

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

*Bulletin* No. 399



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

## RECENT REPORTS JULY AND AUGUST 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), John Harding (Gulls and Terns, Jon Pavey (Pigeons to Woodpeckers), Jono Leadley (Larks to Thrushes), Mike Foley (Warblers to Tits), David Heath (Wood Nuthatch to Buntings) and Hybrids and Exotica (Vicki Harley). Recent Reports edited by Vicki Harley and Ira Federspiel. If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the county recorder (contact details on back page).

*Hunting Hobby by Graham Easy*



Numbers in brackets indicate July and August maximums.

## WILDFOWL

**Mute Swan** Largest counts were at Fen Drayton Lakes (241; 249), Grafham Water (147) and Ouse Fen (80; 61).

**Whooper Swan** One bird was on the Ouse Washes on Jul 13th.

**Greylag Goose** Three-figure counts were at Fen Drayton Lakes (180; 336), Kingfishers Bridge (90; 255), Needingworth GP (141), Ouse Fen (118; 416), Paxton Pits (290) and Wimpole Park (179).

**Canada Goose** Three-figure counts were noted at Fen Drayton Lakes (149; 202), Isleham water meadows (274), Kingfishers Bridge (280), Needingworth GP (107; 28) and Paxton Pits (124) and double figures at 6 sites.

**Barnacle Goose** Up to 2 birds reported from 4 sites.

**Egyptian Goose** Two birds were at Fen Drayton Lakes on Jul 13th and singles at Buckden GP on Jul 14th and Paxton Pits on Jul 26th.

**Common Shelduck** Broods were seen at the Cam Washes, Four Gotes, Grafham Water and Kingfishers Bridge.

**Mandarin** Singles were seen at Bolton's Pit and at Grafham Water.

**Eurasian Wigeon** Apart from summering birds, the first returning birds of note were a flock of 15 at Ouse Fen on Jul 20th and a total of 12 spread around the lakes at Fen Drayton on the same date.

**Gadwall** A count of 221 at Fen Drayton Lakes on Aug 16th was the only three-figure count. Broods were noted at Buckden GP, the Cam Washes, Kingfishers Bridge and Ouse Fen.

**Eurasian Teal** Double figures were noted at 7 sites. The highest count was 86 at Ouse Fen on Aug 17th.

**Mallard** Three-figure counts were noted at Fen Drayton Lakes (233), Kingfishers Bridge (106), Needingworth GP (165), Ouse Fen (254) and Paxton Pits (412).

**Northern Pintail** Singles were at the Cam Washes, Grafham Water and Paxton Pits in July and up to 3 at Paxton Pits in August.

## GAMEBIRDS

**Red-legged Partridge** Only 4 sites recorded this species, in small family groups.

**Grey Partridge** Records from 6 sites, the largest group being 6 birds at Westfield Farm in Comberton.

**Common Quail** One record from Caldecote in Hunts on Jul 2nd.

**Common Pheasant** Breeding recorded at 2 of the 6 sites where this species was reported.

## DIVERS TO HERONS

**Little Grebe** Double figures were noted at Needingworth GP (22), across the river at Ouse Fen (17) and Grafham Water (12). Single figures were noted at 4 other sites.

**Great Crested Grebe** At Fen Drayton Lakes (78; 92). Breeding was recorded at 11 sites. A leucistic bird was at Paxton Pits on Aug 21st.

**Red-necked Grebe** An adult bird was at Grafham Water on Jul 3rd and 4th, and 2 juveniles at the same site on Jul 22nd.

**Black-necked Grebe** An adult was at Ferry Meadows CP on Jul 26th and 3 birds were at Fen Drayton Lakes on Aug 17th.

**Great Cormorant** At Chain Corner on the Ouse Washes 93 birds were counted on Jul 8th, including some young still in nests. Double figures were noted at 4 sites.

**European Shag** An influx occurred in the county in the second half of August with a maximum of 5 at Grafham Water and singles at Fen Drayton Lakes, Ferry Meadows CP, Fowlmere and Paxton Pits.

**Great Bittern** Heard booming at 3 sites and birds seen on a number of occasions at 2 other sites.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** A bird, presumably the bird that was seen in June, flew over the causeway at Earith on Jul 8th.

**Cattle Egret** A bird was seen at Hartford on Jul 31st and an unconfirmed report of 1 at Wicken Fen on Aug 2nd.

**Little Egret** This species has really become a familiar site in the county with 132 records submitted from 19 sites. With maximums of 85 at the Ouse Washes, 46 roosting at Fen Drayton Lakes, 26 at Paxton Pits, 21 at Ouse Fen and 14 at the Cam Washes Upware.

**Grey Heron** Double figures were present at the Ouse Washes (64), the Cam Washes Upware (17) and Fen Drayton Lakes (11) and single figures at 11 other sites.

