

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

*Bulletin* No. 396



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

## RECENT REPORTS JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2008

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

### ANNUAL REPORT NOTICE

#### **The Cambridgeshire Bird Report 2006.**

A number of the 2006 Bird Reports have a problem with faulty binding (loose pages) or duplicated pages. If any member has one of these copies and wishes to replace it, please contact Bruce Martin (see back page for contact details).

### FIELD MEETINGS

For information on Club field meetings at Fowlmere and Fen Drayton Lakes RSPB Reserves, please see the notice on page 13.

*Grey Partridge by Sue Rogers*



Numbers in brackets indicate November and December maximums.

## WILDFOWL

**Mute Swan** At Fen Drayton Lakes (80; 36), Grafham Water (28; 38), the Nene Washes (67; 181), Ouse Fen (10; 59), the Ouse Washes (453; 456) and Paxton Pits (172; 115). Also noted at 11 other sites.

**Bewick's Swan** At the Nene Washes (391; 642) and Ouse Washes (1444; 1152). At Kingfishers Bridge 9 birds roosted from late January to the period end.

**Whooper Swan** At the Nene Washes (450; 291) and Ouse Washes (2993; 2928). Two birds were at Wicken Fen on Jan 1st and 1 on Feb 17th.

**Pink-footed Goose** One bird was at Graham Water from Feb 2nd until the 17th and 4 birds at Ouse Fen from Feb 20th to the period end.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** Fourteen at the Nene Washes on Jan 6th to 14th, 7 at the Ouse Washes on Feb 11th and a juvenile bird at Paxton Pits from Jan 26th to the end of February.

**Greylag Goose** At Cambridge Research Park (formerly Waterbeach GP) (201; 166), Grafham Water (40; 139), Ouse Fen (169; 240), the Ouse Washes (102; 228) and Paxton Pits (12; 224). Double figures were noted at 6 other sites.

**Canada Goose** At Kingfishers Bridge (49; 134), Ouse Fen (113; 62) and the Ouse Washes (425; 39). Other three-figure counts were at Barleycroft GP (132), the Cam Washes (140), and Ouse Fen (113; 62). Double figures were noted at 7 other sites.

**Barnacle Goose** Single figures reported from 5 sites.

**Brent Goose** At least two birds were present during the period with 1 each at Grafham Water and the Ouse Washes on Jan 1st. Again at the Ouse Washes on Jan 3rd and one at Paxton Pits on Jan 2nd and 4th.

**Egyptian Goose** A maximum of 13 birds were recorded at the Ouse Washes in the Earith area during the period. Two were at Paxton Pits and 1 at Fen Drayton Lakes.

**Common Shelduck** At Grafham Water (15; 13), the Nene Washes (7; 68), the Ouse Washes (9; 70) and Paxton Pits (12; 11). Single figures were noted at 8 other sites.

**Mandarin** Three birds were at Grafham Water on Jan 26th.

**Eurasian Wigeon** At Fen Drayton Lakes (853; 2222), Kingfishers Bridge (240; 361), Needingworth GP (1336; 1569), Ouse Fen (558; 590), the Ouse Washes (15,425; 11,913), Paxton Pits (838; 1047) and Wicken Fen (408; 200). Double figures were noted at 4 other sites.

**Gadwall** At Barleycroft GP (112; 39), Fen Drayton Lakes (364; 250), Grafham Water (9; 81), the Nene Washes (23; 277), the Ouse Washes (702; 670) and Paxton Pits (309; 324) Double figures were noted at 8 other sites.

**Eurasian Teal** At Fen Drayton Lakes (159; 286), Grafham Water (181; 130), Kingfishers Bridge (160; 70), the Nene Washes (891; 2078), the Ouse

Washes (446; 1257) and Paxton Pits (278; 106). Double figures were noted at 8 other sites.

**Green-winged Teal** A bird was present at Woodwalton Fen on Jan 16th.

**Mallard** At Fen Drayton Lakes (197; 180), Grafham Water (194; 304), the Nene Washes (429; 1164), Ouse Fen (111; 68), the Ouse Washes (1398; 1430) and Wicken Fen (254; ?). Double figures were noted at 9 other sites.

**Northern Pintail** At Fen Drayton GP Lakes (33; 391), the Nene Washes (550; 1267), the Ouse Washes (304; 1195). Other double figures were 33 at Grafham Water in January and single-figure counts were seen at 6 other sites.

**Northern Shoveler** At Fen Drayton Lakes (90; 70), Grafham Water (139; 120), the Nene Washes (105; 384), the Ouse Washes (231; 334), Paxton Pits (93; 118) and Wicken Fen (200; 158). Double figures were also noted at 4 other sites.

**Red-crested Pochard** A maximum of 5 were at Paxton Pits during the period, 2 at Orton BP and single birds at Fen Drayton Lakes, Grafham Water and Needingworth GP.

**Common Pochard** At Fen Drayton Lakes (136; 97), the Nene Washes (6; 462), the Ouse Washes (1509; 1846) and Paxton Pits (101; 313). Double figures were noted at 6 other sites.

**Tufted Duck** At Fen Drayton Lakes (391; 382), Grafham Water (1461; 375), the Nene Washes (47; 103), the Ouse Washes (1872; 2523) and Paxton Pits (433; 831). Double figures were noted at 6 other sites.

**Greater Scaup** One bird from 2007 was still at Grafham Water on Jan 1st and 1 bird was at Fen Drayton Lakes on Feb 10th.

**Common Scoter** One bird was at Grafham Water on Jan 12th and 13th.

**Goldeneye** At Buckden GP (29; 38), Fen Drayton Lakes (114; 76), Grafham Water (c.140; 85), Ouse Washes (11; 13) and Paxton Pits (77; 137). Orton BP had 19 in February and single figures were noted at 2 other sites.

**Smew** Needingworth GP and Paxton Pits had birds throughout the period with the maximum monthly counts, Needingworth GP (6; 12) and Paxton Pits (6; 13). Fen Drayton Lakes and Grafham Water with a max. of 3 each at sometime during the period were the only other sites to record this species.

