

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 403



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

RECENT REPORTS MARCH AND APRIL 2009

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), Mike Foley (Larks to Tits) and David Heath (Wood Nuthatch to Buntings) and Vicki Harley (Hybrids and Exotica). If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the county recorder (contact details on back page).

Spring Washland Scene by Ben Green



Numbers in brackets indicate March and April maximums.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Ouse Fen (108:88) and the Ouse Washes (513:65). Double figure counts were made at 7 other sites.

Tundra Swan Ten birds on Mar 5th were the last reported from the Nene Washes. One bird at Dunkirk near the Ouse Washes on Apr 1st was the last of the winter.

Whooper Swan At the Nene Washes (260:61) and the Ouse Washes (313:15). Away from the Washes, 2 birds spent March with a flock of Mute Swans in the Swaffham Prior Fen/Cam Washes area.

Bean Goose The 19 seen flying north along the Ouse Washes in late February were seen opposite Four Balls Farm on the Washes on March 1st.

Great White-fronted Goose Five birds were on the Ouse Washes on Mar 2nd and 2 on the 16th.

Greylag Goose At the Cam Washes (203:32), Fen Drayton Lakes (58:43), Kingfishers Bridge (75:76), Ouse Fen (80:40) and Wicken Fen (33:23). Three figure counts were the Nene Washes (114) and at the Ouse Washes (100).

Canada Goose Three figure counts were at Kingfishers Bridge (130) and double figures at 10 other sites.

Barnacle Goose Six birds were at Whittlesford GP on Apr 26th, 2 at Hinxtan Hall on the Mar 16th and singles at 4 other sites.

Egyptian Goose Four birds were on the Cam Washes on Mar 3rd, 3 at Hemingford Abbots on the 3rd and 3 on the Ouse Washes on the 31st. Two were at Marsh Lane GP on Apr 20th, singles on the Nene Washes on the 17th and at Grafham Water on the 18th.

Ruddy Shelduck Two birds made a brief visit to Grafham Water on Mar 10th and then on Mar 29th two birds were seen at Elton, Ferry Meadows CP and the Nene Washes. These are likely to be the same birds.

Common Shelduck Maximum counts for the period at Cam Washes were 31, Grafham Water 31, the Nene Washes 91 and the Ouse Washes 72. Single figures were seen at 17 other sites.

Mandarin Five birds were at Wimpole on Mar 8th, singles at Grafham on Mar 10th & 12th and at Kingfishers Bridge on Mar 17th. Two birds were at Elton on Mar 29th and at Longstowe on Apr 18th.

Eurasian Wigeon At the Cam Washes (150:18), Fen Drayton Lakes (838:27), Kingfishers Bridge (340:13), Needingworth GP (1068:2), the Nene Washes (9096), Ouse Fen (586:8), the Ouse Washes (14550:200) and Wicken Fen (476:8).

Gadwall At Berry Fen RSPB (11:12), Fen Drayton Lakes (23:45), Grafham Water (117), Kingfishers Bridge (25:36), Needingworth GP (17:1), the Nene Washes (170), Ouse Fen (60:15), the Ouse Washes (1143:23), and Wicken Fen (33:15).

Eurasian Teal At the Cam Washes (125:70), Fen Drayton Lakes (150:55), Kingfishers Bridge (121:12), the Nene Washes (1851), the Ouse Washes (2055:150) and Wicken Fen (224:59). At Mare Fen 265 were counted on Mar 12th. By the end

of April, apart from the Ouse Washes just a few birds remained at 3 sites.

Mallard At Fen Drayton Lakes (108:89), the Nene Washes (364) and the Ouse Washes (2284:78).

Double figures were counted at 11 other sites.

Northern Pintail At the Nene Washes 1198 and the Ouse Washes 1201 in March. Double figure counts were 28 at Fen Drayton Lakes, (including an injured or sick male that has been present since the beginning of the year) and 10 at the Cam Washes. Singles figure counts were noted at 3 other sites.

Garganey Reported from 10 sites with 9 on the Nene Washes the highest count followed by 6 on the Ouse Washes.

Northern Shoveler The highest counts were at the Nene Washes 272 and the Ouse Washes 1506 in March. Double figure were present at 6 other sites.

Red-crested Pochard Six birds were at Grafham Water on Mar 1st to 4th with 2 still on Mar 11th. A single bird was at Needingworth GP on Mar 15th & 17th.

Common Pochard The highest counts were at the Nene Washes 83 and the Ouse Washes 398 in March. Double figure were present at 4 other sites.

Ring-necked Duck A male was present on the Nene Washes at March Farmers for one day on Mar 22nd.

Tufted Duck At Fen Drayton Lakes (358:338). Other high counts were also made at Grafham Water 169, the Nene Washes 123 and the Ouse Washes 2102. Double figures were counted at 13 other sites.

Great Scaup At least four different birds were seen at three sites during the period.

Common Scoter At Grafham Water 3 birds were seen on Mar 31st, then 4 on Apr 5th and 2 on the 11th. Six birds spent the day at Fen Drayton Lakes on Apr 13th with another bird at Grafham Water on the same date.

Goldeneye At Fen Drayton Lakes (94:20) & Grafham Water (41:3). Single figures were seen at 6 other sites.

Smew Two birds were at Paxton Pits on Mar 3rd and one at the Ouse Washes on Mar 16th. At Needingworth GP the maximum for the period was six, with the last bird seen on Apr 23rd.

Red-breasted Merganser The bird that had taken up residence at Fen Drayton Lakes finally left on Mar 18th.

Goosander From 8 birds at Grafham Water in early March the last one seen was on Apr 15th and at Fen Drayton Lakes from a maximum of 3 in March the last one was on Apr 19th.

Ruddy Duck Reported from 3 sites.

GAMEBIRDS

Red-legged Partridge A small number of records, mostly of paired up birds

Grey Partridge Pairs/birds noted from 14 locations, with 4 pairs at Kneesworth the highest count. A dispute between two males with an onlooking female was noted at the Ouse Washes.

