individuals being the norm at most sites. At least 23 breeding territories were confirmed from Paxton Pits.

Mistle Thrush Reports were received from 8 sites with 1–2 being the norm; 22 were noted at Priory Park (St. Neots) on August 8th.

Cetti's Warbler Just one report, a bird at Wicken Fen on July 3rd.

Common Grasshopper Warbler Two birds were noted at Wicken Fen on July 3rd and July 21st.

Sedge Warbler Reported from 11 sites, with 99 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits, and 23 and 16 pairs/males/territories recorded at Farcet Fen and Blackbush respectively.

Eurasian Reed Warbler Paxton Pits held 72 breeding pairs in July, and 32 singing males were noted at Pymore by the viaduct. It was also reported from 14 other locations.

Lesser Whitethroat From 9 sites, with 11 pairs at Paxton Pits. Elsewhere 1–4 birds were seen, all in August.

Common Whitethroat At Paxton Pits, 53 breeding pairs were counted in July. Peak counts of 5+ birds elsewhere included 5 at Farcet Fen, 5 at Lower Farcet Fen, 5 at Toft, 13 at Westfield Farm (Comberton) and 5 at Woodwalton Fen.

Garden Warbler Paxton Pits stole the show with 54 breeding pairs – up around 29% on 2004.

Elsewhere 1–2 birds included some garden visitors.

Blackcap Sixty-nine breeding pairs at Paxton Pits were up around 44% over the 2004 count. Casual records at 8 other sites included mainly low numbers but up to 7 were noted at Woodwalton Fen on Aug 9th, and 7 at Kingfisher's Bridge on Aug 17th.

Common Chiffchaff Paxton Pit's count of 37 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits was down by 16% on 2004. At 10 other sites, numbers in the range 1–6.

Willow Warbler A count of 57 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits is up more than 42% compared to 2004. Forty were noted at Woodwalton Fen on Aug 9th 1–7 birds elsewhere at 12 sites.

Goldcrest Reported from 4 sites, this is always a delightful bird to see at close range, with a family of 4 reported from Little Paxton and single birds at Barton, Chippenham Fen and Woodwalton Fen NNR

Spotted Flycatcher Records from 20 sites included multiple sightings from some of those sites, and August records were more numerous than those for July. Higher numbers of 4–7 included juveniles or family groups.

Pied Flycatcher There were two records in the period, both of single 'female-type' birds – at Paxton Pits on Aug 19th/20th, and at Witcham on Aug 27th.

Bearded Tit Two were heard in the reed bed at Kingfishers' Bridge at dusk, on Aug 26th.

Long-tailed Tit Foraging parties of varying sizes, 6–15+, were noted at 5 sites; Paxton Pits held 16 breeding pairs in July.

Marsh Tit Noted at 7 sites, the maximum was 18 at Monks Wood (Aug 17th). Also seen or heard (1–2+ birds) at Brampton Wood, Hardwick Wood, Hayley Wood, Overhall Grove, Paxton Pits and The Gloucesters (Wimpole).

Willow Tit Just two records both from the Ouse Washes, one bird calling repeatedly from a willow bed north of the Pymore viaduct (July 14th) and another report from Welches Dam on the opposite side of the washes, in the company of Long-tailed Tits and warblers (Aug 22nd).

Coal Tit A smattering of records, only from Chippenham Fen, Comberton, Paxton Pits and Stretham, counts of 1–2 birds.

Blue Tit Fifty-four breeding pairs were recorded at Paxton Pits. Other double-digit counts were made at Fox's Bridge Farm (Comberton & Toft), Kingfishers Bridge, and at Over.

Great Tit Paxton Pits held 47 breeding pairs in July – more than in 2004. Elsewhere small numbers were reported (1–9 birds).

Wood Nuthatch The only records were of a probable single at Paxton Pits on Jul 26th, and 6 at Monks Wood on Aug 17th.

Eurasian Treecreeper Records from 4 sites, of 1–4 birds, included probable breeding pairs at Paxton Pits.

Eurasian Jay Records of 1–4 birds from 7 sites; a brood of 3 was seen Paxton Pits.