**Purple Heron** A bird was seen at Fen Drayton Lakes on Aug 18th.

**Black Stork** There were 4 records during the period which surely must refer to one very elusive bird roaming the county. They were at Stow Longa on Jul 2nd, a probable at Ramsey on Jul 14th, at Witcham on Jul 26th and a possible at Dry Drayton on Jul 27th.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** Two or more birds were seen during the period with 1 at the Nene Washes on Jul 1st, then 1 at the Ouse Washes on Jul 13th. One at Ferry Meadows CP on Aug 5th and 1 at the Nene Low Wash on Aug 23rd and finally 2 at the Ouse Washes on Aug 25th and 26th.

## RAPTORS

**Red Kite** Just 6 records, all of single birds, mostly in July.

**Eurasian Marsh Harrier** Widely seen at the main wetland sites, but breeding evidence also came from some less traditional areas. One seen near Cambridge at the M11/A14 junction.

**Hen Harrier** One record came from the Wicken Fen visitors' book on Jul 28th.

**Montagu's Harrier** A female seen at Stow Longa on Jul 2nd.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** Many reports, mostly of single birds, throughout the summer, including several areas of Cambridge where breeding activity

was also observed. Breeding also noted from Sawston Hall, Hardwick Wood and Fen Drayton Lakes.

**Common Buzzard** Sightings came from 24 sites, with highest counts at Grafham Water (9 on Aug 23rd) and Paxton Pits (6 on Aug 22nd). Aerial display seen at Hayley Wood and probable juveniles at Hardwick Wood were the only breeding activity noted.

**Osprey** Approx 10 individuals from Jul 8th to Aug 30th. Some lingered for a day or two, but most were brief appearances. A juvenile male fitted with a satellite transmitter was logged at Largowood, Fife, 5am on Aug 22nd and roosted from 7pm at Little Gidding in Hunts; it was still there at 7am the following day, then was moving south-east over Houghton at 8am and West Wrating by 9am. That course would have taken it roughly over Huntingdon at 7.30 and Cambridge at about 8.30!

**Common Kestrel** Recorded from just 10 localities, with breeding activity/pairs at just 3 of those: Ouse Washes, Elm and Toft.

**Merlin** Three records from late August, at Witcham, Duxford and Melbourn. The latter two were on 23rd and 25th so could relate to the same bird being in the general area.

**Eurasian Hobby** With 65 records this was the most reported raptor of the period. Mainly singles, with 3 at Ouse Fen and Serpentine Brick pits the highest counts. Breeding activity from just 1 site.

**Peregrine Falcon** The second successful breeding season in a row with 3 fledged young. Away from the confidential breeding site there were sightings at Ouse Washes, Milton, and Paxton Pits, where at least 2 individuals were seen.

## RAILS

**Water Rail** Some good evidence of breeding for this elusive species; 2 broods seen at Grafham Water (Jul 27th and Aug 14th), adult and juvenile at Fowlmere and an immature at Paxton Pits. Also recorded from Wicken Fen, Chippenham Fen and Kingfishers Bridge.

**Corn Crane** Records submitted for the Nene Washes (where reintroduction programme underway) of single birds on Jul 2nd, 16th and Aug 7th.

**Common Moorhen** Small numbers from WeBS counters, e.g. Fen Drayton (18; 28), Landbeach GP (15; 10) and Ouse Fen (15; 9). Elsewhere juvenile seen at Roswell Pits, Elm, and Paxton Pits where one helper from an early brood was feeding small chicks.

**Common Coot** WeBS counts: Fen Drayton (827; 1187), Ouse Fen (166; 250), Barleycroft (165; 79), Needingworth (120; 141) and Landbeach (57; 66). Elsewhere bred at Ouse Washes, Buckden GP and Great Eversden, good numbers from Kingfishers Bridge.

**Common Crane** Two seen at Woodwalton Fen Jul 15th and at Nene Washes the following day.

## WADERS

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** Breeding birds mostly departed by end of July, though latest birds present to Aug 12th at Paxton Pits (2 adults 1 juvenile). In 2007, birds were present to Aug 8th. Single at Grafham Water on Aug 29th.

**Avocet** Pairs managed to hatch young at 3 sites with successful fledging certainly from 2 of these. Highest counts from Cam Washes where up to 16 present to Aug 6th reducing to 5 to Aug 25th.

**Little Plover** Highest counts from Maxey GP where peak counts of 9 on Jul 6th and 12 on Aug 13th. Elsewhere in July – 5 at Ouse Washes on 9th and 4 at Cam Washes (Upware) on 5th and 3 at Grafham Water on 1st and singles from a further 5 sites to Aug 25th.

**Ringed Plover** Highest counts Paxton Pits (21; 13), Maxey GP (14; 10), 5 at Ouse Fen on Aug 17th and 1–2 from a further 4 sites.

**Tundra Ringed Plover** Five at Maxey GP on Aug 26th, 4 on 28th and 9 on 30th. Three at Paxton Pits on Aug 18th with 2 present on 20th.

**European Golden Plover** Earliest single at Paxton Pits on Jul 1st. From Jul 24th more widespread sightings from several sites. In August 25 at Ouse Washes on 2nd and up to 180 around Kingfishers Bridge from 25th.