Common Pheasant A scatter of records with the maximum of 13 coming from Wilbraham common

DIVERS TO HERONS

Little Grebe Double figures were noted at Kingfishers Bridge (19), Ouse Fen (11) and the Ouse Washes (17). Single figures were counted at 14 other sites.

Great Crested Grebe Larger counts were at Fen Drayton Lakes (42), Godmanchester GP (10), Grafham Water (60), Needingworth GP (18), the Nene Washes (22), the Ouse Washes (70) and St Ives GP Pits (16). Single figures were counted at 8 other sites.

Slavonian Grebe Two birds in summer plumage were at Grafham Water on Apr 12th.

Black-necked Grebe A summer plumaged bird was at the Nene Washes on Mar 14th and 22nd, 2 at Grafham Water on Apr 20th and 1 at Paxton Pits on Apr 25th.

Great Cormorant Reported from 18 sites.

Great Bittern Booming birds reported at two sites and birds also seen at two other sites.

Cattle Egret One flew over Brampton racecourse on Apr 5th.

Little Egret The maximum count on the Ouse Washes during the period was 37. Other double figure counts were 14 at Ouse Fen on Mar 1st and 10 at Wicken Fen on Mar 7th. Single figures were noted at 15 other sites.

Great Egret Three birds continued to be seen during March up to the 18th with 1 roosting on the Ouse Washes and 2 at Roswell Pits, Ely. In April 1 bird flew south over Kingfishers Bridge on the 1st and 1 was seen on the Ouse Washes from Witcham Gravel on the 18th.

Grey Heron Breeding was noted at Berry Fen RSPB, the Cam Washes, the Ouse Washes, Paxton Pits, Stapleford and Wicken Fen. The most notable count was during the March WeBS count on the Ouse Washes with 153 birds in the Cambs section.

White Stork One was reported at Chatteris on Mar 27th.

RAPTORS

Red Kite With 56 reports coming from 42 sites, it is apparent that this species is ranging widely through the county. There are also reports of breeding and displaying pairs so the future looks good for this species at the moment, although most reports are still of singletons.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier Compared with Red Kite, this species is much more concentrated to areas of suitable habitat; 99 reports relate to just 22 sites, but numbers at good sites are higher with 9 at Wicken Fen the highest count. Breeding reports from a couple of apparently new sites are encouraging.

Hen Harrier Last record appears to be Apr 22nd at the Ouse Washes, while highest counts came from Wicken Fen, where 5 were present in March, down to 3 in April. Elsewhere only singles were reported, though Cam Washes had a male and ringtails on separate occasions. An encouraging number of other locations reported this species, many likely to represent migrant birds moving north – Arrington, Balsham, Coveney, Croydon, Eltisley, Ely, Farcet Fen, Gamlingay (where seen roosting), Upware, Nene and Ouse Washes.

Montagu's Harrier A male reported on Apr 25th at Melbourn, and another at Bar Hill on 29th.

Northern Goshawk An imm male seen over the dam at Grafham Water on Apr 19th. As with the previous species, descriptions are always needed for these scarce and difficult species.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk Reported from 35 sites, including several instances of breeding behaviours, such as the spectacular display flights over woods. Now is a good time to be checking those areas for birds bringing in prey items that indicate successful breeding.

Common Buzzard 127 reports from just about everywhere! Many records of large groups, including double figure hauls from Grafham (15+ on Mar 29th, included mating pair), Cambourne and D'Engaynes Fen both with 10 on Mar 15th.

Rough-legged Buzzard One report of this well watched Coveney bird in Mar, followed by regular sightings in the middle of Apr; one report came from Grunty Fen.

Osprey Two reported. The first recorded on Mar 22nd at Dry Drayton and another on Apr 11th hunting over the lake at Kingfishers Bridge.

Common Kestrel Far fewer records than Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Red Kite or Marsh Harrier, with just 20 localities featuring Kestrel. There were several indications of breeding.

Merlin Widely reported throughout March, but just 3 records in April showing the departure to breeding areas very nicely. Two at the Ouse Washes WeBS count was the only multiple record.

Eurasian Hobby First report Apr 13th, Southoe, with numbers steadily building towards the end of the month, with 6 at Fen Drayton on 26th the highest count

Peregrine Falcon Seen as 1's or 2's at most of the larger wetland sites throughout the period and reported breeding again in the county by April.

RAILS

Water Rail Records from 9 localities, with 6 at Wicken Fen, 4 at Kingfishers Bridge and 3+ Ely Beet Pools the highest counts.

Corn Crake First two back at the Nene Washes on Apr 23rd, with 4 on the 29th. Encouraging signs for the re-introduction programme.

Common Moorhen Generally small numbers from most of the WeBS count sites, 194 at Ouse Washes in March by far the highest, followed by Fen Drayton (30, 27).

Common Coot WeBS counts provide the most data, although Ouse & Nene Washes April counts are not yet available in March there were 2564 and 609 respectively. Other sites are in a lower league; Fen Drayton (264, 225), Berry Fen (77, 137), Needingworth (85, 46) Ouse Fen (58, 31).

Common Crane One pair seems to have taken up residence in the Fens, with sightings throughout Mar and Apr. Hopefully the return of this species as a permanent fixture in the county avifauna.

WADERS

Eurasian Oystercatcher Highest counts from Four Gotes 38 on Apr 11th (roosting on bank of tidal Nene), Ouse Washes 29 and Nene Washes 21 on Mar 16th and 1-6 from a further eight sites.

Black-winged Stilt One at Maxey GP on Apr 25th was particularly appreciated by those who could make it during the birds short stay and “unblock” it from their Cambs lists.

Pied Avocet Remarkable counts from Cam Washes where numbers rose from 6 on Mar 1st to a county record of 51 on 28th-29th and up to 35 at Ouse Washes through April. Breeding was reported from at least 3 sites with a record high of 20 pairs from one private site.

Little Plover No notable passage movements. Reports received from 5 breeding sites with a maximum of 3 pairs from three of these and 1-2 at the other two.

