

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 408

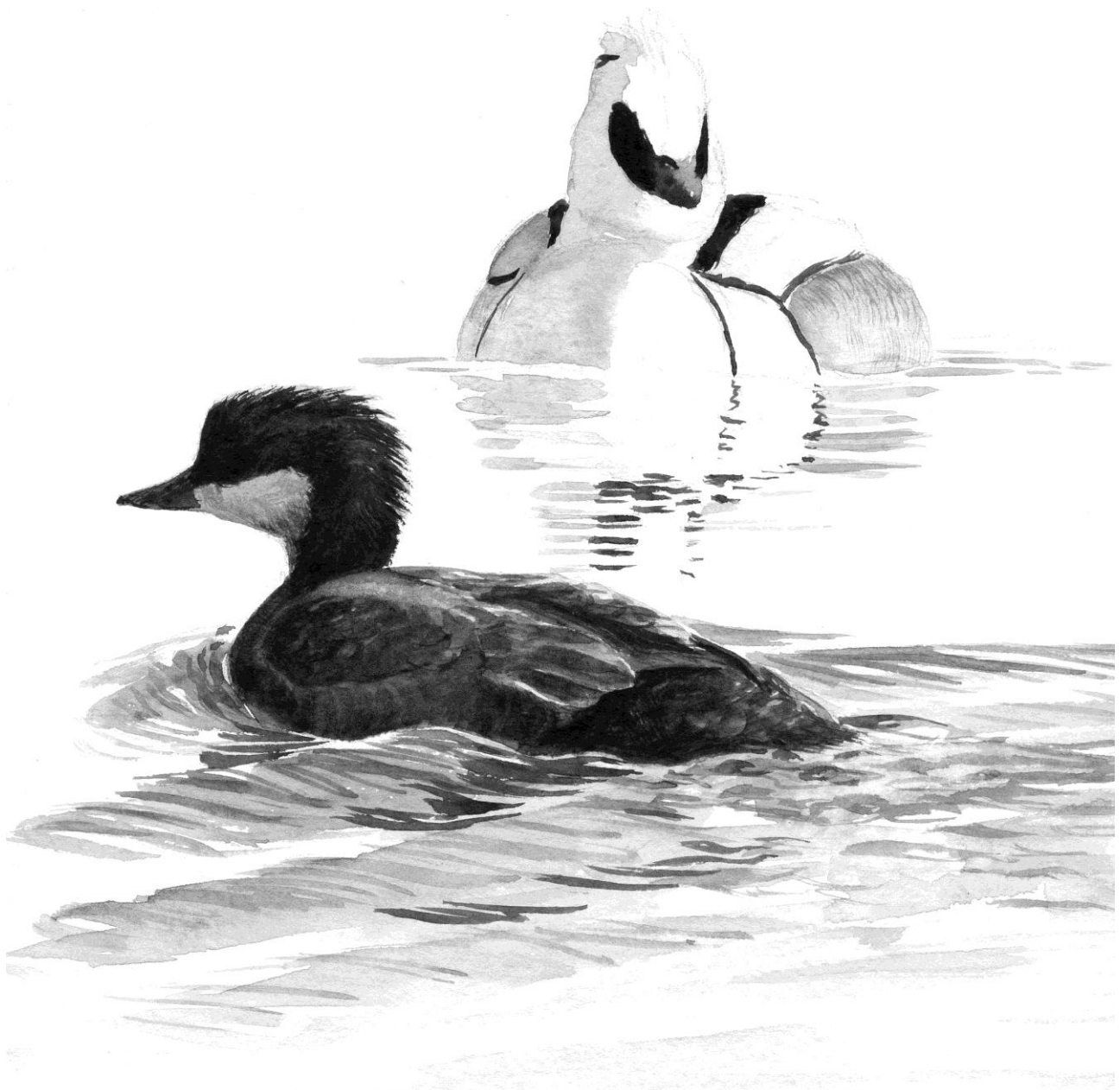


Opinions expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of the Club.

RECENT REPORTS JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records sourced from sightings received by the county recorder or reported on Cambirds (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cambirds/>).