Black-billed Magpie Recorded from widespread sites in the county; maximum count of 25 from Coldham's Common, Cambridge on Jul 3rd.

Eurasian Jackdaw Records came from 3 sites

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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.

only, including a maximum count of 60 at Over on Jul 6th.

Rook Records from just 4 sites, with the highest count of 50+ birds going to roost at Melbourn on Aug 27th.

Carrión Crow Records from 8 sites, including 12 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits.

Common Starling Records from widespread sites in the county, with a maximum count of 320 from Crowtree, Farcet Fen, at the end of August.

House Sparrow Maximum counts of 130 birds from Crowtree, Farcet Fen, and 120 from Eaton Ford.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow Seventeen pairs at Farcet Fen raised 72+ young.

Chaffinch Seventy-three pairs were recorded breeding at Paxton Pits.

European Greenfinch Twenty pairs were recorded breeding at Paxton Pits; the maximum count in the period was 55+ from Crowtree, Farcet Fen.

European Goldfinch Reported from 7 sites, with highest counts of 54 at Fox's Bridge Farm on Aug 30 and 43 at Shropshire's Reservoir on Aug 14th.

Common Linnet Records were received from 10 sites. The highest counts were 50 from Ouse Fen on Aug 6th and 30 at Paxton Pits on Jul 20th.

Common Crossbill Three birds were present at Monks Wood.

Common Bullfinch Reported from 7 sites. There were 14 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits. A Northern Bullfinch was reported from Stretham on Jul 25th.

Yellowhammer Reported from 8 sites; breeding pair counts included 8 at Paxton Pits, 7 at Farcet Fen and 4 at Blackbush.

Reed Bunting Reported from 8 sites; breeding pair counts included 43 at Paxton Pits, 32+ at Farcet Fen and 23+ at Blackbush.

HYBRIDS

Canada x Greylag One was at Cam Washes (Upware) Aug 13th.

Scaup x Tufted Duck A female at Grafham Water on Jul 4th was considered to be this cross, or was it a pure Scaup, despite the time of year?

EXOTICA

Black Swan One was at Paxton Pits throughout.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo One was noted at Grafham Water on Jul 25th.

Java Sparrow Two on a bird table at Paxton Pits on Jul 9th.

Bulletin bird: Franklin's Gull at Grunty Fen

Simon Stirrup

July 2006 was the hottest on record with temperatures hovering around 30°C. With the final week set to remain hot and with birding opportunities appearing minimal the weekend of 29th/30th was set aside to see friends and relatives. This also seemed a good time to send my camera off for maintenance. The 29th was again very hot and Susan and I were pleased to join friends on their boat at Ely and spend a relaxing day travelling along the Great Ouse as far as Waterbeach and back.

We left Ely at 19:30 and on the way home decided to check out a flooded field that I'd noticed from the A10 that morning. Despite the high temperatures there had been substantial downpours on the previous Wednesday and Thursday. Our attempt to find the area of flooding was unsuccessful, but on Grunty Fen we found a small area of flood water alongside the road at about 19:45. The shallow water was packed with over 50 Black-headed Gulls – all feeding actively. It was a real treat to watch them at such close range and the juveniles looked great in the soft evening light. I scanned casually through the flock enjoying the spectacle and idly hoped that amongst them there might be a Mediterranean Gull. The majority of the Black-headed Gulls were juveniles, the adults were all in non-breeding plumage and ... Suddenly, I found myself looking at a gorgeous gull with a black hood, prominent eye crescents and a dark grey-back – perhaps only 30 or 40 yards away. It was a jaw-dropping moment. The relaxation was over – I was looking at either an adult Laughing or Franklin's Gull in apparently full breeding plumage. With Ring-billed the only American Gull on the county list, I was looking at a first for Cambridgeshire. At this point the full enormity of the situation hit me and I managed to mumble to Susan, rather lamely, 'I've found a very, very rare gull.'