**Grey Plover** Singles at Grafham Water on Aug 23rd and Maxey GP on 30th.

**Northern Lapwing** Highest counts from Paxton Pits (1683; 1100), Ouse Washes 1500 on Jul 13th, Kingfishers Bridge 800 on Jul 14th, Fen Drayton 766 on Jul 20th, 300–600 from Maxey GP, Cam Washes and Nene Washes.

**Red Knot** Singles at Paxton Pits on Jul 17th (cf 1 on same day in 2007) and a summer plumage bird at Maxey GP on Aug 8th.

**Sanderling** In July, 4 at Paxton Pits on 11th and 2 on 17th. In August, 2 at Grafham Water on 2nd, singles on 14th and 28th, and 4 on 29th.

**Little Stint** Brief passage with 3 at Maxey GP on Jul 30th and singles on Aug 3rd and at Cam Washes on 1st.

**Baird's Sandpiper** This year's wader highlight so far was a juvenile at Paxton Pits from Aug 27th to 31st representing the county's 3rd record.

**Curlew Sandpiper** Three at Paxton Pits on July 25th (cf 3 on 22nd in 2007).

**Dunlin** Highest counts from Maxey GP (22, 4), Paxton Pits – present almost daily from July 1st to Aug 31st (10; 20) and 1–7 from a further 2 sites.

**Ruff** Highest counts from Ouse Washes of 18 on July 13th and 55 on Aug 30th; 1–7 at Cam Washes from Jul 26th and 1–2 from a further 4 sites.

**Common Snipe** Reported from 9 sites with highest counts from Ouse Fen 35 on Aug 17th, Cam Washes up to 25 in August and 1–6 at the remaining sites.

**Eurasian Woodcock** Roding birds still at Wicken Fen on Jul 3rd and Woodwalton Fen on Jul 14th.

**Black-tailed Godwit** Highest counts from Cam Washes (11; 30), Ouse Washes 30 in Jul, Isleham water meadows 7 on Jul 31st and Maxey GP 12 on Jul 19th were identified as race *islandica*.

**Whimbrel** Largest group was 14 flying south-west over Witcham on Jul 9th. Earliest over Nene Washes on Jul 6th (cf Jul 6th in 2007), other groups of 5 over St Neots on Jul 8th, Grafham Water 6 on Aug 11th and 6 at Helpston on Aug 24th and 1–2 at a further 6 sites.

**Eurasian Curlew** Largest group was 5 over Witcham on July 24th, 4 over Grafham Water on 2nd with 2 next day, 3 at Paxton Pits on Aug 20th with 2 next day, 2 over Impington on July 3rd and singles from a further 6 sites.

**Spotted Redshank** Two at Ouse Washes on Jul 8th and singles at Ferry Meadows, Maxey GP and Ouse Washes all on Aug 26th.

**Common Redshank** In early July good numbers of young fledged at Nene Washes. Otherwise highest counts from Paxton Pits (4; 16), Ouse Washes 8 and 1–2 from a further 4 sites.

**Common Greenshank** Highest counts from Ouse Washes (11; 15), Cam Washes at Waterbeach (2; 9), Ouse Fen 7 on Aug 17th and 1–3 from a further 8 sites.

**Green Sandpiper** Super abundant as usual. Highest counts from Cam Washes at Waterbeach (20; 22), Maxey GP (9; 19), Paxton Pits (11; 12), Fen Drayton RSPB (10; 10), Isleham water meadows (8, 10), Wicken Fen (7, 5), Kingfishers Bridge and Ouse Washes 6 and 1–5 from a further 6 sites.

**Wood Sandpiper** Earliest at Paxton Pits on Jul 20th, 1–2 at Maxey GP on Aug 4th–17th, Fen Drayton Aug 4th–6th, Paxton Pits 2 between Jul 31st and Aug 1st, singles on 9 dates at Cam Washes July 31st–Aug 15th, Isleham Water Meadow 2 on July 31st and Aug 3rd. Ouse Fen 2 on Aug 17th and 1 on 24th and Ouse Washes Aug 2nd and 28th.

**Common Sandpiper** Highest counts from Paxton Pits (11; 12), Grafham Water (6; 9), Maxey GP (7; 3), Isleham (7; 2), Cam Washes (5; 6) and 1–4 from a further 7 sites.

**Ruddy Turnstone** At Paxton Pits 1–2 on July 24th, 5 on 27th, 2 on 28th, 1 on 31st and 10 on Aug 31st. Grafham Water on July 31st, 2 on Aug 6th, singles on Aug 11th and 20th and 2 at Maxey GP on Aug 2nd.

## SKUAS TO TERNS

**Great Skua** One bird at Grafham on Aug 12th and another at Wicken on Aug 17th.

**Mediterranean Gull** Regularly sighted throughout the period, mostly juvenile birds. The majority were at Grafham (10 records) but also 5 records from Paxton and 1 from Maxey GP. All of single birds except 2 juveniles at Paxton on Jul 25th and up to 4 juveniles at Grafham on Aug 7–8th.