Smew by Ben Green



This winter's diver fest continued into the New Year with a **Red-throated Diver** present for over a week from Jan 28th on the River Great Ouse at Earith/Willingham and up to 4 **Great Northern Divers** remaining at Grafham Water throughout. A **Slavonian Grebe** at Grafham Water on Jan 10th stayed to Feb 28th unlike the 4 **Black-necked Grebes** seen briefly there on Jan 9th. Following those, singles of the latter species were more obliging, being present at Grafham Water from Jan 18th to the end of Feb and Paxton Pits from Feb 9th-20th.

No count of **Cormorant** was higher than 80 (Ouse Washes) and the only **Shags** for the period were singles noted at Grafham Water on Jan 5th & 17th. Hit hard by the cold spell **Bitterns** were pushed into the open of frozen waterways resulting in records from 13 sites involving at least 21 birds with a peak count of 4 at Fen Drayton Lakes. At Kingfishers Bridge, a **Bittern** was noted along the edge of a grass airstrip, no doubt forced to hunt for small mammals as pits and lakes remained frozen. **Little Egrets** are now found throughout the county, even from the chalklands of the south, as high-lighted by the records received from Balsham, Fowlmere, Fulbourn, Hinxton and Melbourn. The **Great Egret** continued to be seen in its favoured drain at Dunkirk on and off to Feb 23rd at least; elsewhere one brightened up a train journey at Waterbeach on Jan 15th. Re-acting to the prolonged cold spell, **Grey Herons** were noted following the plough at both March Farmers and Bottisham Lock and up to 9 scavenged the landfill at Long Drove Cottenham.

The flock of **Mute Swans** at Ouse Fen peaked at 242 on Jan 17th, whereas **Bewick's Swan** numbers remained about average with 1605 on the Ouse Washes (Cambs only) in January and 1100 on the Nene Washes in February; feeding flocks on arable land included 326 at Shippea Hill on Jan 10th. **Whooper Swan** counts included 2633 on Ouse Washes (Cambs only) roosting in front of Stockdales Hide on Jan 5th. One of the features of the winter was the influx of geese into the county most notably the occurrence of both forms of **Bean Geese**. Birds of the tundra form '*rossicus*' were noted on the Nene Washes with 2 on Jan 22nd -24th, Somersham GP 4 on Feb 14th and Kingfishers Bridge 3 on Feb 23rd, but the finding of 3 birds of the taiga form '*fablis*' at Byell Fen, Manea on Jan 18th heralded a red letter day for the county. Remaining in this area to Jan 24th and often accompanied by 2-3 **Pink-footed Geese** they perhaps represent the first genuine record

of this form in Cambs? Having been re-located on the Nene Washes from Jan 27th one could witness the unique sight of seeing both forms feeding together with up to 20 Pink-feet and a couple of White-fronts! Records of feral geese flocks included 632 **Greylag** and 580 **Canada Geese** at Kingfishers Bridge in January. Single dark-bellied **Brent Geese** were noted at Wicken Fen on Jan 20th-30th and Nene Washes on Jan 31st-Feb 16th.

Wimpole Hall, a traditional site for **Mandarin** held a pair on Jan 5th and 5 on Feb 27th. The superb conditions on the Nene Washes resulted in record numbers of **Wigeon** 22,571 and **Teal** 9012 beating previous totals by 9000 and 4500 respectively! Such numbers were the result of the deep 2 metre plus flooding on the Ouse Washes which despite this still held 12,771 **Wigeon** but only 380 **Teal** on the same day. A report of a **Green-winged Teal** on the Ouse Washes on Feb 25th was hopefully not the decoy of that species which was washed up in the flotsam around that time! The highest **Mallard** count for the period was 1657 (a far cry from the 7000+ of the mid 80's -note this species now has amber status), and **Pintail** totalled 2400 on the Nene in Feb.

Frozen out of neighbouring counties, counts of **Red-crested Pochard** included flocks of 27 at Grafham Water and 29 on the River Ouse at Needingworth on Jan 10th. An impressive 2242 **Tufted Ducks** amassed at Grafham Water mid-January and 1-3. **Scaup** were noted there as well as at Ferry Meadows and Fen Drayton Lakes. Other sea ducks at Grafham Water included 3 **Common Scoter** and the immature male **Velvet Scoter** was joined by another from Jan 15th!