**Goosander** At Grafham Water (12; 6) and Paxton Pits (3; 4). Two birds flew over Cambourne on Feb 14th and 1 bird was at Fen Drayton Lakes during the period.

**Ruddy Duck** Seven birds were at Fen Drayton Lakes in early January and 1 or 2 birds were at 3 other sites during the period.

## GAMEBIRDS

**Red-legged Partridge** Relatively few records came in; patch workers and atlas surveyors contributed those that were submitted.

**Grey Partridge** Submitted records suggest about half as many Grey compared to Red-leg, with 9 at Comberton and 6 at Cambourne peak counts.

**Common Pheasant** Nine records came from 5 localities, mostly double-figure counts. Twenty-one in a garden at Farcet Fen shows what can be achieved with generous feeding!

## DIVERS TO HERONS

**Little Grebe** At the Ouse Washes (14; 8) and Paxton Pits (22; 19). Single figures were noted at 13 other sites.

**Great Crested Grebe** At Fen Drayton Lakes (36; 24), Grafham Water (105; 132), the Ouse Washes (15; 35) and Paxton Pits (13; 24). Single figures were noted at 13 other sites.

**Red-necked Grebe** One bird was at Buckden GP from Feb 10th until the month's end.

**Black-necked Grebe** The bird from December at Fen Drayton Lakes remained until Jan 25th. One was at the Ouse Washes on Jan 16th and Feb 18th and another at Orton GP from Jan 20th until Feb 28th.

**Great Cormorant** At Fen Drayton Lakes (54; 36), Grafham Water (210; 247), Needingworth GP (20; 18), the Ouse Washes (66; 155), Paxton Pits (23; 34) and Wicken Fen (13; 48). Also recorded at 10 other sites.

**Great Bittern** Single birds were reported from Fen Drayton Lakes, the Nene Washes, Ouse Fen (one over Jan 12th), Wicken and Woodwalton Fens during the period. Three birds were at Kingfishers Bridge during February.

**Cattle Egret** One flew west over Elton on Feb 23rd.

**Little Egret** Up to 16 were roosting at the Ouse Washes and single figures at 10 other sites during the period.

**Great Egret** A bird took up residence on the Ouse Washes late December and remained throughout the period. One of its favoured feeding areas was a drain on the east side of the Washes in the Pymore/Dunkirk area giving many birders the opportunity to add it to their year list. Single birds were also seen flying over Fen Drayton Lakes on Jan 18th and Fordham on Jan 29th. Also a bird was seen in fen drains in the Aldreth area on Jan 19th. I won't attempt to guess how many birds were involved!

**Grey Heron** At Fen Drayton Lakes (14; 8), Grafham Water (14; 12), the Nene Washes (8; 26) and Ouse Washes (3; 71). In addition to the 71 counted in the Cambs section of the Ouse Washes in late February there were another 12 in the Norfolk section. Single figures were noted at 12 other sites.

## RAPTORS

**Red Kite** Sightings came from 8 locations, mostly of singles. One at Magog Down to the south of Cambridge was away from the more regular locations in the north and west of the county.

**Eurasian Marsh Harrier** Well represented at the main wetland sites, with 10 at Wicken Fen in February the peak count. A possible new roost site is developing at Kingfishers Bridge.

**Hen Harrier** Thirty-two records came in, the majority being from Wicken Fen where roost

numbers peaked at 6 in January. Regular singles at the Nene Washes, Swaffham Prior and Woodwalton Fens while additional one-offs came from Haddenham, Kingfishers Bridge and Wood Ditton. A great improvement on the same time last year.

**Northern Goshawk** A single report from Wicken Fen on Jan 16.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** Records came from 26 sites, with a max. of just 3, from Elm.

**Common Buzzard** Widely reported, often in multiples, including highs of 9 at Stetchworth, 8 at Grafham Water, and 6 at Hermitage/Hill woods (central Hunts).

**Rough-legged Buzzard** Following one report in the previous period, two came in this time; both on 10th Feb; at Fenstanton (13.30pm), and Milton Science Park (time not specified).

**Common Kestrel** Very widely reported, including 3 records submitted by timed tetrad recorders for the Atlas project. Highest counts were just 6 and 5 from the Nene Washes WeBS counts in Jan and Feb respectively, down on last year's 9 each month.

**Merlin** Nene Washes, Maxey GP and Wicken Fen had 2 each, while singles came from a further 9 widespread sites. A hunting attempt at a Linnet was noted from Paxton Pits.

**Peregrine Falcon** Max. of 3 at Nene Washes, with a scattering of other records quite widely distributed, mainly from wetlands. A sighting on the late winter tetrad survey came from the same area of Barton as in the early winter period.

## RAILS

**Water Rail** Max. reported from Kingfishers Bridge, with 10 calling in Feb. Six at Wicken, 4 each Grafham and Fowlmere and 1–2 from a few other sites.

**Common Moorhen** Most counts came from WeBS counts, with Ouse Washes (329, 376) way ahead of all other sites; second highest counts came from Fen Drayton Lakes (33, 67). All other WeBS sites had a few moorhens and they were also recorded in small numbers elsewhere.

**Common Coot** WeBS showed numbers generally highest in Jan; Ouse Washes had the highest counts (4259, 3550), followed by Fen Drayton (1228, 406), Grafham (733, 444), Paxton Pits (419, 265), Nene Washes (12, 482), Needingworth (197, 82) and 20–100 at a few other sites.

**Common Crane** One wintered on the Ouse Washes but seemed to prefer the fields in Norfolk, with just one recorded date submitted for Cambs: 27th Jan.

## WADERS

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** Earliest at Paxton Pits on Jan 28th, more normal arrivals from Feb 10th.

Exceptional count of 48 at Foul Anchor on Feb 24th and double figures at Ouse and Nene Washes by end of February.

**Avocet** Two at Kingfishers Bridge and 1 at Pymoor on Feb 26th were the first arrivals.

**Ringed Plover** Single at Paxton Pits on Jan 20th was unseasonal, First true arrivals from Feb 12th when 2 at Maxey Pits and then increasing at Paxton Pits from 4 on 15th to 9 at month's end.