Ringed Plover No notable passage movements with most records of 1-9 birds from breeding sites.

European Golden Plover Highest counts from Fen Drayton up to 1000 in March, Beeby's Pit 1000 on Mar 30th, Cam Washes 450 on Mar 1st. Latest gatherings were at Fen Drayton with 500 on Apr 6th and 230 on 12th, Maxey GP 200 on Apr 9th and several groups of 10-100. The last record was on Apr 20th.

Grey Plover Singles from Ouse Washes on Mar 1st and Grafham Water on Mar 20th and in April at Nene Washes on 12th-13th, Fen Drayton Lakes on 19th and 25th and Ferry Meadows on 24th.

Northern Lapwing Largest count was 835 at Ouse Washes on Mar 16th. Breeding numbers from Nene Washes of 280 pairs, Kingfishers Bridge initially 5-8, Cam Washes 12, Litlington 9, Wicken Fen 9, Berry fen 14, Fen Drayton Lakes 3.

Red Knot Two at Ouse Washes on Mar 4th and singles at Maxey GP on Mar 20th. Further birds reported on the Ouse Washes Apr 13th and Paxton Pits on Apr 18th.

Sanderling A single at Fen Drayton Lakes on Apr 19th was the sole record.

Dunlin Highest counts from Ouse Washes where up to 70 in early March, Nene Washes 12 on Mar 16th and 1-3 at six sites in April.

Ruff Highest counts from Ouse Washes (45, 150), Nene Washes (76, 17), Cam Washes (8, 4) and 1-2 from a further three sites.

Jack Snipe Ten at Thornhaugh Quarry on Mar 2nd was an impressive site record, elsewhere singles from seven sites with latest at Ouse Washes on Apr 20th and Nene Washes on Apr 22nd.

Common Snipe Highest non-breeding counts were 100+ from Ouse Washes on Mar 5th, 47 at Thornhaugh Quarry, 30+ Wicken Fen, 18 Ouse Fen and 14 Cam Washes. Drumming counts came from Nene Washes (220), Kingfishers Bridge (8) and Wicken Fen (3+).

Eurasian Woodcock Recorded from eight sites in March with roding only at Wicken Fen and from 2 sites in April.

Black-tailed Godwit The annual spring assemblage of Icelandic birds on the Washes. The highest counts from Nene Washes of 3530 on Mar 16th and 1800 on Apr 18th and Ouse Washes (2233, 700) also peaks at Fen Drayton lakes (2000, 400). Breeding numbers at Nene Washes showed slight increase on 2008 with 42 pairs.

Bar-tailed Godwit 14 at Nene Washes from Apr 24th-25th and singles at Berry Fen, Paxton Pits, Isleham, Maxey GP and Ouse Washes between Apr 26th and 30th.

Whimbrel first recorded on Apr 14th from Wicken Fen. Largest groups were 7 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 17th and 3 on 25th, 4 from Grafham Water on 23rd, 3 at Ouse Washes on 23rd and 29th and 1-2 from a further four sites.

Eurasian Curlew Thirty three at Four Gotes on Apr 11th were feeding on freshly tilled arable. Two at Nene Washes on Apr 13th and singles from a further six sites.

Spotted Redshank Nine at Ouse Washes on Apr 10th was an unusually high count and 1-2 there from Apr 20th-24th.

Common Redshank Highest counts were from Nene Washes (220) and Ouse Washes (126) on Mar 16th WeBS counts. Breeding birds were present at least eight sites with highest numbers at Nene Washes with an early estimate of 190 pairs.

Common Greenshank An early bird at Ouse Fen on Mar 29th, more normal passage started from Apr 11th with highest counts from Ouse Washes of 2-8 from 20th-26th, Nene Washes 4 and 1-2 from a further seven sites.

Green Sandpiper Recorded up to April 27th the highest counts from Maxey GP (5, 4), Cam Washes (4, 3), Ouse Washes (1, 4), Ouse Fen 1-3, Kingfishers Bridge 3 on Apr 13th and 1-2 from a further four sites.

Common Sandpiper Recorded from Apr 17th with singles from eight sites, plus the over-wintering bird at Four Gotes to Apr 20th.

Ruddy Turnstone One at Ouse Washes on Apr 14th.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull Singles reported from six sites throughout the period. One bird was at Kingfisher's Bridge between Mar 24th and April 3rd.

Little Gull Reported regularly in April: there was a major passage on 6th with 10 at Fen Drayton, 7 at Ferry Meadows, 3 at Kingfisher's Bridge and odd birds on the Ouse Washes. Another 7 were reported from Grafham on 16th and there were 5 at Kingfisher's Bridge on 21st.

Black-headed Gull Thirteen thousand were counted on the Ouse Washes on 5th Mar and counts of over 1000 came from Kingfisher's Bridge in mid-March and then again in mid April.

Common Gull Over 3000 counted at Grafham on March 1st, and 7000 at the Ouse Washes four days later. There was a definite falling away of reports of this species through April.

Lesser Black-backed Gull Three thousand counted on the Ouse Washes on Mar 1st, with small numbers thereafter except for Apr 9th when there were 358 at Kingfisher's Bridge.

Herring Gull A count on the Ouse Washes on Mar 5th produced 3000 birds.

Yellow-legged Gull A scattering of reports at the beginning of March and then in mid-April; there were 6 at Grafham on Mar 4th.

Caspian Gull One bird was at Kingfisher's Bridge on March 22nd.

Iceland Gull Singles were reported from Grafham, Long Grove and Tanholt GP.

Glaucous Gull One bird was at Grafham on March 10th.

Great Black-backed Gull Three hundred on the Ouse Washes on Mar 5th; otherwise the only substantial groups were reported from Kingfisher's Bridge where numbers peaked at 35 on April 13th.

Kittiwake Five birds were at Grafham on March 10th.

Sandwich Tern All reports refer to April. The first bird was at Grafham on the 11th and two were present there following day. One was on the Ouse Washes on the 12th, and Grafham again saw singles on 14th and 25th.