Counts of **Goldeneye** included 102 at Grafham Water and 112 at Fen Drayton Lakes and at least 50+ **Smew** graced the county including 27 at Barleycraft GP on Feb 27th. Other sawbills included a drake **Red-breasted Merganser** at Grafham Water on Jan 7th, and counts of Goosander included 16 at Bainton GP. Considering that the number of **Ruddy Ducks** culled so far has reached over 6000+, a flock of 17 noted at Grafham Water on Jan 17th was exceptional given the circumstances.

The **Hen Harrier** roost at Wicken Fen contained 5 birds including a male on Feb 17th, and the male **Rough-legged Buzzard** at Witcham played hide and seek throughout. The Nene Washes attracted up to 5 **Peregrines** during January and an injured

Finnish ringed bird picked up at Soham was found to have been shot.

Easier to find in the snow, **Grey Partridge** totalled 31 around Melbourn and elsewhere were reported from 10 other sites. At least 16 calling **Water Rails** were noted at Fowlmere NR and a walk along the Cam from Newnham to Chesterton resulted in a count of 81 **Moorhens** on Jan 1st. Up to 5 **Cranes** frequented the north of the county.

Returning waders include **Oystercatcher** at Bassingbourn on Jan 8th, **Avocet** at Grafham Water on Feb 7th, and **Ringed Plover** at Teversham Fen on Feb 6th. Single **Grey Plover** were on the Nene Washes on Jan 28th and Feb 22nd, with 5 there on the 26th. **Knots** were noted at Barleycraft GP, Ouse Washes (2) and Nene Washes during January. Numbers of regular waders remained low as a result of the freeze (highest counts in brackets) **Lapwing** (1996), **Golden Plover** (379), **Ruff** (17), **Dunlin** (80) and **Snipe** (43). **Jack Snipe** were reported from 7 sites.

The large scale influx of **Woodcocks** into Britain this winter filtered through into Cambs with records from 22 sites including 12 at Kingfishers Bridge, a road side feeding bird at Barton and a few garden visitors. Icelandic **Black-tailed Godwits** had built up to 2220 on the Nene Washes by the end of Feb and **Curlew** were noted at 6 sites. Unseasonal waders included **Greenshanks** at Brownhill Stuanch and Grafham Water in January and Ouse Fen in Feb. A single **Common Sandpiper** was noted on the River Nene at Newton on Jan 31st.

The only reports of **Mediterranean Gull** came from Grafham Water on Feb 16th and 24th and Ferry Meadows on Feb 26th. The spring passage of **Common Gulls** is always under recorded so 550+ passing south east over Saxon Street on Feb 24th was noteworthy. The landfill at Cottenham Long Drove attracted 1600 **Black-headed Gulls**, 150+ **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and 300+ **Herring Gulls** on Feb 13th, but no counts at all have been received of the tens of thousands of gulls from any of the county's roost sites. 1-3 **Caspian Gulls** were regular at Milton and were often noted at Fen Drayton Lakes pre-roost gatherings.

Bolstered by the large scale autumn immigration, the explosion of **Wood Pigeon** numbers was clear to see as four figured

counts came in from 8 sites including 4000 at Little Eversden on Feb 5th.

An orange-breasted **Barn Owl** seen on private farmland in Hunts in January and February did not pass the recent upgrade in id criteria to put it in the "continental" camp. The most regular site for **Short-eared Owls** this winter has been the Nene Washes (March Farmers – Rings End) where up to four birds have been present.

Freezing conditions on the continent saw thousands of **Skylarks** moving over coastal watch points seemingly these birds failed to reach Cambs as nothing on a similar scale was reported within the county. **Water Pipit** sightings were scarce but 4 were noted on the Nene Washes on Feb 1st. Just when we thought we would not get any **Waxwings** this winter, 2 turned up in Stretham on Feb 9th-10th, moving on to Willingham later that day. Two were also seen at Cambourne on Feb 14th. Further sightings of 1-3 birds moving around various sites in Cambridge from Feb 14th to the month's end provided many with a photographic opportunity. Another bird in the frame was a **Black Redstart**, photographed at Sutton Gault on Jan 9th.