**European Golden Plover** Highest counts Nene Washes (2500; 3750), Paxton Pits (1100; 3200), Wicken Fen (1500; 3000), Ouse Fen (3300; 550), Fen Drayton lakes (1500; 50), Comberton 1030 and Newmarket (Warren Hill) 500 on Jan 6th and Trumpington 600 on Feb 22nd.

**Grey Plover** Single at Ouse Washes from Feb 2nd to 11th.

**Northern Lapwing** Highest counts from Nene Washes (6504; 10,575), Ouse Washes (5324; 3158), Paxton Pits (1500; 2258), Kingfishers Bridge (1590; 600) Ouse Fen/Needingworth GP (1000; 1334) and Fen Drayton Lakes (1019; 463). First displaying birds at Nene Washes on Jan 31st!

**Dunlin** Ouse Washes (102 same number as December; 193), Needingworth GP (173; 58), Fen Drayton Lakes 65 on Jan 13th, Nene Washes 20 on Feb 10th.

**Ruff** Fen Drayton Lakes (29; 60), Ouse Washes (13; 47), Mare Fen 47 on Feb 14th and Nene Washes (0; 33) and 32 at Swavesey on Feb 1st.

**Jack Snipe** 2–3 at Paxton Pits, 2s at Kings Dyke, Ferry Meadows and Melbourn and singles from Kingfishers Bridge, Maxey GP, Orton BP, Shepreth and Wicken Fen.

**Common Snipe** Nene Washes 91 on Feb 10th was the highest count, peak counts from other sites: Ouse Washes (39; 89), Fen Drayton Lakes (1; 42), Ferry Meadows 34 on Jan 4th, Grafham Water (24; 27), Kingfishers Bridge (15; 32), Ouse Fen/Needingworth (13; 21), Paxton Pits (25; 13), Barton up to 10 and 1–5 from several smaller sites.

**Eurasian Woodcock** Good numbers recorded with highest counts from Ferry Meadows 9, Kingfishers Bridge 7, Paxton Pits 5, Hardwick Wood and Monks Wood 3, and 1–2 from a further 11 sites.

**Black-tailed Godwit** During January up to 730 at Nene Washes, 271 at Ouse Washes, 260 at Paxton Pits and at month's end 500 at Fen Drayton. On Feb 1st 5000 arrived at Fen Drayton, remaining to 6th whilst at Nene Washes numbers built up to 1746 on Feb 10th and, what were presumed to be the Ouse valley birds, up to 5000 at end of month. Additionally 400 at Ouse washes on Feb 5th.

Observations of colour-ringed birds at the Nene Washes showed birds mostly coming from the East coast though some had recently been on the Dee Estuary and also Chichester harbour, all as recently as December 2007 and January 2008.

**Eurasian Curlew** Only a single was recorded at Ouse Fen on Feb 24th.

**Common Redshank** Ouse Washes (99; 134), Nene Washes (49; 148), Kingfishers Bridge (18; 10), River Ouse at Needingworth 65 on Jan 12th, River Nene at Foul Anchor 25 on Feb 24th, Grafham Water (22; 11), Fen Drayton Lakes (19; 2), Paxton Pits (8; 9) and 2–3 from a Wicken Fen and Maxey GP.

**Green Sandpiper** Low numbers with highest counts from Maxey GP 4, Paxton Pits 3, Nene

Washes (Stanground) and Hinchingsbrook business Park 2 and singles from a further 7 sites.

**Common Sandpiper** An increase from normally one wintering bird to three individuals from Grafham Water from Jan 4th to Feb 7th, Wisbech on Jan 1st and Ely BF on Jan 24th

**Turnstone** One on the Ouse Washes on Feb 2nd.

## SKUAS TO TERNS

**Mediterranean Gull** All records in the period were of single adult birds seen at Ferry Meadows CP, Grafham Water and Paxton Pits.

**Black-headed Gull** Records came from 15 sites. Counts above 200 birds were 450 at Milton CP on Jan 2nd, 363 at Fen Drayton Lakes Jan 13th, 234 at Landbeach GP on Feb 8th. Also approx. 150 on a flooded field near Toft golf course on Jan 20th. The highest counts reported within Cambridge were 110 on Jesus Green (Jan 2nd) and 100 on Parkers Piece (Feb 22nd).

**Common Gull** Records came from 11 sites. The highest count was less than in the previous recording period: 180 at Paxton Pits on Feb 21st. Also approx. 150 on a flooded field near Toft golf course on Jan 20th.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Recorded from just 4 sites, including approx. 150 on a flooded field near Toft golf course on Jan 20th.

**Herring Gull** Perhaps no one counted this species for this period; after 5000 at Grafham at the end of 2007, the highest count submitted for January–February 2008 was 10 on the flooded field near Toft golf course on Jan 20th.

**Yellow-legged Gull** Regularly reporting of this species continues. Records came from 11 sites on 21 different dates throughout the period. The highest counts were 8 birds on the Ouse Washes on Jan 6th and at Long Drove (Cottenham) on Jan 8th.

**Caspian Gull** Records of 1–3 birds (1st and 2nd winter and adults) from a range of sites throughout the period.

**Iceland Gull** A good batch of records, all of singles, for this period: at Dogsthorpe Tip on Jan 5th and Feb 9th; Grafham Water on Jan 20th and 27th, and Feb 7th; Cottenham (Long Drove) on Feb 14th and Buckden GP on Feb 27th.

**Glaucous Gull** Another good batch of records from 7 sites on 19 different dates. All records were of single birds except for 2 juvs on Jan 27th at CEGB Res (Fletton). Multiple records came from Dogsthorpe Tip and Cottenham (Long Drove).

**Great Black-backed Gull** Lower numbers reported than in the previous period; 31 were at Fen Drayton Lakes on Jan 13th (WeBS count) and 74 roosting at Kingfishers Bridge on Jan 21st.

## NEAR PASSERINES

**Feral/Rock Pigeon** Over 30 birds recorded from each of Cambridge, Over and Wisbech.

**Stock Pigeon** Recorded from 8 sites. Highest count of 90 birds at Kingfishers Bridge on Jan 22nd.

**Common Wood Pigeon** Five counts of over 1000 birds, from five different locations.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** Ten records, 4 in double figures. More than 35 birds at Elm on Jan 31st.