The bird had to be a Laughing Gull after last autumn's incredible influx – didn't it? The bill didn't look particularly long, but then it didn't look that short either and I was looking at it through bins. The wings appeared short and could a Laughing Gull ever show such obvious white mirrors? The size was about that of a Black-headed Gull and surely a Franklin's should look smaller. I was confused. I'd seen at least half-a-dozen Laughing Gulls in Britain and Ireland and had recently spent hours watching and photographing two, although neither were adults. In contrast, I'd only ever seen one Franklin's Gull, an adult in the northwest, over 20 years ago. Could this possibly be a Franklin's? I could remember little about the adult I'd seen in the 1980s except the diagnostic wing pattern. The sun was ominously low in the sky and I had visions of the gull flying off to roost at any moment with the identification unresolved. I had to see the upper wing. Several times the gull flew up with the flock and I managed to obtain brief views of its upper wing pattern. The white trailing edge to the secondaries did appear to curve behind the black markings on the primaries.

Having seen what I considered was enough to clinch the identification it was time to put the news out. I had already realised that this was not going to be easy as my phone's battery was flat and we were in Susan's car, so I had no recharger and no phone numbers. To complicate matters, Susan's phone was in the boot. We reversed the car down the road, retrieved her phone and returned to the pool. Susan was able to follow the gull with the naked eye while I wrestled with the problem of contacting Bruce Martin and Owen Marks. At this point I realised that Susan (non-birder, mega cricket fan) had failed to grasp the full significance of the moment when she suggested that we head home to catch the test match highlights!

The gulls had flown up and around the field and landed on a number of occasions usually after disturbance from passing cars. This provided me with more opportunities to view the gull in flight. The wings looked comparatively short and rounded with equal proportions of black and white on the primaries. I was convinced that it was a Franklin's. About five minutes after making the phone calls the entire flock took flight. The majority flew north, but about a dozen or so gulls returned and landed in the adjacent field. Sadly, the Franklin's Gull was not amongst them. Only a few minutes later Owen arrived with Ian Barton and Kathleen Rosewarne not far behind. Predictably, despite checking the area on the following day, the bird was not seen again.

This was one of my most exciting birding moments especially as it occurred so unexpectedly. It was also extremely frustrating that it occurred when I was so unprepared and no other birder was able to share the experience. If only I'd been in my car with phone numbers, phone charger and field guide; if

only I'd had my camera, if, if, if ... In reality, I was extremely fortunate to see such a fantastic bird at all and even if my mobile had been working only a few people would have arrived in time to see it.

Postscript – we made it home in time to see the test match highlights.

Post postscript – what was presumably the same bird was seen at Blithfield Reservoir in Staffordshire on 9th and 10th August. and on the Ythan Estuary in Aberdeenshire on a number of dates in late August.

Recollections of a Vice-President

Colin Kirtland

Inevitably in the 1950s, after my early sorties by bicycle to nearby sites like the sewage farm , Fulbourn Fen and then Wicken, I decided with a few friends to visit the Ouse Washes, tempted by reports of vast flocks of wildfowl and the inviting prospect of such rarities as Bewick's or even Whooper Swans. Bewick's Swans had occurred in small numbers since 1950 but in January 1954 had reached the unprecedented total of 104! We would usually head for the Earith end of the washes as this was nearer to Cambridge and start our count at Bury Fen where a few wildfowl would whet our appetite. The straight road between Earith and Chain Corner was much quieter then and there was no barbed-wire fence to hamper our access as we made regular stops to climb the bank and peer over, taking care not to disturb the birds. A full bank to bank flood was always exciting; it also made duck counting easier as there was no emergent vegetation in which they could hide. As we crested the hill on the (now closed) road through Sutton we could see in the morning sunlight the flood water stretching into the far distance, gleaming like a long silver ribbon.

On those early cycling excursions we seldom managed to get much further than Fortrey Hall or Welches Dam before we ran out of light in the short days of winter. If we did get as far as Pymore we would walk along the railway viaduct in search of the Willow Tits, which frequented the old willows and bushes on the banks. One cold evening Howard Ginn and I found a small boat which had drifted from its moorings further upstream. We clambered aboard and keeping a low profile paddled out like the punt-gunners of old among the unsuspecting duck. The sound was as memorable as the sight, with thousands of Wigeon calling on all sides and hundreds of Mallard, Teal and Pintail adding to the winter chorus

As well as the wildfowl we usually found other species to brighten the day: Short-eared Owls would often be flushed from the banks, maybe a Merlin dashing past in pursuit of a Skylark or Meadow Pipit, or a pair of Stonechats flitting from one prominent perch to the next.