Common Tern First reported on April 5th and thereafter daily; the highest count was 63 at Ferry Meadows on 27th.

Arctic Tern Reported first from Kingfisher's Bridge on April 14th and subsequently from seven other sites throughout the rest of the month; there were 6 at Fen Drayton on 21st.

Little Tern One at Paxton on 25th April

Whiskered Tern For many observers one of the highlights of the period, a single was at Paxton for two days from Apr 27th. There was an influx of Whiskered Terns into the country during this period of easterly airflow. This bird is likely to be a reorientating individual from the large group that spent several days in Derbyshire/Staffordshire.

Black Tern Two were at Grafham on Apr 17th and a single there again on 23rd; meanwhile singles were reported from Ferry Meadows on the 20th and then again on the 24th.

NEAR PASSERINES

Rock Pigeon Seventy three birds at Barrington Cement Works on Apr 5th.

Stock Pigeon Elm produced the highest numbers in both months: 12+ and 18+ in Mar and Apr respectively.

Wood Pigeon Eight hundred at Ouse Fen on Mar 1st. Shooting seemingly impacting on numbers at Elm.

Eurasian Collared Dove Over 20 birds at Elm in both months.

European Turtle Dove 1-2 returning birds noted at a variety of sites from Apr 20th when the first bird was noted at Roswell Pits, Ely.

Common Cuckoo Present from Apr 10th; generally singles.

Barn Owl Sixty records including 3 found dead on roads.

Little Owl Present throughout, mainly in the south of the county. One bird was heard calling in competition with vocal Stock Pigeons at Barrington Cement Works.

Tawny Owl About 15 records, generally of 1-2 birds. Far fewer birds were recorded in April than in March.

Long-eared Owl Two records with one unfortunate bird found freshly dead at Witcham Toll.

Short-eared Owl Recorded up to Apr 29th. Four birds at Thorney Dyke on Mar 15th.

Common Swift A single early bird over Cambridge on Apr 10th; thereafter recorded daily from Apr 24th, with 50 at Fen Drayton lakes on Apr 25th.

Common Kingfisher Over 40 records most relating to 1-2 birds. A high count of 6 were recorded during the WeBS at the Ouse Washes on Mar 16th.

Green Woodpecker Generally 1-3 birds recorded from nearly 30 sites. 9 birds were at the Ouse Washes on Mar 16th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker 1-3 birds recorded from 24 sites, predominantly in the south of the county.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Recorded from four sites, with drumming occurring at two of these.

PASSERINES

Skylark Up to 25 birds were noted at Westfield Farm (Comberton), and 15 at Cambourne. Double-digit numbers were also seen at two more sites.

Sand Martin The first few records were not particularly early, though one bird was seen on Mar 4th at Earith Bridge.

Barn Swallow The first bird was reported from Wicken Fen (in visitors' book: Mar 19th), but the bulk of March records did not occur until an influx from March 27th onwards. Overall, reports were received from 37+ sites over the period, with maximum numbers of 30+ at Grafham Water and also 30+ at Bury Fen on Apr 11th.

House Martin The first birds of the spring were noted on Mar 30th at Cambourne and Waterbeach, with numbers at 16 other sites in the period ranging from single birds to 20 over Cambourne on Apr 28th.

Meadow Pipit Records were received from 8 sites, with 154 at the Ouse Washes on Mar 16th, and 50+ at Wicken Fen on Mar 4th.

Rock Pipit A single record at Grafham Water on Mar 15th. In addition, an individual identified only as a Water/Rock Pipit was noted at Needingworth GP on Apr 21st.

Water Pipit Noted on the Nene Washes and on several sections of the Ouse Washes from the start of the period up to Apr 12th. Several reports consisted of 2+ birds, with a maximum of 8+ in the Fortrey's Hall area on Mar 5th.

Yellow Wagtail All records were within April, the earliest being on the Nene Washes on the 3rd with 30 present there on the 12th, and 20 birds were noted at Ely BF on the same date. By late April 65+ were present at March Farmers. Reports were received from 18 other sites.

Blue-headed Wagtail One was reported at Grafham Water on Apr 8th, and a female-type was noted at the Nene Washes on Apr 25th.

Grey Wagtail Noted at 13 locations, with two pairs at Byron's Pool (Grantchester) and 1–4 birds at the other sites.

Pied Wagtail Records were received from 6 sites. The two largest flocks reported consisted of 55 birds at Sutton Gault and 35 at the Ouse Washes both in March.

White Wagtail Birds were noted passing through at 8 sites from Mar 31st to Apr 21st, with a maximum of 3 at Grafham Water on Apr 15th.

Bohemian Waxwing Two birds were reported from Oundle Road, Woodston on Mar 28th.

Winter Wren Reported from 10 sites, there has been some discussion suggesting that numbers of adults have been reduced by the cold winter period.

Hedge Accentor Noted at 9 sites, with a reported maximum of four "pairs" in a garden at St. Ives.

European Robin Reported widely but from few locations.

Common Nightingale Following three birds noted at Marsh Lane GP on Apr 10th, birds were noted at 7 other sites in the period. By Apr 26th, 11 were singing at Marsh Lane GP with 10 at Paxton Pits on the 29th.

Black Redstart A male was reported at Cambourne on Apr 13th, present from Apr 9th, and last reported on May 8th (all via Birdguides, presumably the same individual throughout). Single birds were found at Dullingham (Apr 1st), Hatley St. George (Apr 12-13), Shaddywell GP (Mar 21–22) and St. Neots (Eynesbury Manor) on Mar 27-29.

Common Redstart A bird was present in a small paddock at Witcham on Apr 19th.

Stonechat Present at 5 sites in the period and at 3 of these during April. Young birds being fed were observed at one fenland site.

Northern Wheatear Around 72 birds (with probable duplication of reporting of several of these) were seen at 32 sites. The first record was at Farcet Fen on Mar 16th. Additionally, birds with characteristics of the Greenland race were noted near Welney, Litlington and Melbourn (1, 3 and 5 respectively) all from Apr 21st to 25th.