**Barn Owl** Forty-nine records from 27 sites. On 12 occasions, 2 birds recorded; and 3 birds once.

**Little Owl** Recorded from 11 locations.

**Tawny Owl** Nineteen records, with more than a single bird on 8 occasions. Five at Kingfishers Bridge at the end of February.

**Long-eared Owl** Single birds recorded at 3 sites.

**Short-eared Owl** Recorded from 6 sites, with most records from Wicken Fen, where 4 birds were noted on Jan 16th.

**Common Kingfisher** Records from 14 sites. Milton CP had the highest number – 4 – on Feb 10th.

**Green Woodpecker** Generally singles recorded from across the county. 7 at the Ouse Washes on Jan 14th.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** Four or more birds recorded on 4 occasions; generally 1–2 birds noted. drumming reported from the start of January.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** Five records, all singles, including one bird drumming in St Neots on Feb 18th.

## PASSERINES

**Skylark** Reported from 7 sites in January and 11 sites in February. Notable counts include 150 at Melbourn on Jan 31st, 80 at Stirtloe on Feb 24th and 63 at Comberton on Feb 10th.

**Sand Martin** One at Sutton Gault on Feb 29th.

**Meadow Pipit** Reported from 9 sites in January and 14 sites in February. Notable counts include 83 at the Ouse Washes on Feb 11th, 68 at Paxton Pits on Feb 17th and 60 at Paxton Pits on Jan 26th.

**Water Pipit** Reported from 3 sites in January and February. Four were seen at the Ouse Washes on Jan 29th, with singles reported at Eldernell, Nene Washes, on Jan 1st, Kingfishers Bridge on Jan 22nd and 29th. In February, singles seen at Kingfishers Bridge on 5th, at the Ouse Washes on 11th, 18th and 25th and at Coveney/Little Downham on 17th.

**Grey Wagtail** Reported from 6 sites in January and 4 sites in February. All reports of 1s and 2s.

**Pied Wagtail** Reported from 6 sites in January and 7 sites in February. Notable counts include 54 at Haslingfield on Jan 21st and 49 at Grafham Water on Jan 19th.

**White Wagtail** An unseasonal record was of 1 on a roof in Thriplow on Feb 5th.

**Wren** Reported from 5 sites in January and 6 sites in February.

**Duncock** Reported from 5 sites in January and 7 sites in February.

**Robin** Reported from 6 sites in January and 7 sites in February.

**Black Redstart** One was seen just north of Roswell Pits, Ely, on Feb 24th.

**Stonechat** Reported from 18 sites in January and 19 sites in February. Highest counts include 12 at the Nene Washes on Jan 27th, 10 at the same site on Feb 10th, 9 at the Ouse Washes on Feb 25th, with 9 there on Feb 25th and 7 there on Jan 3rd and 6 were on the Great Fen on Feb 24th.

**Blackbird** Reported from 6 sites in January and 7 sites in February. No notable counts received.

**Fieldfare** Reported from 12 sites in January and 24 sites in February. Notable counts include 1000 at the Nene Washes on Feb 10th, 850+ at Elm on Jan 31st and 300 at Elton on Feb 1st.

**Song Thrush** Reported from 3 sites only during January and 9 sites in February. No notable counts received. One noted singing at Cambridge on Jan 8th.

**Redwing** Reported from 8 sites in January and 15 sites in February. Notable counts include 200+ at Elm on Feb 29th and 172 at Cambridge on Feb 2nd. Several birds were noted singing from mid-January onwards.

**Mistle Thrush** Reported from 7 sites in January and 10 sites in February. No notable counts recorded with singing first recorded at Roswell Pits on Jan 12th.

**Cetti's Warbler** Records received from Ely BF, Fen Drayton GP, Little Paxton village), Nene Washes (Eldernell), Paxton Pits, Swaffham Prior Fen, Wicken Fen and Woodwalton Fen, with a maximum of 6 at Wicken Fen on Feb 8th.

**Blackcap** Individuals reported from 7 sites. If you want to increase the chance of seeing these birds, apples on the feeding table make a significant food-source.

**Common Chiffchaff** At seven sites, and a possible Siberian '*tristis*' on Jan 30th (Thriplow).

**Goldcrest** Singles and up to 4 birds at 10 sites.

**Firecrest** Confirmed at Grafham Water, reported from Jan 1st up to Feb 23rd.

**Bearded Tit** Reported from 3 sites, Kingfishers Bridge, Wicken Fen and Woodwalton Fen (2 males).

**Long-tailed Tit** From 14 sites, with a maximum of 16 at Grafham Water.

**Marsh Tit** From 7 sites, with 7 pairs at Aversley Wood (TL165860), and 16 birds at Monks Wood.

**Willow Tit** One reported at Ouse Washes (Feb 11th, per Rare Bird Alert) and Fordham Wood (Feb 17th)

**Coal Tit** From 8 sites, 1–4 birds.

**Blue Tit** Counts from 13 sites ranged up to 30 birds (Caxton-Cambourne).

**Great Tit** From 15 sites, with 16 by the Grafham Feeding Station.

**Wood Nuthatch** An increase in records with 5 pairs reported at both Aversley Wood and Monks Wood. Other reports from 5 sites noted 1–3 birds.

**Eurasian Treecreeper** Reports from 11 sites mostly involved 1–2 birds, but 5 were recorded at Savages Wood, Grafham on Jan 20th.

**Great Grey Shrike** The single bird remained throughout the period at Wicken Fen.

**Eurasian Jay** Reported from 15 sites with the peak count being 4+ at Elm on Feb 29th.

**Black-billed Magpie** A report of 30 birds coming to roost at Milton CP on Jan 25th was the peak count supported by 10 birds at Cantelupe Reservoirs, Barton and Montgomery Road, Cambridge.

**Eurasian Jackdaw** A report of 1000 birds at Melbourn during the period was the peak count.

**Rook** Records were received from 7 sites with 240

birds between Barton and Coton on 1st February being the peak count.