The irrepressible Clive Minton, the ringing secretary of the club, sometimes organised evening visits to ring roosting Starlings. Floundering through flooded osier beds in total darkness, we picked the birds from their perches just above our heads or scooped them off with nets, put them into bags and groped our way back to have them 'processed' (weighed, sexed, measured and ringed). The noise of thousands of Starlings all around us was bad enough, but imagine the smell! One or two of us would usually manage to stumble over into the murky water and get soaked and at the end of the evening, wet, dirty and covered with droppings we would sink back gratefully into the warm comfort of the car which some gullible town member had been cajoled into providing for the expedition!

Spring and summer visits were enlivened by the prospect of seeing Black-tailed Godwits which had recently been discovered nesting. There were also hundreds of displaying Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank filling the air with their calls. Along the bank between Mepal and Pymore could be found a few pairs of Whinchat, but their numbers were already dwindling.

The acquisition of a car enabled us to be even more ambitious and we would attempt to count the whole of the washes, starting at Earith Pits and stopping to count Mepal Pits on the way! Even so it would normally be dusk by the time we had travelled far beyond Welney and from counting individual

birds at the start of the day we were resigned to estimating in thousands as the light faded. The RSPB reserve at Welches Dam was established in 1969 and the Wildfowl Trust reserve at Welney soon followed. They then organised the regular monthly wildfowl counts and our efforts became less significant, but we still enjoyed our visits even if the desire to achieve a total count had diminished.

From the jumble of memories accumulated over many years in the field, some days were so special that they stand out like beacons, their highlights still fresh in the mind, to be recalled without any reference to old notebooks. They were not necessarily days when we found rarities, but more usually when every few minutes seemed to produce something new and unexpected, when the excitement and anticipation never flagged. These were often days of fine weather, of sunshine, blue skies and unsurpassed clarity when even distant birds appeared pin-sharp through our binoculars and we felt that nothing escaped our attention.

One such day was 5th March 1961 when Owen Marks and I set off early on our bikes. The preceding days had been fine, with warm, southerly winds but we were still thinking more in terms of winter wildfowl than of early summer migrants. Arriving at Earith we found the washes fully flooded and eagerly scanned the open water, counting everything in sight. There were several Great Crested Grebes and among the many Mute Swans gleaming in the sunlight were a few late Bewick's. Surface feeders were outnumbered by diving duck: there was a flock of 480 Pochard and a few Tufted Duck but we were delighted to find six Scaup, a comparative rarity in the county.

The day was warming up and combined with the effort of cycling, so were we. Off came our jackets and we stuffed them into our saddle-bags. As we sat on the bank munching our sandwiches and surveying the scene, to our surprise a Sand Martin came flying in from the south-west, dipping low over the water after insects. We couldn't believe our luck; this was far earlier than any of our previous records. North of Mepal we revelled in the spectacle of literally thousands of duck, mostly Wigeon and Mallard but also good numbers of Pintail, Teal and Shoveler. A Goldeneye was noteworthy and along the edges of the flood we found many Redshank and Snipe and a few Ruff. A flock of 95 Pink-footed Geese was unexpected but even more so was the sight of two handsome Garganey flying past, their forewings flashing silvery in the sun. Enjoying the rising temperature we took off our jumpers and continued in our shirt-sleeves. As if to emphasise that spring had truly arrived, a nearby Chiffchaff suddenly burst into song.

Despite generally earlier arrivals nowadays, March 5th is still my earliest date for Garganey, Sand Martin and Chiffchaff, ignoring records of presumably overwintering birds. Just as interesting as all the species seen on the day was the total absence of some which would now form an inevitable part of a March visit to the washes. We did not see a single Cormorant, Gadwall, Greylag or Canada Goose or even a Lesser Black-backed Gull! How things have changed in 45 years!

The Hanson-RSPB Wetland Project (Ouse Fen).