Ring Ouzel Five or more birds were recorded in the period (perhaps as many as 8), from 4 sites (Apr 3rd to Apr 27th).

Common Blackbird Records were received from 12 sites with a maximum of 17 at Barleycraft GP on Apr 11th.

Fieldfare Numbers were dwindling by early April, but one flock of 100 was noted at Honey Hill (Quy) on Apr 6th. The maximum for the period was 200 at Fulbourn on Mar 15th. The last bird was noted on Apr 22nd at Grafham Water.

Song Thrush Noted at 17 sites, mostly 1–2 birds, with a maximum of 5+ at Elm. A bird thought to be of the continental form was seen at the RSPB Ouse Washes on Mar 11th.

Redwing A flock of 100+ was present at March on Mar 11th; elsewhere flocks consisted of up to 30 birds. The last birds were noted on Apr 12th at Buckden.

Mistle Thrush Birds were reported from a small number of sites with 4+ singing males at Elm.

Cetti's Warbler Records were received from 13 sites. Records from Wicken Fen, Fen Drayton Lakes and Kingfisher's Bridge continue to be prominent, with a maximum of 10 males at Wicken Fen and 5 birds at Fen Drayton Lakes.

Common Grasshopper Warbler Noted at 21 sites, with an influx of singing birds from Apr 11th. A maximum of 7 was noted in the Teversham Fen area on Apr 22nd.

Sedge Warbler The first record was an early arrival on Apr 1st, at Wicken Fen. Several more sites held birds by Apr 10th and by Apr 28th 22 males were singing at Kingfisher's Bridge.

Eurasian Reed Warbler From 10 sites, the date of first arrivals was Apr 10th (Little Paxton GP and Wicken Fen).

Lesser Whitethroat Reported from 23 sites (which is a higher number of sites than in some recent years) the first report was on Apr 3rd at Marsh Lane GP, only 3 days later than the earliest ever for the county (in 1987).

Common Whitethroat Reports were sparse in the first half of April, the first record being on the 12th. The maximum reported number for the period was 11 at Southoe on Apr 23rd.

Garden Warbler Birds were noted at Larkrise Farm (Barton), Fen Drayton Lakes, Ferry Meadows CP, Orton BP, Over, Paxton Pits, and Wicken Fen, the first record being on Apr 14th at Over.

Blackcap Of the 34 sites with reported birds over the period, four sites had birds present in March, some of which were already singing.

Common Chiffchaff Reports were received from many sites with the maximum reported being 12 singing birds at Fen Drayton lakes on Apr 21st.

Willow Warbler There were only two records in March at Grafham Water and Fen Drayton Lakes. Higher numbers than usual were noted in suitable habitat in Cambourne.

Goldcrest Reported from 9 locations, with singing birds present at 3 sites into April.

Firecrest Two were present at Paxton Pits on Mar 2nd, and one bird was noted the next day there. A bird was feeding in scrub at Six Mile Bottom on Apr 1st, and there was an unconfirmed report of an individual at Fen Drayton Lakes on Apr 11th.

Bearded Tit Present at Fen Drayton Lakes, Wicken Fen, and at 2 other sites.

Long-tailed Tit Up to 20 birds were noted at Paxton Pits, with lower numbers of birds reported from 13 other sites.

Marsh Tit Reported from 10 sites, with 2+ territories noted at Buff Wood, Gamlingay Wood, and Hardwick Wood. Notably Wennington Wood held 15 birds on Mar 27th.

Coal Tit Reported from 4 areas of established woodland and from a garden in Comberton.

Blue Tit Notes at 11 sites.

Great Tit Noted at 10 sites.

Wood Nuthatch Reported from 11 sites with 6 birds at Wennington Wood on March 27th being the peak count. A single bird, encouragingly, was noted at a nest hole at Clare College, Cambridge.

Eurasian Treecreeper Records received from 10 sites all involved 1-2 birds proving that the Treecreeper can be quite elusive during the breeding season.

Eurasian Jay Reported from many sites the peak count being 4 birds at Over on Apr 30th.

Black-billed Magpie The maximum count throughout the period was 12+ birds at Elm.

Eurasian Jackdaw A feeding flock of 80 birds at the Barrington cement works on Apr 5th was the peak count.

Rook Counts included 224 nesting birds at Melbourn Bury on Apr 5th and 137 nesting near Little Ouse on Apr 21st.

Carriion Crow A feeding flock of 74 birds at the Barrington cement works on Apr 5th was the peak count.

Common Raven Reports of this scarce species came in late April with an unconfirmed bird noted in the Ouse Washes visitor centre book with another at Kings Dyke NR during a WeBS count.

Common Starling Records from 8 sites included 162 birds at Westfield Farm, Comberton on Mar 14th and 150+ birds at Wisbech on Mar 31st.

House Sparrow The peak count of 30 birds came from Melbourn during the period.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow Some good garden records were received during the period with 25-30 birds in a Stapleford garden on Mar 1st being particularly notable.

Chaffinch The peak count of 46 birds came from Barton on Mar 21st.

Brambling With very few birds reported this year it was not surprising that records received from 12 sites involved just 1-2 birds.

European Greenfinch Reported from 8 sites with 100 birds assembling to roost at the Cambridge Botanic Gardens on Mar 1st being the peak count.

European Goldfinch Recorded at 11 sites with the peak count being the 150 birds noted at Wicken Fen on Mar 3rd. Of interest an albino bird was noted in a Cambridge garden on Mar 15th.

Eurasian Siskin The peak count of 15 birds came from the Cam Washes on Apr 16th. Reports from 13 other sites included pairs in suitable breeding habitat.

Common Linnet Reported from 12 sites with 57 birds at Fortrey's Hall on the Ouse Washes being the peak count. Other records included 40 birds at Fen Drayton Lakes on Mar 12th.

Lesser Redpoll The only notable counts during the period came from Wicken Fen where on Mar 12th two flocks containing 20 and 40 birds were recorded.

Mealy Redpoll Single birds were reported at Fen Drayton Lakes on Apr 7th and Orton BP on Mar 16th.