**Little Gull** Two adults at Grafham on July 21st and 1 juvenile at Paxton on Aug 31st.

**Black-headed Gull** Large counts were up to 700 at Wisbech on Jul 26th, and 1500 at Paxton on Aug 7th.

**Common Gull** Small numbers reported, mainly from Paxton, except for 80 there on Jul 27th and 46 at Elm on Aug 25th.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** There was a breeding pair with 3 juveniles at Buckden on Jul 6th, and 27 juveniles were noted at Godmanchester GP on Jul 19th. On Jul 27th 500 were at Paxton; otherwise small numbers recorded for July, with only 1 August record, 2 at Fen Drayton on 16th.

**Herring Gull** The odd single bird reported in July; no reports for August.

**Yellow-legged Gull** Thirty-four records, the very large majority from Paxton, where numbers consistently in double figures, highest counts being over 80 on Jul 27th and 64 2 days later; numbers fell away a little in the second half of August but still at least 25 on 21st. Elsewhere birds reported from Grafham ('usually about 5 around', but peaking at 30 on Jul 31st), Ouse Fen, Tanholt GP, Buckden GP and Cam Washes.

**Great Black-backed Gull** One bird at Wicken on Jul 10th, 2 at Fen Drayton on Jul 20th, 6 at Paxton on Jul 27th and 2 at Ouse Fen on Aug 3rd.

**Sandwich Tern** One flew over Fowlmere on Jul 19th and there were 7 at Paxton on Aug 30th.

**Common Tern** Fifty-one reports spread over the 2 months from all over the county: numbers generally in single figures or teens, except at Paxton where high counts were regularly over 30 and peaked at, at least, 66 on Aug 20th.

**Arctic Tern** A single bird at Grafham on Jul 19th and then singles reported from Ferry Meadows on 4 occasions.

**Little Tern** One at Paxton Pits on Jul 23rd.

**Black Tern** There were at least 56 birds at Grafham on July 31st with 25 there the following day; and then 40 there on Aug 30th, with the odd record of twos or threes at other times. Elsewhere, 1 was at Paxton on Aug 17th, 1 at Fowlmere on 30th, when there was also 1 at Hinchingsbrooke CP, and then 2 at Paxton the following day.

## NEAR PASSERINES

**Rock Pigeon** Wisbech town centre continues to hold the highest reported numbers (> 65).

**Stock Pigeon** 1–9 birds recorded mainly in the southern fens; 2 separate records of prospecting or nesting in owl boxes.

**Wood Pigeon** Highest numbers reported at Elm with 140+ on Aug 31st.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** Over 30 birds at Elm in both months.

**European Turtle Dove** Around 50 records, predominantly single birds, widely distributed across the fens and river valleys; 9 birds at Cam Washes on Jul 10th.

**Common Cuckoo** During July juveniles at Fowlmere appear to have been taken by a sparrowhawk. The last record was on Aug 6th.

**Barn Owl** Three records of breeding in boxes; 1–4 birds seen at 18 sites.

**Little Owl** Very few records in the period; regularly seen around Cottenham.

**Tawny Owl** Five records; 4 territories noted at Wimpole. Calling birds reported at the end of August.

**Short-eared Owl** An adult seen near Ely on Jul 24th.

**Common Swift** Widely recorded, but with numbers dropping off in the 2nd half of Aug. The largest gathering was 250 birds near Fowlmere on Jul 8th.

**Common Kingfisher** Recorded at 22 sites, predominantly single birds; 4 recorded at Fen Drayton on Jul 8th.

**Eurasian Wyrneck** A bird was ringed at Dunkirk on Aug 25th.

**Green Woodpecker** Fifteen birds recorded from nearly 30 sites, well distributed across the county.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** 1–3 birds recorded from 6 sites.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** One in a private garden at Brampton on Aug 2nd.

## PASSERINES

**Skylark** Twenty-four at Westfield Farm, Comberton, on Jul 30th was the only record of note during the period.

**Sand Martin** Notable counts in July included 700 at Fen Drayton Lakes on Jul 7th, 400 there on July 12th and 200+ at Grafham Water the same day. In August, 200 at Paxton Pits on Aug 18th was the only notable count.

**Barn Swallow** Few records received in July, with 15 passing through Toft on 15th and 25 south-west at Barton on 25th of note. In August, counts included 50 at Priory Park, St Neots on 14th, with 80 there on 20th.

**House Martin** Notable counts included 100+ over Eynesbury Manor, St Neots on July 25th and counts of 50 at Streham on August 11th and Buckden Pits on Aug 25th.

**Meadow Pipit** Evidence of breeding reported from 3 sites in July.

**Yellow Wagtail** Reported from only 2 sites in July and 11 sites in August. Thirty+ over Paxton Pits during Aug 27th indicated autumn passage.