Bruce Martin

On July 1st the RSPB appointed Sophie Leadsom as Site Manager for the above site. Sophie, who for the last five years has worked with Norman Sills at the RSPB Lakenheath Reserve, has had plenty of experience in creating reedbeds. She is already involved in the work at Ouse Fen and looks forward to meeting people when they visit the area. She will also be looking for help with various projects as they arise. These will be announced in the bulletin and to email groups, etc, and it is hoped that she will give a talk to the Bird Club about her work sometime in the future. Sophie is also keen to build up the records of birds using the site and is happy for records to continue to come through the Bird Club network. If anyone wants to contact Sophie they can do so by phone 07766441863 or email at sophie.leadsom@rspb.org.uk

SITE NAMES

Since the announcement of the wetland project there has been confusion about which site names birders should use when submitting records.

The title name (The Hanson-RSPB Wetland Project (Ouse Fen)), used by the RSPB is obviously too much to expect birders to use and would take up too much space in publications, etc. But the RSPB are keen that Hanson be acknowledged, (after all, without them the site would not exist), so to this end the Bird Club will acknowledge the formal name in the Annual Report. Eventually the RSPB will use the name Ouse Fen Nature Reserve but this will not be for many years until the land is handed over.

In the meanwhile, bird records are coming in to the Cambridgeshire Bird Club database with at least ten different names for the whole site. To help overcome this confusion it has been decided to use the following names:

The west side of the River Great Ouse

Needingworth GP: Except for the Barleycroft GP to the north of the workings.

Barleycroft GP: This name was given to the first pit that was dug. The name came from the original Barleycroft Farm that was on the site.

The RSPB now own the Barleycroft pit and will be carrying out management work on it in the near future. The Needingworth Pits that include settling ponds are still in Hanson's hands so there will not be any management by the RSPB for a while. Although there are footpaths round the Needingworth pits there is no direct access between the two areas, hence the reason for using two names.

The east side of the River Great Ouse

Ouse Fen: The whole of the east side will use this name. As gravel extraction from each section (known as phases) is completed, they will be handed over to the RSPB.

For more information, look at the RSPB website: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/england/eastanglia/fens/index.asp>

Observers are asked to use these names when submitting future records

The 2005 Cambridgeshire Bird Report, due out later this year, will use the name Ouse Fen for records from the east side of the river. The west side will use Barleycroft (too late to change to Barleycroft) as it not possible to divide the records between the two areas.