Common Bullfinch Another secretive bird at this time of the year with the peak count being just 3+ birds at Elm throughout the period.

Yellow Hammer Reported from 9 sites with the

maximum flock being 20 birds at Cambourne on Apr 15th. A further 18 birds were recorded in a Fowlmere garden on Mar 13th.

Reed Bunting Records were received from 14 sites but the peak count by far was the 88 birds noted at the Ouse Washes during the Webs count on Mar 16th.

Corn Bunting The peak count of 23 birds came from area near Reach being a part of the Wicken Fen extension, the Wicken Vision. Reports from 16 other sites included 11+ birds at Four Gotes on Apr 20th.

HYBRIDS

Barnacle x Brent Goose One at Ouse Fen RSPB on Mar 11th.

Canada x Greylag Singles recorded at Cam Washes, Earith, Kingfishers Bridge, Ouse Fen and Upware, and 1-2 at Kingfishers Bridge.

Gadwall x Mallard A drake seen at Grafham Water on Mar 1st appeared to be the same bird as that seen at Paxton Pits earlier in the year.

EXOTICA

Black Swan Singles noted at Buckden GP on Mar 28th, and Ely (Riverside) on several dates. Also 2 at Ouse Washes (The Gravel) on Mar 6th.

Bar Headed Goose Singles noted at Berry Fen (RSPB), Nene Washes (March Farmers) and Ouse Washes (Pymoor).

Ross's Goose Recorded on several dates in March from Cam Washes and Kingfishers Bridge; this male was paired with a Greylag early in the recording period.

Muscovy Duck At Ely the maximum count of 20 included 7 adults and 13 downy young.

Wood Duck Singles noted at Berry Fen, Cambridge (river in city centre), Earith, and Fen Drayton Lakes.

Eagle sp. Reported from Fen Drayton Lakes on Apr 5th.

Golden Pheasant One noted at Little Shelford on Mar 16th.

Contributors: Colin Addington, Louise Bacon, Rowena Baxter, James Cadbury, Ade Cooper, Steve Cooper, Robin Cox, Mike Foley, Ben Green, Simon Giddings, Dean Harlow, Stephen Hartley, Mark Hawkes, Fred Heath, Peter Herkenrath, Jonathan Hook, David Hopkins, Bob Humphrey, Colin Kirtland, Vince Lea, John Lindsell, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Bruce & Gwen Martin, Mark Missin, Richard Patient, Duncan Poyser, Michael Price, Duncan Ritchie, Tony Roberts, Nigel Spowell, Martin Sreeves, Chris Thorne, Alan & Brenda Wadsworth, P. M. Warrington

How to Watch – The Cam Washes

David and Jonathan Heath

Jonathan and I started visiting the Cam Washes on a regular basis last year when we decided that we required a new 'patch'. We had previously spent a lot of time at Milton Country Park and Cottenham Long Drove and we felt it was the right time for a change and a new challenge.

The Cam Washes can be viewed from both sides of the river either at Upware or from the end of the Long Drove from Waterbeach; but we feel that the best views by far are from the Waterbeach side and this is where we have recorded all of our observations.

Access is by road taking Bannold Road in Waterbeach towards Bottisham Lock, go over the railway line and then turn left into Long Drove. Follow the Drove for a few miles until the road effectively runs out and becomes private. At this point park up carefully off the road making sure no entrances to fields are blocked and then walk eastwards to the Wash bank along the path. At the end of the bridleway you can either go right and climb the overgrown bank where you can get good views over the Wash on the west side of the river or follow the path to the left and from here look over the river to the Wash on the east side of the river. A footpath also follows the course of the river and this can be a good place to view from. However, care should be taken as birds can be easily flushed.

Don't forget to check the fields, hedgerows, ditches and telephone wires as you drive down Long Drove. In the past year we have recorded Stonechat, Whinchat, Brambling, Wheatear, Marsh Harrier, Merlin and Hobby. We have also seen Bean Geese and Hen Harrier on or over the fields either side of the byway and Green Sandpiper and Little Egret in the ditches too. The main focus though is the Washes themselves particularly the wader passage in spring and autumn which can often be very productive. As with most wetland locations what you can expect to see is very much dependant upon the time of year, prevailing weather conditions and the depth of the water.

This year so far, we have witnessed reasonable movements of Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank and record breaking passage of Avocet. The county record for Avocet - which previously stood at 32 - has been smashed with 54 birds on the Cam Washes, quite a sight!

Avocets start to appear at the beginning of March and peak towards the end of the month before gradually dispersing. Other birds of note have included Curlew, Whimbrel, Wood Sandpiper and Turnstone. Spring passage also includes a few Garganey, these attractive ducks tend to favour the Wash on the Upware side. The autumn wader passage normally starts early with failed breeding birds returning from late June onwards. It is at this time of year that Sandpiper numbers are at their highest. Last year we recorded 22 Green Sandpiper on one visit backed up with Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper too. Black-tailed Godwit, Greenshank and Avocet are also usually present, often in reasonable numbers.

The Cam Washes is not just a wader spot, it is also a good place to see raptors and a period of sky watching can be productive at the right time of year. Peregrine and Red Kite are included in our list and last September Jonathan found an Osprey perched in the dead trees at the far end of the Wash, so make sure you don't just concentrate on the mud at the waters edge!

To us the Washes are a magical place, a natural wetland where the chance of a rarity turning up is a real possibility. Over the years Black-winged Stilt, Marsh Sandpiper and Kentish Plover have been recorded here, so at the right time of the year with the winds in a good direction who knows what you might see when you reach the top of the bank to view the Cam Washes.

CBC Outdoor Meeting - Ouse Washes RSPB

Louise Bacon

On the evening of Friday 15th May, 9 CBC members enjoyed a guided visit to the Ouse Washes RSPB reserve. We would like to thank the Site Manager Jon Reeves who guided us for much of our visit. The days rain had faded away, and the evening, although a little breezy, had brilliant light across the main washes.