**Carrión Crow** A report of 180 birds at Wicken Fen on Feb 5th was the maximum count with a further 51 also noted at Kingfisher's Bridge on Feb 22nd probably flying to roost at Wicken.

**Common Starling** Reported from 14 sites with 3000 at the Nene Washes on Feb 10th being the peak count. A further 1000+ birds were recorded at Elm.

**House Sparrow** Records were received from 4 sites with 38+ birds at Elm being the maximum count.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** Only 4 reports received mainly involving single birds, but 10 were reported at the Nene Washes on Jan 27th.

**Chaffinch** The peak count was from Stirtloe with 150+ birds on Feb 24th. A further 120 birds were seen on arable fields at Trumpington on Jan 31st.

**Brambling** Recorded from 12 sites of mostly 1–2 birds, but 60+ birds were reported as the monthly maximum at Fowlmere RSPB on Feb 25th.

**European Greenfinch** Reports were received from 9 sites with a pre-roost gathering of around 85 birds at the Cambridge Botanical Gardens being the peak count.

**European Goldfinch** An interim count of 252 birds at the Ouse Washes on Jan 3rd was easily the peak count. A further 66 birds were reported between Caxton and Cambourne.

**Eurasian Siskin** A flock of 80 birds in Alders at Kingfishers Bridge on Jan 22nd probably exceeded the total number recorded in the county last year. A further 70 birds were also reported at Woodwalton Fen.

**Common Linnet** Records were received from 9 sites with 85 birds in fields on the approach road to Fen Drayton Lakes being the peak count. A further 80 birds were reported at Ouse Fen.

**Lesser Redpoll** Recorded from 10 sites mostly involving 1–2 birds but 25 were reported at Woodwalton Fen on Jan 29th with a further 15 recorded at both Ferry Meadows CP and Swaffham Prior Fen.

**Mealy Redpoll** A single bird was recorded at Woodwalton Fen on Jan 20th and another ringed at Wicken Fen on Feb 20th.

**Common Bullfinch** Reported from 15 sites with 16 birds at Elm during January being the peak count. A further 8 birds were noted at Bar Hill nature reserve.

**Hawfinch** Another rare bird in the county – a single bird flew over Aversley Wood on Feb 17th.

**Lapland Longspur** A great find by Mark Hawkes with 2–3 birds being present on a stubble field at Stirtloe on Feb 24th with at least 1 bird remaining to the end of the month.

**Yellowhammer** Reported from 19 sites with the maximum being 100 at Witcham on Feb 27th.

**Reed Bunting** A large increase in reports during

the period with records from 13 sites. The peak count was 130 feeding on chicory at Kingfishers Bridge on Jan 1st with a further 30 being noted at Stirtloe and Fen Drayton.

**Corn Bunting** Reported from 13 sites with an impressive 200 birds at Melbourn on Jan 31st being easily the largest count. Other records of note included flocks of 50 birds at Swaffham Fen and 40+ at Stirtloe.

## HYBRIDS

**Greylag x Canada Goose** Two adults at Grafham Water on from Jan 20th to 10th February at least.

**Common Pochard x Tufted Duck** Single drakes at Paxton Pits and Ouse washes (Pymore) in January.

**Tufted x Red-crested Pochard** A drake, presumed to represent this combination, appeared at Grafham Water on Jan 12th; it had previously been seen at Rutland Water.

## EXOTICA

**Black Swan** Individual birds on several dates throughout the period at Cambridge, Grafham Water and Buckden GP.

**Bar-headed Goose** Singles at Paxton Pits on several dates and Diddington.

**Wood Duck** Drake on R Cam on Jan 13th.

**African Green Parrot** Seen around West Road, Cambridge; it may have been present since before Christmas.

**Red-winged Laughthrush** One was in the Hinxtton area from Jan 1st, until found dead on Feb 21st (perhaps due to the cold weather).

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*Fieldfares by Sue Rogers*



## Atlas impressions

### *Tony Fulford and the Atlas surveyors*

Last autumn I, like countless others up and down the country, signed up to cover a couple of tetrads for the BTO 2007/11 Atlas project. As I plodded along the Grunty Fen Drain in the bleak and muddy fenland, I wondered how many people we could persuade to spend their free time out in the cold just to count common birds. With 550 tetrads and four visits each we were going to have to repeat this on 2200 occasions. Surely this was not going to be possible. But, as my observations accumulated, I started to build a picture of the bird life in this corner of the fens that I would never have visited for any other reason. Then there were the surprises: both my tetrads produced flocks so huge that the BTO's online data submission system questioned them. Okay, they were only starlings and fieldfares, but they were MY starlings and fieldfares on MY patch, which made it special after all. Yes, I could see why people would do this.

Many of you clearly already also understood. Now that we have completed our first winter season, 108 people have signed up, many for several tetrads. We hope eventually to cover all 550 tetrads in the county for both the winter and breeding atlases (that's five tetrads each over four years – should be possible?). In our first season we completed winter observations for approximately 130 of these (see map), and we have promises to cover another 70 or so at a later date. Below are some impressions a few observers have offered.

#### *Tony Fulford*

The following took place on a bright but chilly day in early December. It was intended to be my first recording visit to the first of my two tetrads. I was about halfway through the visit and walking on the bank of Reach Lode near Reach village. Suddenly I heard a plaintiff 'Baaaaa' – far too close to have come from any of the sheep I could see about 100 metres away. Eventually I located the source – a sheep in the lode with only its head just above the water close to the bank but completely tangled up in trailing brambles. It took only a short while for me to realise I had no hope of getting the sheep out by myself so I hurried off to the nearest farmhouse. Unfortunately the farm did not own the particular piece of land in question and the young girl I spoke to thought the sheep probably belonged to someone who lived in the village. Enquiries in the village eventually brought me to the house of the probable owner – but of course – no reply! Following helpful suggestions from people in the village I found my way to another farm where, it was felt, I might find someone who could help.

Help indeed came in the form of three young men from the farmer's family – and a tractor! Getting onto the tractor, already occupied by three men (and their dog!) with my own gear (binoculars and scope, etc.) took a little while to organise – but soon the tractor, with its motley crew, rumbled off and it felt to me that I had somehow stumbled into the plot of some weird fairy tale.