Access

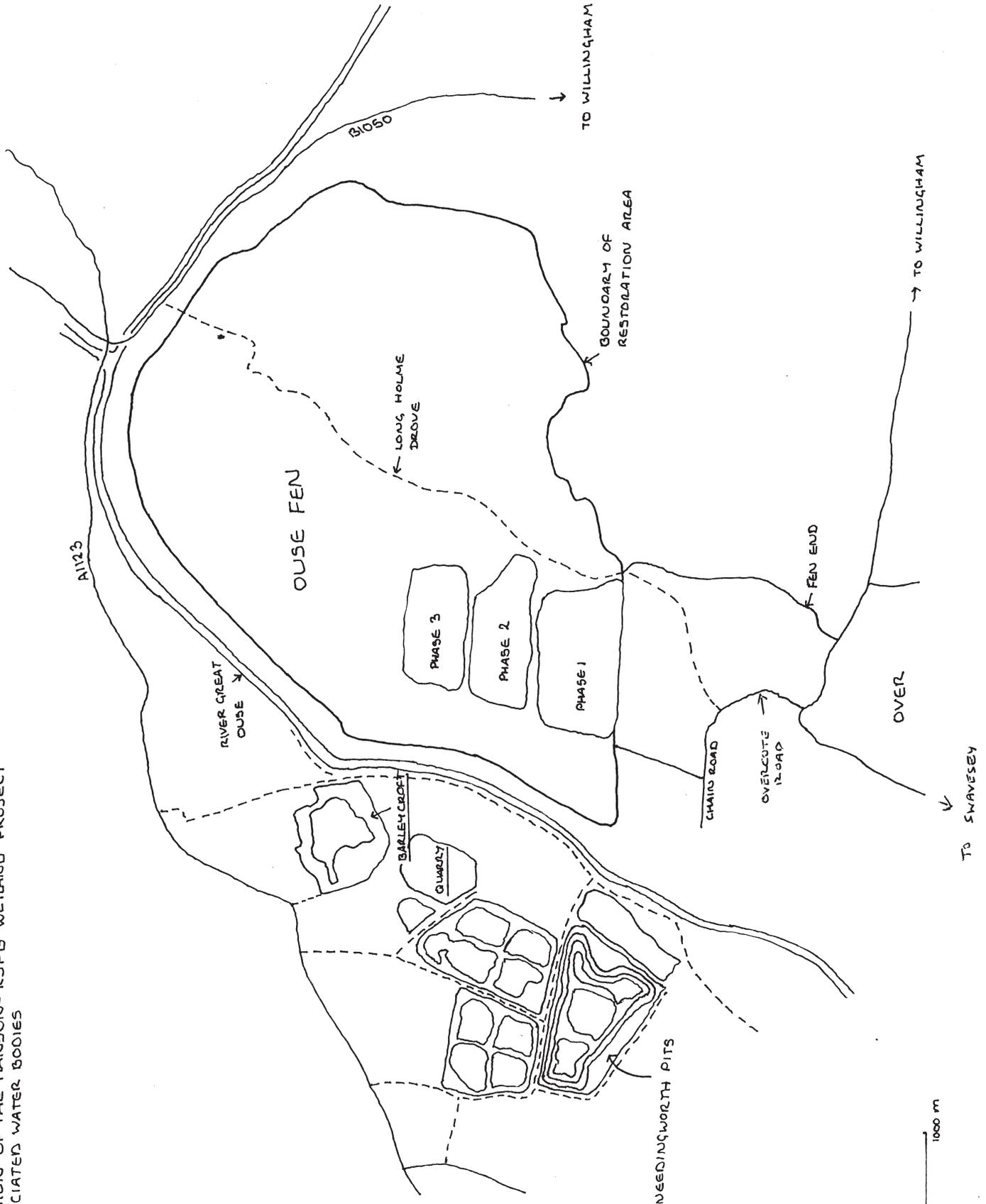
Access to Ouse Fen is from Over village either by Fen End, opposite the playing field, or by Overcote Road, which is just east of the church. Both roads deteriorate nearer to the Fen but it can be reached by car with care. The road from Fen End is straightforward and there are open areas to park along the east side of Phase 1. The Overcote Road becomes Chain Road on the maps but to get to the Fen turn north onto a rough track that passes the west side of Phase 1. There is limited parking on reaching the Fen. For those with Internet access, look at the Ordnance Survey Map website <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/getamap/> and then enter the map reference TL376718. This will bring up the map of the area.

Access to Needingworth GP is either by parking along the road to Needingworth village approaching from the east after leaving the A1123, or by driving through the village taking the Overcote Road to the Pike & Eel pub and stopping at a number of pull-ins which have access to the footpaths round the pits.

Barleycroft Pit can be reached by parking by the sharp bend on the A1123 between the Needingworth bypass and Bluntisham, and walking south to the pit from there.

Please don't leave anything showing in your car; as in many places these days, there have been break-ins.

THE LOCATION OF THE HANSON-RSPB WETLAND PROJECT AND ASSOCIATED WATER BODIES



NEW BTO REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Tony Fulford, the new BTO Regional Rep, introduces himself to the Bird Club.

My background is in statistics and biochemistry. For most of my career I have been involved in research in tropical medicine. I spent 12 years with Cambridge University studying schistosomiasis in Kenya and Uganda. Currently I work as a statistician and data manager for the Medical Research Council's International Nutrition Group based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine studying nutrition-related disease in the Gambia. I spend about 3 months of the year in Africa. I hope I can put my data management skills to work organising the BTO surveys. I hesitate to offer statistical advice too... but if anyone has any interesting bird data that need analysing/modelling, I might be persuaded to take a look.