Our first stop was Grosse Hide, about 500m from the visitor centre at Welches Dam. We guided ourselves along this stretch as Jon had to deal with an emergency; he soon caught us up as we were enjoying the wader show from the hide. Around 30 Black-tailed Godwit were feeding busily, and a handful of Avocet, amongst them an obliging Greenshank. Redshank were a little more unobtrusive, as some probably had chicks in the grass around the area. Lapwings and their chicks were a little more obvious on the pool edges and a flock of around 20 Ringed Plover and a few Dunlin added to the wader diversity.

With Swifts and Common Terns screaming around feeding and Marsh Harriers and Little Egrets flying through from time to time, the evening was idyllic. Jon explained that how, except in times of flood, the RSPB are able to maintain a defined water level of their choosing on the Washes. There is a water management plan in place for the benefit of the breeding waders which are a major feature of the Washland summer. Cattle had just been introduced to sections of the Washes with lower densities of breeding waders, although only about a third of the total summer contingent of cattle had been introduced, and more will be added later in the summer. There is a danger that livestock can trample the nests of waders and only once the egg stage has passed will cattle be allowed on to other areas of the Washes. Jon has a strong background in stockmanship as well as management of the Washes, and was able to put the birds into the context of the needs of grazing and water level management on the site and the new wet grassland project.

We moved on further down the Washes bank, towards the new habitat creation scheme on adjacent land, outside of the Washes. There are now windows in the Cadbury Hide for viewing the newly created habitat. Viewed from the bank, as there were too many of us for comfort in the hide, Jon gave us the background to the project.

The RSPB have created around 75 hectares of new wet grassland habitat on once arable fields, running from Purls Bridge to the railway bridge. Commencing in 2003 the project has extended and developed annually by two or three blocks. The reason behind this project is the increasingly unpredictable spring weather. This means that increasingly flooding occurs in May or June to the detriment of the breeding waders. The aim of the project is to investigate ways to reverse the decline in breeding waders, particularly focus is upon Snipe and Black Tailed Godwit, which have been declining or become extinct as breeding birds on the main washes. The project started rather experimentally, with channels or small dykes cut into the fields at different spacing, some allowed to fill with rushes and some kept more open with a variety of grasses. They now have an increasingly specific prescription of how to set up a new grassland field from the pre-existing arable land. This management plan suggests the best combination of grasses and low density flowering plants to give the optimum wader breeding and feeding habitat while also provide suitable grazing. To enable this balance to be reached the water levels are engineered in late winter and early spring keeping the water table at a specific depth below the surface. To retain water and to avoid the crops on adjacent arable land from getting waterlogged in the process, an impermeable membrane is put in place between the grassland and the arable fields and drains.

This land has proved irresistible to Snipe, with far more using this area than the main Washes. In fact the wader density across all species using the new ground is greater than the Washes when taken as a whole (although the waders do not necessarily breed uniformly across the main reserve). Godwits are not yet favouring the site, but Lapwing and Redshank are seemingly quite happy there. Other birds such as ducks tend to use the newly created habitat when the main Washes are in flood, this happened last year but this year they are back on the main reserve. An alternative breeding area when conditions are unfavourable is an important strategy in maintaining sustainable breeding

numbers of waders and wildfowl on a year on year basis. One interesting trial going on here is to allow cattle to intermingle with the breeding waders and the RSPB is monitoring the impact of this.

We were treated to views of a Barn Owl hunting across the site and the farmland before the backdrop of the sunset, then a Hobby shot through. We were able to pick out a couple of Snipe, although disappointingly they were not drumming for us. Jon's tour finished with a summary of how this pioneering work is carried out in a broad vision across the Washes in partnership with similar projects such as Lady Fen on the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve at Welney. Land owners near the Washes and other sites in Fenland are also drawing on the management insights and experiences gained at the Ouse Washes to benefit breeding waders. Further afield habitat regeneration schemes up and down the country are being planned and coming to fruition and the Ouse Washes has it's part to play in the helping develop the conservation models for the 21st Century.



Favourite Reeds - The Birds of Heaven by Peter Matthiessen

Peter Bircham

There are only fifteen species of Crane in the world and if, like Peter Matthiessen, you decide that you would like to tick them all off, then read this book before making any preparations so to do (it will make you think again). It is a book to which I referred in my talk at the CBC/BTO autumn conference on wetlands.

Originally published in 2001 and in paperback in 2003 these are 300 pages of mixed emotions as with great skill the writer takes you journeying to some of the far flung places in the world with the hope each time of counting off one more species of Crane. Few of the Cranes are common and many of them are rare, the hauntingly beautiful white Siberian Crane is the rarest, Matthiessen states that of the fifteen, eleven are threatened – by man of course. Apart from in South America, Cranes can be found in all other parts of the world and the most interesting feature is how much the different species share in their ecology and especially their appearance, showing that a recent common ancestor is obvious. The book is beautifully illustrated with paintings by Robert Bateman, a new name to me, in which each species is portrayed, head and neck and eight of them in full page portraits, usually against a misty morning background. The skill of the artist is such that you want to reach out and touch the birds, so real do they seem.

The book contains much travelogue, for Matthiessen is as much a commentator as he is a bird hunter. Chapters headed 'Black Dragon River', 'On the Daurian Steppe' and 'At the end of Tibet' give you an idea of his Asian travels in China, Siberia and the Himalayas, added to which he visits India, Japan and South Korea. The Asian section occupies two thirds of the book, not just because this is where he finds many of the crane species but because his journeys are fraught with difficulties of both human and non human origin. The outback of Australia, the plains of Africa and even our own Horsey Mere feature in the next section before the final burst in North America for the Sandhill and Whooping Crane. The book ends with a crane family tree and the sources of his information in extensive 'notes' arranged by chapter.

I read *Birds of Heaven* a year or so ago but remember sharing the sheer frustrations of dealing with bureaucracy and the physical endurance required in order to reach many of the wilder parts of Asia in particular, but also the joy when after so many tribulations Matthiessen finds his quarry. This is a complete book about a quest that becomes more understandable with every description of these beautiful birds. A trip to Lakenheath Fen is the least we can do.