**Grey Wagtail** Reported from 5 sites in July and 8 sites in August. Six at Ouse Fen on Aug 10th and 4 at Grafham Water on Jul 26th were notable counts. The latter involved a pair feeding 2 fledged young.

**Pied Wagtail** Fifty-two at Hinxtion Hall on Aug 12th was the highest count noted.

**Wren** No notable records received.

**Dunnock** No notable records received.

**Robin** No notable records received.

**Common Nightingale** Only 1 report received, a juvenile that was trapped and ringed at Paxton Pits on Jul 14th.

**Black Redstart** An adult male was seen on Jul 6th, but the site has been withheld.

**Common Redstart** A female was seen at Barton on Aug 23rd and another was at Over on Aug 25th.

**Whinchat** One at Waterbeach on Jul 16th was an early record, followed by up to 5 on the Nene Washes between Aug 20th and 23rd, 1 at Maxey

GP 25th to 30th, one at Grafham Water from 28th to 29th, and 1 at Paxton Pits on 31st.

**Stonechat** A pair was present at a withheld site between mid-July and August.

**Northern Wheatear** No records in July. In August, 1 was present at Paxton Pits on 2nd–3rd with 5 there on 17th and a single remaining to the month-end. Another single was at Maxey GP on 3rd staying until 20th when it was joined by a second bird. Other singles were noted at Whittlesey on 3rd, Melbourn on 5th, Grafham Water on 11th, with 3 there from 13th to 19th, Nene Washes on 16th, with a high count of 12 on 20th, a single at Ferry Meadows on 21st and 2 at Bottisham Lock, Upware on 25th.

**Blackbird** No notable records received.

**Song Thrush** No notable records received.

**Mistle Thrush** Notable counts included 20 at Long Drove, Cottenham on Jul 28th, 18 at Friday Bridge on Aug 26th and 10 at Elm on Jul 2nd.

**Cetti's Warbler** Noted at 3 sites including Wicken Fen where 8 and 6 different birds were ringed in July and August respectively.

**Common Grasshopper Warbler** One was noted at Chippenham Fen (July), at Paxton Pits during July (on more than 1 occasion but possibly just 1 male), and 2 birds were ringed at Wicken Fen in August.

**Sedge Warbler** A juvenile was present at Lake Ewart Cambourne, and 1–4 birds were reported from 3 other sites.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler** Up to 5 birds were at Landbeach GP in July, and records also received from Marsh Lane GP, Ouse Fen, Paxton Pits (where a male was singing as late as July 24th), and St Neots (Priory Park).

**Lesser Whitethroat** From only 4 sites, probably reflecting its skulking behaviour, with 12 birds ringed at Wicken Fen in August.

**Common Whitethroat** From 14 sites, with family flocks evident at several of these; 22 birds were ringed at Wicken Fen in August and up to 10 birds were present at Westfield Farm, Comberton.

**Garden Warbler** Two birds were reported from Grange Farm (Abbots Ripton) and singles were found at Marsh Lane GP, Eaton Ford and Paxton Pits, where a male was in sub-song on Aug 2nd.

**Blackcap** From 12 sites, the largest count being 11 singing males at Grange Farm (Abbots Ripton). A road casualty was noted at Elm.

**Wood Warbler** A single record of 1 bird on Aug 6th at Ferry Meadows CP between Overton and Gunwade Lakes.

**Common Chiffchaff** Reported from 14 sites, still singing in late August at 3 sites. Around 10 birds were noted in Over and 14 at Marsh Lane GP in August.

**Willow Warbler** Single birds were noted at Barton, Caldecote, St Neots (Priory Park) and at Cambourne (where a very yellow individual was seen). Three were present at Marsh Lane GP and up to 7 at Westfield Farm, Comberton.

**Goldcrest** Just 2 records, one in Cambridge and a juvenile at Wicken Fen – in the latter case possibly evidence of breeding at the Fen?

**Firecrest** Reported in similar numbers to Goldcrest

in this period! Two were found in a private garden in Witcham on July 19th.

**Spotted Flycatcher** At 26 sites. Some birds seen in the latter part of August were considered passage birds but at several sites, breeding was confirmed.

**Pied Flycatcher** One was recorded at Over (Fen End Road) on Aug 21st and a probable was reported from Grafham Water on Aug 10th.

**Wood Nuthatch** Records were received from 2 sites with the peak count being 4 birds at Hardwick Wood on Aug 14th.

**Eurasian Treecreeper** Only 1 record during the period being 6 different birds ringed at Wicken Fen.

**Eurasian Jay** Reported from 5 sites with the maximum count being 5+ birds at Elm on Aug 31st.

**Black-billed Magpie** Records were received from 4 sites with a 10+ group, including juveniles, being the peak count at Elm. A further 8 birds were reported from Coleridge Rec. Cambridge.

**Eurasian Jackdaw** This bird has been obviously under recorded during the period with just 2 reports submitted, both from the same site. The maximum count was 37+ birds from Elm.

**Rook** Records were received from just 2 sites with the peak count being a flock of 330+ birds, again from Elm, on Aug 18th.