Stonechats virtually abandon the county during the cold spell as no site held more than 4. Garden feeding stations provided essential food supplies during this coldest winter for many years with many species attracted to them (particularly thrushes). **Blackbird** flocks were into double figures such as the 37 in two small gardens at Stretham and many people enjoyed the sight of visiting **Redwing** and **Fieldfare**. Of note were the 1050+ **Fieldfares** at Elm during January and February. Thankfully, **Cetti's Warblers** were still being heard at 5 sites during February. As with the winter thrushes, **Blackcaps** put in numerous appearances in at least 20 gardens, one garden ringer caught 12 different individuals, so just how many now winter in Cambs?

Ominously **Goldcrests** were reported from just 6 sites but the 2 overwintering **Firecrests** were still present in a private garden throughout and a single was also at Woodwalton Fen to the end of Feb. **Bearded Tits** continued to be seen at 4 sites during January, but not in February. Alder trees attracted many feeding **Blue Tits** with flocks of 40+ at Woodwalton Fen and 26 at Fowlmere NR in February. No large **Starling** flocks were noted during the period. **House Sparrows** numbered at least 130+ around the village of Melbourn and up to

58 **Tree Sparrows** were noted at Whittering. Flocks of 70 **Chaffinches** were noted at Littlington and Wandlebury, but the identity of an 'african' type **Chaffinch** at Wicken Fen on Jan 6th tested many.

Where are **Bramblings** this year? Single records came from 5 sites only. **Siskins** are also scarce this winter but some good flocks of **Linnet** included 440 at Elm, 380 at Manea, 340 at Melbourn and 130 at Witcham. At Paxton Pits, 3 **Twite** were a good local find, present from Jan 24th to at least the end of Feb often being very elusive at times. The regular winter **Lesser Redpoll** flock at Woodwalton Fen, had built up to 140+ birds on Jan 17th. **Mealy Redpolls** were noted at Woodwalton Fen and a single at Fowlmere NR was site faithful from Jan 10th – Feb 19th at least.

Strips of bird cover at Melbourn attracted 340 **Yellowhammers** during the snow and with buntings much in the news it was pleasing to noted that there were at least 400+ **Corn Buntings** within an 8km radius of Melbourn as well. The aforementioned bird cover strips at Melbourn were also a magnet for **Reed Buntings** but the huge count of 1200+ roosting

at Fowlmere NR in mid-February revealed just how important this food source was during the cold spell. This count is the third highest ever in Britain, the previous two being well over 30 years ago.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Steve Cooper

Thanks to the contributors to the CBC database Jan/Feb 2010 :

Colin Addington, Jake Allsop, Louise Bacon, Ian Barton, Jenny Brightwell, Will Burdett, James Cadbury, Ade Cooper, P.J & A.G Evans, Ed Frear, Alan Freestone, Kevin Harris, Suzanne Harwood, Dean Harlow, Stephen Hartley, Mark Hawkes, Peter Herkenrath, Jonathan Hook, Bob Humphreys, Colin Kirtland, John Lindsell, Owen and Monica Marks, Tony Mallyon, Ania Masters, Richard Palmer, Mark Pettit, Mark Piercey, Mike Redshaw, Michael Price, Mark Missin, Neil Renwick, Tony Roberts, Kathleen Rosewarne, Duncan Ritchie, Margaret Sharp, Clive Sinclair, Nigel Spowell, Chris Thorne, Martin Walters, P.M Warrington, Matt Webb, John Wells and Mick Whitehouse.



Visible migration at Croydon Hill

Darren Oakley-Martin

"Oh...my...god!" These were the first words uttered by my colleague, Lloyd Scott, when he accompanied me on his first visible migration exercise on the morning of 18 October 2008 at Croydon Hill. "Redwings...there must be forty there." "Fieldfares! Starlings going west! Linnet! Brambling! How many Golden Plover? There's a Snipe somewhere...can you hear it? Redpolls!"

For 30 minutes, it was all a bit hectic and I was struggling to keep up, so heaven knows how Lloyd was feeling. One thing is certain though, his enthusiasm for, and appetite for knowledge of avian migration has increased as a result of that morning's experience. He couldn't have chosen a better morning to join me!

Visible migration may be defined as "daylight movement of birds that can be witnessed" (Britton & Day, 1995). The observation of visible migration, particularly during the autumn months, can often result in spectacular movements of birds. Even large movements of common species such as Wood Pigeons, Redwings and Chaffinches can leave the observer as awe-inspired as can the first glimpse of a vagrant Siberian waif.