I have lived in East Anglia for 20 years, the last five in Ely, although I grew up, and learnt my birds, in Amersham, Buckinghamshire. I have had an interest in birds all my life, but it is only recently, now that my children have left home, that I have been able to take it more seriously. Currently my main birding activity is ringing with the Wicken Fen Group and, recently, also with John High in the Gambia. (John is attempting to compile a 'Svensson' to age the birds of the Gambia, a task that is proving difficult as most resident species seem to do a complete post-juvenile moult.) I am not sure which of category of birder Bill Oddie would put me in: I don't own a telescope and I don't keep a lifetime species list, but I am pretty good at birdsong. To my shame I actually know considerably more Gambian birdcalls than Mandinka words.

Please contact Tony by email: tonyfulford@googlemail.com

BTO Winter Plover Survey

Simon Gillings is coordinating a national survey of Lapwings and Golden Plovers this winter. The aim is primarily to estimate the wintering population of these birds, although gulls and curlews will also be counted in order to provide subsidiary information. The main survey will involve volunteers counting these species in tetrads identified as potentially containing plover habitat monthly between October this year and February next. Surveyors will scan all areas within their tetrad that are suitable for plovers (i.e. agricultural fields, recreational grasslands, wetlands, coasts and even, in a minority of regions, including urban factory roofs) to count all flocks present – no transect walking is necessary. Since these birds are highly mobile, where possible visits will be synchronised in order to minimise double-counting. Thus the aim is for everyone to conduct their surveys on a specified date each month. At the time of writing most of the squares in Cambridgeshire have already been allocated although the following remain vacant should anyone else wish to participate: TF41A (nr Gorefield), TL68A (nr Prickwillow), TL49A (nr Doddington), TL25A (nr Everton), TL55A (nr Babraham) and TL48A (nr Mepal). [Please contact Simon directly for forms: Simon.Gillings@bto.org.] As usual, casual records of plover flocks seen either within or outside the survey squares at times other than during a survey visit will also be collected. These may be submitted on-line at www.bto.org/goto/winter-plovers.htm.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2006

Doors open at 7.30pm for an 8.00pm start.

November 10th St John's Church Hall, Cambridge The Great Fen Project by Chris Gerrard

A talk about the Great Fen Project, including the history of the drainage of the western Fens and the Whittlesey Mere, how Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserves survived, and the plans to create a vast wetland for people and wildlife.

Chris Gerrard is the Great Fen Project Manager. Prior to this he worked for the Wildlife Trust in a variety of roles including Reserves Manager and, more recently, Senior Conservation Officer, covering planning issues across Cambridgeshire. He is a member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

**Friday December 8th – 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. We also hope to include a brief presentation about submitting birds to the club by email.

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).

COUNTY RECORDER

Cambridgeshire Bird Club has co-opted Mark Hawkes as the new County Recorder. Mark is a very active county birder and has been involved in the production of the Annual Report for several years. We would like to thank John Oates for his work as County Recorder. He has been a great asset to the Club and we will miss his high standards, and kind way of communicating with everybody. We wish John and his family every happiness and good birding at their new home in the West Midlands.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new member, Tony Fulford
Bruce Martin

Cambridgeshire Bird Club photographic competition

The Bird Club holds a monthly photographic competition. Please visit the Club’s website to view a selection of the excellent photographs taken by county birders and to learn how to vote for the winning photograph each month.

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

If you would like to receive your bulletin by email or be subscribed to CBC-ANNOUNCE, please contact Vicki Harley. If anyone has asked to receive the bulletin this way but is still getting the print version, please let me know: email vicki.harley@care4free.net

Cambridgeshire Bird Club members and friends are invited to:

Oriental Bird Club winter meeting with AGM

Saturday 11 November 2005, 11am–5pm, St John’s Church Hall, Cambridge

- 10.45 Doors open - refreshments available
- 11.20 Opening remarks – The Chairman
- 11.30 Qinghai captured on video by Keith Blomerley
- 12.10 OBC AGM, Conservation Awards and Smythies fund
- 13.00 Lunch: refreshments available
- 14.00 Conservation status of Asia's pheasants and partridges by Phil McGowan
- 14.45 In search of the Western Tragopan in Pakistan's Palas Valley by Francis Buner
- 15.30 Break for refreshments
- 16.10 The Sumatra birding circuit by James Eaton
- 16.55 Day prize draw
- 17.00 Close

Sales by WildSounds & OBC

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 2006, covering September–October 2006

GOOD BIRDING!