**Carrion Crow** Records were received from 5 sites with the maximum count being 60 birds at Ouse Fen on Jul 27th.

**Common Raven** Reported from 2 sites towards the end of August both of which involved 2 birds flying over Paxton Pits and Castor Hanglands.

**Common Starling** Just 5 reports submitted during the period with 130+ birds at Isleham water meadows on Aug 28th being the peak count. A further 120 birds were recorded from the golf course at Great Eversden and 100 birds at Ouse Fen during August.

**House Sparrow** Records were received from 4 sites with the maximum count being 145+ at Elm on Aug 31st.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** No records submitted.

**Chaffinch** Records were received from 4 sites with 10+ birds at Elm during the period being the peak count.

**European Greenfinch** Records were received from 4 sites with 40 birds at Priory Park, St. Neots on Aug 23rd being the maximum.

**European Goldfinch** Reported from 8 sites with the peak count being 85 birds at Ouse Fen on Aug 10th. A single flock of 60 birds, being mostly juveniles, was recorded at Fen Drayton on Aug 23rd.

**Common Linnet** Reports were received from 6 sites with a flock estimated at 200+ birds feeding in rape stubble at Elm on Aug 25th being the peak

count. Other reports included 60 birds at Ouse Fen and 42 at Westfield Farm, Comberton.

**Common Crossbill** Records were received from an impressive 14 sites during the period with the peak count being 50 birds at Monks Wood on Jul 2nd. A further 11 birds were noted at Bevill's Wood the following day.

**Common Bullfinch** A very secretive bird during the breeding season probably explains why the peak count was just 5+ birds Paxton Pits on Aug 24th.

**Yellowhammer** Reported from 7 sites with 10 birds at Westfields Farm, Comberton on Jul 30th being the maximum count.

**Reed Bunting** Records were received from 6 sites with the peak being 8 birds from both Ouse Fen on Jul 20th and Westfields Farm, Comberton on Aug 14th.

**Corn Bunting** Reports were received from 2 sites with the peak count being a family group of 5 birds at Cambourne on Jul 15th.

## HYBRIDS

**Greylag x Barnacle Goose** One record from Ouse Fen on Aug 17th, during the WeBS count.

**Canada x Greylag Goose** There were several records of this combination from Kingfishers Bridge, Paxton Pits and Isleham Water Meadows.

## EXOTICA

**Black Swan** Reports were of single birds at Buckden GP and Earith Sluice, and one on the Cam at Chesterton was frequently seen with Mute Swans.

**Bar-headed Goose** Most reports were of a single at Paxton Pits plus a single at Ouse Washes (Chain Corner).

**White-cheeked Pintail** One at Grafham Water on several dates during the period.

**Muscovy Duck** A feral bird was observed with three young at Elm on Aug 31st.

**Red-tailed Hawk** One reported from Grafham Water on Jul 23rd.

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## Baird's Sandpiper, Paxton Pits – the second county record.

*Martin Davis*

During another look around my local patch on Wednesday 27th August, I had no reason for optimism. It had been quiet for the last week or so, the only highlight being three Curlew Sandpipers with very little change from one day to another. On this evening little was new, six Dunlin were still there as were two Greenshank. Then I caught sight of an isolated *Calidris* type wader feeding on some tiny shingle islands c.300 m in front of me, but close to the bank. My initial thought was that it resembled a Pectoral Sandpiper as it was face on and I could just work out the breast streaking, although it was some distance away, and I was using a loaned scope with no zoom as my Leica was in for repair.

I moved 100 m or so to get a better view, but the vegetation on the bank was hampering me as the bird was feeding so close to the shoreline. As it turned side on I then realised that it was obviously not a Pectoral Sandpiper – the shape was all wrong and the bird too small. The very attenuated rear end drew me to one of two candidates even with the poor views; it was either a White-rumped or a Baird's!

As elation was creeping in I was soon to be deflated as a Peregrine came across the pit sending waders, ducks and gulls all into bedlam. As the bird took flight it confirmed my theory; the dark rump eliminated White-rumped Sandpiper. I managed to stay on the bird as it wheeled its way through the scattered flock and it dropped to the middle of the lake and out of sight behind the main island. Great, I thought, it's still here, and still alive! At this point I phoned the other Paxton regular (Jamie Wells) and the county recorder (Mark Hawkes) to explain what I had seen.

The next two hours though were a spell of total frustration, as I could not relocate the bird anywhere. Mark and Jamie joined me in the search once they had finished work. Just as I was going to give up, and feeling distraught, Mark asked the question "so where was it when you first saw it?" to which I replied "well, it was on the little island in front of that swan" (pointing to a small island). Mark and Jamie both then 'scoped the island out of habit rather than hope. Amazingly, both realised there was actually a wader there!

BINGO!! Where had it been for two hours? The bird was aged as a juvenile (which was a little surprising given the relatively early date), and the news was then passed to local birders and rarebirdalert.com. Most Cambridgeshire birders saw the bird that evening and it stayed long enough for many observers to get good views. Lucky, as it nearly got away!! It remained until September 1st, and was seen again from September 5th to 7th.