Visible migration can occur anywhere, but generally, high ground and an open vista are required for best results. Autumn movements are more impressive in scale than those during spring and the best period to observe movement is during the first few hours after sunrise. Different species also show a marked tendency to move at different times of the morning. As we know, thrushes are migrating throughout the hours of darkness, and depending upon the scale of the movement, can continue doing so for several hours after sunrise, or even throughout the whole day. This was the case at The Pinnacle near Sandy, Bedfordshire on 13 October 2009, where an incredible 32,988 Redwings were logged during the course of the day. Finches generally appear within the first 30 minutes of sunlight, whereas Skylarks really are the late risers of the avian world, often not appearing until well after sunrise. This rather contradicts the old adage of *being up with the lark!*

A telescope is essential for identifying birds flying at great height or at distance, and on days of exceptional movements, more than one pair of eyes is required in order to scan, count and record simultaneously. Paradoxically, perhaps the most important aids to a successful 'vis-mig' are your ears and knowing your flight calls! Many high-flying birds would remain otherwise undetected but for their calls; a single heard-only Redwing may, when detected visually, reveal a flock of 50 or more.

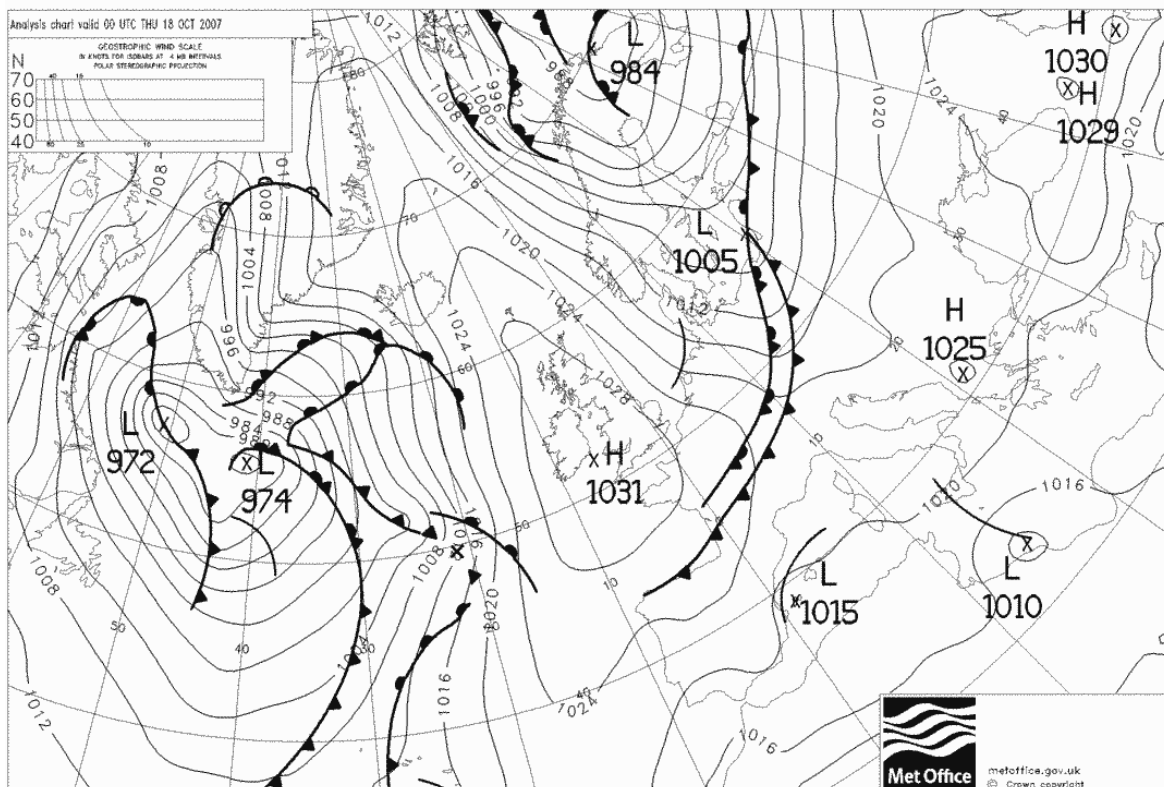
My own site is Croydon Hill, (TL 304 491), which is approximately 1km west of the village of Croydon in South Cambridgeshire. The hill forms part of an escarpment running discontinuously from near Haslingfield in the northeast to Edworth, Bedfordshire in the south-west. The site is some 70m above sea level on a south-facing slope, with commanding views across the Royston Vale. On clear days, the hills around the Hertfordshire village of Reed, some 14km distance – site of 2008's Rough-legged Buzzard – can be clearly seen, leading me to speculate whether I could have 'scoped the bird to get it onto my Croydon Hill list!