By the time we reached the lode more than a couple of hours had passed since I had last seen the sheep and when we approached I really doubted whether the poor thing would still be alive. But it was – just. Getting it out of the water, even with the greatly augmented muscle-power now available, proved to be no simple task, but eventually the waterlogged animal was dragged out. How long it had been in the water is anyone's guess. Certainly the water was very cold and it was no surprise to find the sheep was not capable of standing. The lads dragged her to a spot sheltered by some trees and were confident that she would recover. Unfortunately I shall never know. Due to this unexpected three-hour interlude I had to abort this first visit and when I returned a few days later to start all over again the sheep was, of course, no longer where we had left her.

#### *David Watson*

The contrast between the areas of land on either side of the A14 in tetrad TL36W was very marked. Bar Hill village was teeming with the common garden suspects; even a Kingfisher and Blackcap. However, the arable farmland opposite on the east side of the A14 was depressingly empty, despite lovely old pollarded willows alongside a deeply-cut brook.

*Rowena Baxter*

My tetrads seem not particularly interesting for birds, just fields, roads and villages. I got excited when I found a Stonechat and a Common Buzzard, but the real treat were the numbers – high and low– of common birds. Blackbirds were everywhere, well, within and near the villages (the fields were rather empty of birds). My highest count within a tetrad in two hours was 43 Blackbirds and I estimated 80 to be around. I found numbers of Wren surprisingly low: four was my lowest count in two hours and seven my biggest. Counting the common species and then estimating their numbers was the biggest fun.

*Peter Herkenrath*

No great stories really. I was thinking of petitioning for TL34B to be re-numbered BFZ34B, as in 'bird-free zone' – although this may be more a reflection on the observer than the bird population – but have just this evening discovered 'probable' breeding Barn Owls (they bred in 2005) so am feeling more positive!

*Geoff Barlow*

Just one of the most special birding moments of the year – walking down a green lane on the Greensand Ridge near Gamlingay and finding ourselves in the middle of a flock of c. 400 Chaffinch, and then having superb close views of five Brambling at 2m or so, apricot glowing in the winter sun.

*Gwyn*

My biggest surprise was a Woodcock which I put up in the middle of a field, together with some Snipe.

*Dick*

Just to say that its been bloody good birding just by walking from my own house, & has been excellent already... with a Merlin the top highlight so far... but several in fact... e.g. a resident pair of Stonechat, two Woodcock.

*Chris*

... so, quite a lot of Stonechats and Woodcocks. Curiously, I ringed a Woodcock at Wicken Fen just a couple of days before the Atlas began and, also in October, even ringed the first Stonechat to be caught at Wicken for over a decade. Sadly neither record will count for the Atlas, though we've caught several of both species since that will count.