Photographs of the Baird's Sandpiper appear on the Club's website at [http://cambsbirdclub.blogspot.com/2008\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://cambsbirdclub.blogspot.com/2008_08_01_archive.html)

**From the County Recorder:** This individual was the first county record of a juvenile, and only the second county record, coming 45 years after the first, which was seen briefly on the Cambridgeshire side of the river at Wisbech sewage farm on July 29th 1963 (having been present in Norfolk from July 22nd to August 6th). An adult was seen (and photographed) at Barleycraft GP from Aug 18th to 12th 1990, but this record has not been submitted to the BBRC to date.

Access to some areas of Paxton Pits is restricted, due to health and safety issues within this working quarry site. Thankfully, during the birds stay, most observers obeyed the specific instructions for access and viewing, which will hopefully have reinforced the good relationships with the quarry company for potential future access.

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## The Roger Clarke Hide

Thanks to the generosity of Cambridgeshire Bird Club members, a donation of £550 was made towards the costs of refurbishing the Brick Pit Hide at Wicken Fen, which has been renamed the Roger Clarke Hide.

Janis Clarke opened the Roger Clarke hide on 6th August at a ceremony attended by a number of Cambridgeshire Bird Club members. To mark the occasion, Club chairman Robin Cox, delivered the following speech.



“The Cambridgeshire Bird Club, of which Roger was a past chairman, has had many distinguished ornithologists among its membership but probably none more so than Roger Clarke. He spent many happy hours here at Wicken where much of his seminal work on harriers was carried out. It is, therefore, very fitting that this hide should be dedicated to his memory.

There was a hide here already but it was in need of considerable repair and refurbishment. The view across the pool was obscured and there was no feeding station. The hide has been repaired, the surrounding vegetation cleared and a very good feeding station, that I am sure will attract a lot of birds, has been put up. This has been paid for from the fund set up in Roger’s memory by the Cambridgeshire Bird Club, while the work has been done by the National Trust to whom we are grateful for providing the site of a permanent memorial to Roger. He would have been pleased that this hide will be ideal for young people, perhaps just starting their hobby of bird-watching where they can familiarise themselves at close quarters with a wide variety of birds, including kingfishers if they are patient. It is also easily accessible and accommodating for anyone with a mobility problem.



Roger earned his living as an accountant but I believe he chose that profession because he knew that it would allow him the maximum time to pursue his real interest which was ornithology. He was almost a professional ornithologist but even as an accountant he gave unstintingly of his professional time to bird associations such as the British Ornithologists Union and the Hawk and Owl Trust. His work on harriers on which he was a world authority led to a PhD from the University of Liverpool. He wrote monographs on the three regular British harriers as well as numerous papers.

It is tragic that Roger's life was cut short so prematurely when he had so much more to contribute but his work will not be forgotten and, through this memorial, neither will such a remarkable person. We are delighted that Janis, Roger's widow, is here to name the hide after Roger and I now call upon her to do us the honour."

### **A. E. Vine 1929–2008**

With the death of Tony Vine on 15th August the club lost one of its longest serving members and one of the last links with a bygone era. He joined the club in 1947 when he lived at Shippea Hill where his father was the stationmaster. In that year he contributed his first records to the annual report, including his first heronry counts and also records of birds breeding in the fens as the waters receded following the great floods of that winter. Youthful and enthusiastic, he took an active part in the affairs of the club, where his contemporaries were students such as Bill Bourne and Chris Mylne. His talents were soon recognised; he edited the report in 1951 and 1952 and the following year was the first to hold the office of county recorder. He served on the committee until 1971 and in recognition of his work was made a vice-president in 1979.

Looking at some of his early records one cannot fail to be impressed by his thorough fieldwork and by the numbers of birds, many of which are now scarce or vanished. He spent many hours in the wilds of the Breckland, then included in the report. In 1948 he counted a post-breeding total of 700 Stone Curlew including one flock of 100, and in an area of 35 square miles a total of 450 Wheatears including 130 on a single heath. In 1949 Hooded Crows were still so common that he was able to record 101 flying into a single roost! Without his efforts much of this information would by now be merely anecdotal rather than factual. From 1950 he counted all the heronries in the area, a labour of love which he continued for the next 47 years.

Having spent his own early years scouring the countryside by bicycle, Tony in turn appreciated the efforts of the younger band who followed on his heels a few years later. He was very supportive and encouraging and I felt privileged when I was invited to join Graham Easy and a few others on Tony's regular outings by car. From the fens of Lincolnshire and the shores of the Wash, through the Brecks to the coast of Norfolk and Suffolk, he seemed to know every road and track. He showed us many new places and several new birds. In 1958 he took Graham and me on my first visit to Scotland and in the following year an even more exciting journey through France to the Camargue – my first trip abroad and my first encounters with hitherto fabled species like Bee-eaters, Hoopoes and Black-winged Stilts! For me Tony opened the door to a wider world and for that I shall always be grateful.