The general direction of movement at the site varies between species and the direction from which the birds are approaching. Birds flying in from the east are naturally funnelled into the Vale for lack of any other defining geographical features, and continue due west; those approaching from the north-east from the start of the escarpment at Haslingfield may follow the ridge south-west.

High-flying migrants such as Wood Pigeons, Fieldfares, Redwings and other thrushes tend to move through the vale either due west or southwest into it. Starlings, which never seem to migrate at high altitude here, are something of a mystery. They usually appear low from the southeast and fly directly over the escarpment on a north westerly heading, hugging the contours of the ridge. For finches, there is less of a pattern, but many come into view from the northeast and head south or southwest into the vale, or veer round to follow the escarpment in a westerly direction. For Meadow Pipits and Skylarks, the latter of which is the migrant that invariably flies at the greatest height, there is nearly always a tendency towards a south or southwesterly movement.

Observations of direction of flight vary considerably between different visible migration sites, based upon the topography and habitat mix of the surrounding land. If woodland dominates the landscape, birds of open country, such as Skylark and Meadow Pipit, may avoid flying directly over it, and so veer off to either side of the wood. Conversely, the lack of woodland at Croydon Hill *may* explain why my observations of woodland birds such as Siskin and Crossbill are few, in comparison to other sites close by. These species may avoid the desert of arable land and stick to more wooded ridges and valleys. This is of course, merely speculation.

Weather conditions play a large part in dictating the success or otherwise of a visible migration exercise. Dry mornings with light to moderate winds with an easterly bias are optimal. A sudden overnight clearing of skies following successive days of fog, strong wind or rain can also result in large numbers of birds, previously backed-up, continuing their migration. The amount of cloud cover appears to make little difference to numbers, (at least at this site) although Wood Pigeons and Skylarks move in greater numbers during periods of high pressure with little or no cloud cover. This was certainly the case on the morning of 18 October 2007, when 8,074 Wood Pigeons passed through west in one hour! This movement corresponded with a period of high pressure over most of Britain. Here is the synoptic chart for that day:



Over the last three years' observations, a clear pattern of peak arrival dates can be detected. Adverse weather conditions in Scandinavia can of course delay arrival in Britain, as was the case with thrushes this year, but generally, the autumn season begins with pipits and wagtails throughout September; this is an especially good period within which to pick up a Tree Pipit with migrating flocks of Meadow Pipits. Chaffinches peak during mid-October, when the first wave of Redwings appears. A second peak of Redwings occurs during the last few days of October and early November, when the first large flocks of Fieldfares appear. Starlings and Wood Pigeons predominate in early November, but the latter are prone to movements linked to high-pressure systems rather than any other climatic factor, so peak dates over the last three years were erratic.

The twelve most common migrants at the site, together with the highest count recorded, count period and the date, are given below.

Species	Count	Count period	Date
Chaffinch	332	07:00-11:00	18 October 2009
Linnet	83	08:00-11:00	13 October 2007
Goldfinch	34	06:20-07:50	31 October 2007
Greenfinch	60	07:00-11:00	14 October 2007
Brambling	17	07:00-07:45	15 November 2007
Fieldfare	1,466	06:30-08:05	28 October 2009
Redwing	1,073	06:30-08:05	28 October 2009
Starling	679	06:30-09:00	03 November 2007
Song Thrush	22	08:00-11:00	13 October 2007
Skylark	106	07:00-11:00	14 October 2007
Meadow Pipit	49	07:00-11:00	14 October 2007
Wood Pigeon	8,074	07:00-08:00	18 October 2007

For me, the pleasures of vis-mig are threefold: the ambience of autumn mornings – the sense of involvement in a remarkable natural phenomenon; the great mornings of huge movements of birds, such as the thrush arrival of 28 October 2009, when it was impossible to keep up with the sheer numbers passing on a broad front. Then there is the sense of anticipation, of not knowing what next is going to come into view or call overhead – it could be anything! On one particularly memorable morning I got a real surprise.