BOB SCOTT 11 May 1938 – 26 April 2006

Bob Scott, Vice President of Cambridge Bird Club and a friend and colleague to many club members, died of cancer on March 26th 2009 aged 70. Bob was one of the influential group of birders, ornithologists and conservationists who developed his passion for birds in the years after the Second World War. During his lifetime, he significantly contributed to the growth of bird-watching from an esoteric pastime into a mass-participation leisure activity enjoyed by millions.

During a career at the RSPB lasting almost 40 years, first as a warden and later as head of reserves management, he also made a significant contribution to the conservation of some of Britain's rarest birds and their habitats. In retirement, he continued to make his mark, this time internationally, having a major influence on conservation work in Africa, Italy and especially Bulgaria.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Bob became one of the RSPB's best-known wardens, inspiring countless birders as warden of both the Dungeness observatory and the RSPB reserve there. Finding a species new to Britain is every birder's lifetime goal, but Bob had scored four times in this respect before his 32nd birthday. Subsequently he made additions to the national bird lists of five other countries across three continents.

In 1975 Bob moved to Northward Hill reserve on the Thames marshes in Kent, where he met and married Ann, who was working at the RSPB's south-east regional office at the time. Together, they made a formidable team, jointly running training courses for bird ringers in Ghana, Rwanda and Burundi.

The benefits of his wealth of knowledge about running reserves began to spread widely from 1979 when he moved to the RSPB's head office at Sandy, Bedfordshire. Initially Reserves Manager (England), then Senior Reserves Manager, he served as Head of Reserves from 1988 until his retirement in 1997, although he continued to do some work for the society's international and education divisions.

Bob was known and liked by birders from all generations and backgrounds, many of whom met him at the annual British Birdwatching Fair in Rutland, where he was a regular fixture for more than 20 years. Always ready to engage in conversation, he retained a boyish enthusiasm for his pursuit, which helped to convert many people at home and abroad to the joys of birding.

After he took early retirement in 1997, he and Ann continued their conservation work at home and abroad. In Bulgaria, a grateful government awarded him a medal for his efforts. He also joined other leading birders to save the journal *British Birds*, to which he contributed for almost 50 years.

Bob's lasting legacy can be found at any RSPB reserve in the UK; not just the birds, but also those watching them, many of whom he inspired - either directly or indirectly - to take up birding. He is survived by Ann and two sons from his first marriage.

(Extracts from *The Guardian* and *The Times*)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2009

OUTDOOR MEETINGS

Friday 10th July - Cavenham Heath

Walk at Cavenham Heath for Stone Curlew, Nightjar and general natural history, 7pm until late.

Directions - from Cambridge take the A14 east and then the A11 to Barton Mills roundabout. Drive right round the roundabout, heading back towards Newmarket, and take the first turning on the left to Tuddenham (if you miss this turning there is another further on). In Tuddenham village turn left at the green by the red telephone kiosk and drive for 6/10th of a mile along the narrowing road to a car park on the left-hand side where the reserve manager, Mike Taylor, will meet us at 7pm. Sunset is at 9.15pm, if it is a fine evening, it won't be dark until 9.45pm, so expect to return to the car park about 10.30pm.

Although booking is not essential it would be helpful to have some idea of numbers attending so we do not leave before the whole party has assembled, so please contact Vicki Harley (contact details on back page) if you intend to come.

Friday 14th August - Barbecue at Fowlmere RSPB Reserve

Barbecue cooking in the picnic area from 7.30pm. Bring your own food to cook. Salad, baps, sauces, soft drinks available – donation towards costs welcome.

We hope to arrange a moth trapping session later in the evening.

Toilets are available.

Please book by contacting Dick Newell (contact details on back page).

If anyone is interested in a guided walk at 6.30pm, please contact doug.radford@rspb.org.uk.

INDOOR MEETINGS

Friday September 11th

Eagle's Nest – Birdwatching in Northeast India, a video presentation by Mike Edgecombe

North East India has only in recent years been accessible to visiting birders. The area encompasses the vast flood plain of the mighty Bramaputra river to the unspoilt forest of the eastern Himalayas. Eagle Nest Wildlife Sanctuary lies embedded in some of the most unspoilt forest of the area. An area hardly explored, it was not surprising that a bird new to science was discovered as recently as 2004. Named after the local Bugun tribe, *Bugun liochicla*, is just one of many superb and rare birds to be found in the region.

Mike Edgecombe lives in Norfolk and has been birding for over 35 years. He has been a council member of the Oriental Bird Club for 9 years. His ambition is not only to see every one of the beautiful Pitta species in the world but also capture them on film!

Friends of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve – Special Event

Thursday 12th November 2pm

The Secret Lives Of Garden Birds by Dominic Couzens

FPPNR are pleased to invite CBC members to a special event in November at St Neots Priory Centre. An acknowledged expert on bird behaviour, Dominic Couzens is a major contributor to "Birdwatching" magazine and is well known as a natural history author and feature writer. Tickets at £4 are limited to just 120 and are available in advance from the Paxton NR visitor centre or SAE to: Trevor Gunton, 15 St James Rd, Little Paxton, Cambs, PE19 6QW.

CBC-ANNOUNCE

CBC-ANNOUNCE is an emailing list used to send announcements and important notices about Club matters to any member who asks to go on the list. Most notices will be reminders of meetings and announcements of any changes in arrangements so you will only receive occasional messages.

If you would like to be on this emailing list or ask for more information, please contact Vicki Harley, email vicki.harley@care4free.net.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new members – Jo Darlington of Cambridge, James Hooper of Stretham and Ela Wolbek of Great Shelford.

Bruce Martin

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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.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Birdline number

Remember that your Cambridgeshire bird sightings can be phoned in free of charge to Birdline East Anglia on 0800 083 0803.

Please email records to: Mark Hawkes by July 7th

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

Next Bulletin due out August 2009, covering May-June 2009

GOOD BIRDING!