A man of wide interests, in later years he sought new fields of exploration. He became a leading authority on the bats and badgers of the area, spending countless hours recording their distribution and helping to conserve their habitat. He concentrated his birdwatching on Ministry of Defence land where the limited public access meant that his records were of more significance. In this he was greatly assisted by Graham, particularly after losing the sight in one eye and suffering a considerable loss of hearing.

A few weeks before his death Graham and I took Tony out to lunch and afterwards spent a pleasant couple of hours in the Norfolk countryside. Sadly he could no longer identify any of the

birds by song but he said how much he had enjoyed the outing and graciously claimed that he could not have spent the time with two better companions. It was a small gesture on our part and little enough to repay Tony for all that he had done for us in the past. He taught us a lot and gave us many laughs, mostly at his expense, his gentlemanly appearance belying the fact that he was quite a character to those who knew him well.

Single-minded and absorbed in his interests, he was content to gather information and did not seek wider recognition for his work. However he would no doubt have been pleased and also modestly surprised to have had an obituary in the Eastern Daily Press and to have been commemorated on BBC radio. He spent most of his spare time in the field. Living a rather simple, spartan life surrounded by his books and papers he cared little for domestic comforts and personal possessions. Indeed at the time of his death he was still using the same binoculars, British made by Wray, as when I first met him. He was truly a unique character and I doubt that we shall see his like again.

*Colin Kirtland*

(A more detailed obituary will be published in the next annual report.)

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## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **INDOOR MEETINGS**

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

#### **Friday November 14th St John's Church Hall, Cambridge**

##### **A Fair Isle Year by Rebecca Nason**

Rebecca is a freelance bird photographer and ecologist. She spent two years during 2003/4 working as assistant warden/seabird monitoring officer on Fair Isle, Shetland – a place she now regards as a second home, before embarking on freelance wildlife photography full-time in 2005. Her photographs appear regularly in bird magazines, journals and books. She is one of the top ten photographers who supplied images for *Birds of Scotland* published in 2007 and was the commissioned photographer for the New Naturalist book *A History of Ornithology* by Peter Bircham. She also finds time to combine her photography with ecological work and wildlife tour-leading. Her other interests include moth trapping, palaeontology, Japanese antiques, old bird prints, fine wine and food. Rebecca's talk will offer a photographic insight into working and birding at Britain's premier birding site.

Check Rebecca's website for examples of her photography. <http://www.rebeccanason.com/>

#### **Friday December 12th St John's Church Hall, Cambridge**

##### **Christmas Social: member's slides, quiz and refreshments**

Members are invited to bring 5–10 slides of anything else about birds or natural history that you would like to show to the meeting. A chance to enjoy seasonal refreshments and time to socialise! Contact Dick Newell or Vicki Harley to offer to show slides.

### **EVENTS IN 2009**

The programme card for 2009 will be distributed with the next bulletin. Talks at indoor meetings will cover a wide variety of subjects including owls, the Red Kite, birding in Colombia and north-east India (Eagle's Nest), upland wildlife and Richard Richardson, the famous Norfolk ornithologist. We also plan several field meetings and workshops for 2009

## **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 – Stuart Collings of Holme, Peterborough, Jo Jones of Burwell, Neil Renwick of Fenstanton, Alan Skull of Milton and Chris Went of Cambridge.  
*Bruce Martin*

## **FROM THE BULLETIN EDITOR**

If you would like to contribute to the bulletin, please contact me. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this issue.

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

## **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 contact details).

## **FROM THE COUNTY RECORDER**

As an increasing number of records are being obtained only by searching the CBC website and Cambirds, I would encourage all observers to submit their records directly for the CBC database. I thank Tony Roberts for his persistent efforts in extracting records from these sources, as they would otherwise not make it onto the CBC database.

Can all observers who have found county rarities during 2008 (which require a written description - including the numerous Honey Buzzards) please submit them as soon as possible, either via email, or post Please also use a submission form (available from myself or down-loadable from the CBC website).

*Mark Hawkes* (see back page for contact details).

## **WILD BIRD FOOD**

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

## **NATURE IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Volume 50 of *Nature in Cambridgeshire*, has been published recently. Among the usual wide-ranging coverage, there are articles on changes in wildlife in Cambridgeshire 1940 to 2008, aquatic plants of the River Cam, biodiversity in Cambourne and hoverflies of Cambourne, as well as a review of Peter Bircham's *History of Ornithology* and an index to all 50 issues. Further details of this and earlier issues are available at [www.natureincambridgeshire.org.uk](http://www.natureincambridgeshire.org.uk). Copies of issue 50 and many others are available from Vicki Harley (contact details on back page). Please note if you contact me directly you should receive a quicker response than using the Museum of Zoology address given on the journal's website.

*Vicki Harley* (see back page for contact details).

## CLUB CONTACTS

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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 November 7th**

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

**Next Bulletin due out December 2008, covering September–October 2008**

# GOOD BIRDING!