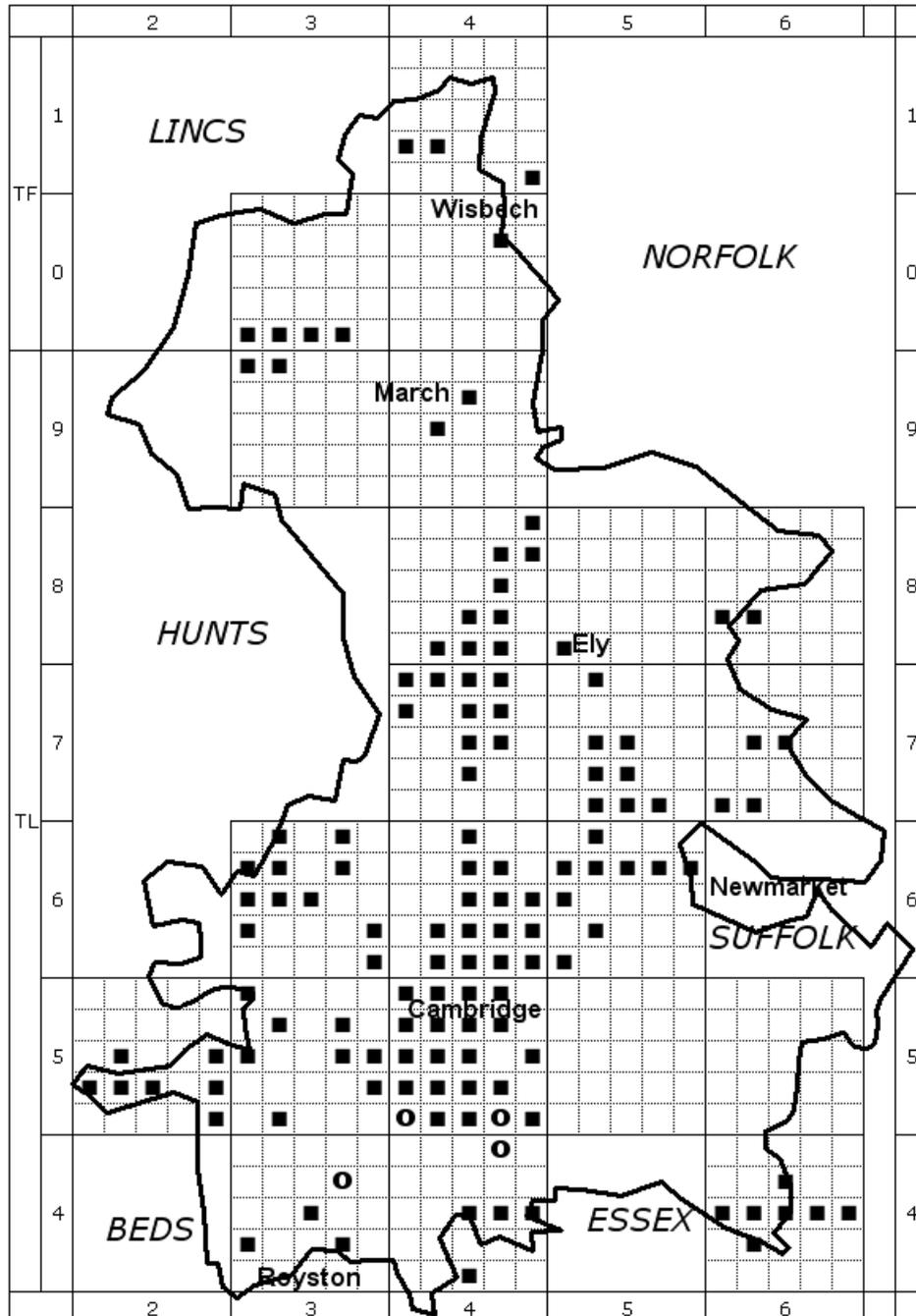
*Tony*

If you are lucky, like us, you can open your front door and walk out into your allotted Atlas tetrad. This is very enjoyable, not least because these are your local birds, and censusing them grants a window into all the wildlife of your immediate area. From now on every time you pass a hedgerow or field or garden in your 'patch' you know who's there. Moreover, people in the village ask us what we are doing as we wander round with binoculars – a good excuse for socialising (but don't forget to 'stop the

clock'!) – and you can spread interest in birds more widely by writing up your experiences of the survey in your parish magazine or local newspaper. And even if you don't have your allotted tetrad close by, just looking out of the window and spotting the odd rarity at the bird table now gives added value, as you can share this experience with the world by entering it as a roving record for your 'home square'.

*Sandi and Robin Irvine*

### Atlas Coverage Winter TTVs 2007/8



- covered for both early and late visits
- covered for early visit only

## What's in a name?

Jake Allsop

You're sitting in the ringing hut. The rain is beating down on the roof., so you can't get the nets up. What do you do to stop from going mad with frustration? In our case, we did daft things like testing each other's knowledge of the scientific names of birds, which is how I came, quite effortlessly, to learn them. This kindled my interest in how the scientific names arose, and the stories behind many of them.

I use the term 'scientific name' rather than 'Latin name' because, although old Linnaeus started out with Latin, he soon ran out of words and started to borrow from classical Greek, since when words from all kinds of sources have been used, including local languages. There are various elements in scientific names. They may describe:

### **Appearance**

e.g. Redstart: *Phoenicurus* from Greek *phoinox* = crimson, *-ouros* = tailed. (Incidentally, the -start in Redstart means tail, from Old English *steort*)

### **Behaviour**

e.g. Nightjar: *Caprimulgus* from Lat *capra* = she-goat and *mulgere* = to milk. I guess its gaping mouth gave rise to the myth of the goatsucking bird.

### **Voice**

e.g. Corncrake: *Crex crex* from the Greek onomatopaeic name for this bird.

### **Habitat**

e.g. Reed Bunting *schoenobaenus* from Gr *skhoinos* = reed and *baino* = inhabit

### **Diet**

e.g. Flycatchers *Muscicapa* from Lat *musca* = fly and *capere* = catch

### **Structure**

e.g. Little Grebe *Podiceps*, from Lat *podex* = anus and *pes* = foot, recording that its legs are to the rear of its body. Francesca Greenoak records the dialect name Arsefoot for our pretty little dabchick.

### **Geographical distribution**

e.g. Gannet *bassana*, referring to the colony on Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth.

It must be fun to be able to name a new species, because, as long as you obey the rules of nomenclature, you can use just about anything: the name of someone famous in the field, the name of someone you admire or want to suck up to, even your girlfriend's name. One thing you cannot do is to name a new species after yourself, though whether this is a rule or just a matter of good taste, I am not sure. So the trick is to have a buddy who is also into finding new species, so each of you can name your discoveries after the other.

Here are some of my favourite stories behind scientific names:

### **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*

*nisoria* is derived from *nisus*, the specific name of Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus*, because of the similarity of the barring on the two birds. As to the origin of the word *nisus*, get thee to Wikipedia and read the raunchy story of Nisus and Euryalus, not that I can see the connection between them and the Sparrowhawk.

### **Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor*

*excubitor* means sentinel, and apparently – the falconers amongst you will know all about this – shrikes were used as lures to catch wild falcons. Talking of falconry, can anyone explain why the Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis*, i.e. the gentle hawk, is so called?

### **Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

A compliment to the Song Thrush's song, since Philomel is the classical name for the Nightingale, deriving from Gr *phil-* = loving and *melos* = black, i.e. lover of the darkness.

### **Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

It is garrulous and it eats acorns from Lat *glans* = acorn. The German name for the Jay is 'Eichelhäher', literally acorn-hewer.

### **Knot** *Calidris canutus*

*Calidris* is one of the many birds mentioned by Aristotle and later pressed into service to name birds, but it is the *canutus* that fascinates. If it is a reference to Canute, then what is the significance? Knots and mad Viking kings paddling together on the shoreline? My guess is that it's simply a latinised form of the word knot, which is itself surely onomatopoeic.

### **Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Nothing very complicated about this: Greek *phalakros* = bald, *korax* = raven, and Lat *carbo* = charcoal. (It's a solecism to mix the two languages, but people do it all the time. Think of 'television'). Anyway, the next time you look at a Cormorant or Shag, see if it reminds you of a bald charcoal-coloured Raven.

### **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

The specific name *decaocto* is from Greek *deka* = ten + *okto* = eight, i.e., eighteen. Why eighteen? Here is the story. A serving wench in ancient Greece moaned about her poor pay, a measly eighteen bob a year, and really wanted out. The gods heard her plea and changed her into a dove, the one that is a real trisyllabic moaner.

### **Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

The specific name is from Greek *kollubistes* = moneychanger. Presumably the person naming it saw a resemblance between its song and the clinking of coins.

### **Wagtails** *Motacilla* spp.

Some real howlers have been committed over the years in the naming of birds. The most delightful is the name of the wagtail genus *Motacilla*. It comes from Greek *muttex*, an unidentified bird mentioned by Hesychius, and the diminutive ending *-illa*. But since the middle ages, people have followed Varro's false etymology that it is from Lat *motare* = move and an otherwise unknown word [*cilla*] = tail. Since then, others have compounded the mistake, as in Laughing Gull *atricilla* = black-tailed; and White-tailed Sea Eagle *albicilla* = white-tailed.

### **Gulls and other mysteries**

Although I think there is value as well as fun in exploring the scientific names of birds (and indeed of all flora and fauna), some of them are misleading, the most notorious being some gulls' names. *Larus ridibundus* (literally, laughing) is Black-headed Gull, while *Larus melanocephalus* (literally, black-headed) is Mediterranean Gull.

In conclusion, here are five questions to ruin your sleep:

What bird name comes from *alopex* = fox and *chen* = goose?

Where does the *borin* mean in the name of the Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*?

Why is the Pheasant called *colchicus*?

Why are plovers called *pluvialis*?

Why are the small finches called *cardueline*?

### **References**

Jobling, J.A., *A Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names*. OUP, 1991.

Greenoak, F., *All the Birds of the Air*. Andre Deutsch, 1979

Website: [www.xs4all.nl/~sbpoley/scinames.htm](http://www.xs4all.nl/~sbpoley/scinames.htm)



## Hide and interpretive centre at Wandlebury

The Cambridge Preservation Society are building a hide and interpretive centre at Wandlebury. This an ambitious project with as much educational benefit as observational. The hide is being built in the Northern corner of the Country Park, in a woodland clearing but also affording views of a meadow and open fields. A pool and regular feeding should attract a wide variety of birds. If anyone wishes to find out more about this project or, more particularly, if you can offer expertise, materials, technical assistance or money please contact Carolin GÖhler or Janet Cornish in the CPS office, Wandlebury Ring, Gog Magog Hills, Babraham, Cambridge. CB22 3AE (Tel 01223 243830).

### **Partnership with Oursi Bird Club in Burkina Faso**

The Club's website now features a blog on the partnership with the Oursi Bird Club in the African country of Burkina Faso (see the article in Bulletin 394 for more details). Under <http://cbcoursi.blogspot.com/>, you will find updates on the developing partnership and new information from Oursi. Recently, Oursi Bird Club recorded Common Cranes and White Storks – check out the blog or follow the link from the Club's website to read more.

### **CBC 2007 Ringing Report – Help please**

This is my annual call for ringers to submit their 2007 totals for the CBC Report. I've emailed everyone I know of individually, so you should have a spreadsheet to fill in. Please get in touch if you haven't had one.

I'm also keen to find out about any new ringing activity, particularly by new arrivals into the county. At least two ringers slipped through the net (as it were) last year and didn't make it into the 2006 Report.

I list below the names of current Cambs ringers and 'ringing secretaries'. I'd be really grateful if regulars on this list could quickly look it over. If you know of anybody ringing who's not listed, then please email me.

*Michael Holdsworth* (m.holdsworth@ntlworld.com)

Jake Allsop, Jenny Atkins, Paul Bellamy, Mark Boyd, Alan Brimmell, Richard Broughton, Malcolm Cavanagh, Ian Dodd, Graham Elliott, Rob Field, Nancy Harrison, Camilla Hinde, Shelley Hinsley, Chris Hughes, Will Kirby, David McKee, Tony Martin, Errol Newman, Kevin Royles, Mark Thomas, Chris Thorne, Mick Whitehouse, Peter Wilkinson

### **Roger Clarke – Memorial Appeal**

Over the past year CBC members have kindly donated to our appeal in memory of former club chairman, Roger Clarke. On April 5th I delivered a cheque for £550 to Wicken where work has already started on the refurbishment of the Brick Pit Hide which will be renamed the Roger Clarke Hide. An area of scrub adjacent to the hide has been cleared in preparation for the erection of a feeding station which should attract a variety of birds. The hide is readily accessible by means of a board walk and is ideal for those with special needs. A modest handing over ceremony will be arranged on completion of the work.

*Robin Cox*

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **INDOOR MEETINGS**

For all indoor meetings, doors open at 7.30 pm for an 8 pm start.

#### **Friday May 9th Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre**

##### **Birds in Art by Nicholas Hammond**

This will be a varied excursion through 25,000 years of images of birds from the walls of caves to the sketchbooks of today, taking in mystical and religious symbolism, the results of exploration, studies of stuffed birds nineteenth century sportsmen's sympathetic magic. This talk will contain some beautiful images, some insights into people's changing perceptions of birds and some lighter moments.

Nicholas Hammond was fortunate enough to be able to combine his passions for birds and art, when he worked as editor of *Birds*. He worked for the RSPB for 24 years and spent 10 years a freelance writer and editorial consultant before becoming director of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough. He has written a number of books including *Modern Wildlife Painting* and has been involved in Artists for Nature Foundation projects in Extremadura, India and the Great Fen.

### **OUTDOOR MEETINGS**

#### **Warbler workshop at Fowlmere RSPB Reserve: Saturday May 10th**

Following from last year's successful warbler workshop at Fowlmere, the Club, in cooperation with the RSPB, offers another such workshop, to be held at Fowlmere, RSPB, Saturday May 10th, 7am – meet in the car park. The aim is to learn about warbler identification, with a focus on songs and calls. It is essential to register for the workshop as numbers are limited. There are still places! If you want to participate, please e-mail or phone Peter Herkenrath (see back page for contact details).

#### **Fen Drayton Lakes RSPB Reserve on Friday June 13<sup>th</sup>**

Meet at 7p.m., in main reserve car park on Holywell Ferry Road (TL343700), for a guided walk with Andy Cotton, site manager for the RSPB.

For further details check the club website or contact Vicki Harley (see back page for contact details).

### **RAFFLE PRIZES**

Many of the raffle prizes at indoor meetings are donated by Club members. If you would like to donate a prize, please bring it to any indoor meeting or contact Ken Hook (see back page for contact details).

### **FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY**

We welcome the following new members – Rod Bee of Eaton Ford, Tony Dellar of Sawston, Jeffrey Harrison of Longstanton and Paul Hinds of Girton .

*Bruce Martin*

### **CBC BULLETIN BY EMAIL**

If you would like to receive your bulletin by email, please contact me. This will save paper and save the Club the costs of distributing the bulletin by post.

*Vicki Harley* (see back page for phone and email).

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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](http://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: Mark Hawkes by May 7th**

**Please send records by post to: Louise Bacon by May 7th**

**Next Bulletin due out June 2008, covering March–April 2008**

# GOOD BIRDING!