The morning of 14 October 2007 was one of my best, in terms of species richness, with 28 species counted and also total number of individuals, with 4,077 passing over in a four hour period. At about 10 o'clock, whilst scanning to the west, I noticed a dark, long-winged bird flying south at height on stiff wing beats...I immediately had my suspicions. Quickly getting it in the 'scope, the realisation dawned that I was indeed looking at a sub-adult Gannet...over arable farmland in South Cambridgeshire, with no water to be seen for miles around! Having seen thousands only two weeks previously whilst in Cornwall, which did not require a field description, I decided that this one probably would, so quickly noted the salient identification features in my notebook. This individual was almost certainly a second winter.

What was truly remarkable about this encounter was that the weather conditions were scarcely 'classic' for an inland seabird occurrence. There was barely a breath of wind and conditions on the coast were clear and dry. Remarkably, there were other inland Gannets around the country that day. What this does prove, however, is that birds do not always do the things we expect of them, and the unexpected can happen!

Unfortunately, the Gannet wasn't twitchable, but I have found other birds at Croydon Hill that have been enjoyed by others. Not all of these are strictly speaking, vis-migging records, but it does prove that even the most unprepossessing patch of arable farmland can reap rewards for the regular visitor and that when things are quiet overhead, who knows what may be lurking in the fields and hedges! These are probably my top ten, in no particular order; an asterisk indicates a visible migrant.

Species	Number	Date(s)
Ring Ouzel	1+1	20 April 2007 / 3 April 2009
Woodlark	1	30 October 2007
Grey Plover*	1	17 November 2007
Osprey*	1	15 Aug 2009
Tree Pipit	1+1	22 Aug 2009 / 12 Sept 2009
Woodcock*	1	26 October 2007
Common Redstart	3	19 September 2008
Merlin	1	23 October 2007
Gannet*	1	14 October 2007
Peregrine*	1	19 September 2008

In summary, visible migration is an enjoyable, instructive and rewarding branch of birding; one that often raises more questions about migration than it answers, but which has undoubtedly increased my interest in this fascinating aspect of avian ecology. It can help with retaining and improving our

knowledge of flight calls, and our familiarity with that most overlooked of identification criteria – jizz, or the *feel* for a birds identity.

There is no argument that visible migration is an acquired taste, and not unlike sea-watching in terms of the need for patience, discipline and attention to detail. Not all will relish pre-dawn starts and the prospect of standing at one point for several hours on a cold, wind-swept hill! But once tasted, it can become addictive. So why not give it a try next autumn, you may – like Lloyd - become a convert.

Some useful websites

http://www.bto.org/birdtrack/dailyresults/index_reports.htm

<http://www.trektellen.nl/default.asp?site=0&taal=2&land=5>

<http://vismig.blogspot.com/>

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/vismig/>

http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm



Cambridge nesters: update on breeding birds

Vince Lea

January and February were pretty inhospitable for any nesting activities, although one Collared Dove was seen on a nest during one timed tetrad winter visit! Nevertheless, any hint of sunshine or mild conditions may trigger visits by hole-nesting passerines to inspect potential nest sites, and tit boxes, starling holes and the like are often checked out by eager birds. Other checks we have been able to do is locate territorial pairs of resident species, which often give clues as to where they may choose to nest by loitering, singing or displaying in the vicinity.

As this newsletter goes to press in March, however, breeding activity is certainly getting under way. The early nesters are firmly underway, with Rooks constructing their nests and collecting the sticks to refurbish any structural remains from last year. During the third week of March we came across at least six pairs of Long-tailed Tits building their fabulous nests of moss and spider webs. These were decorated with lichens and lined with so many feathers it seems impossible; a thousand or more seems to be the consensus on numbers from those who have dismantled old nests! Another early nesting species is the Tawny Owl, and on March 19th one female was seen, probably laying or incubating, in the same woodland tree-hole used successfully last year. The main breeding season is just around the corner, as elevated song levels and territorial disputes bear witness.

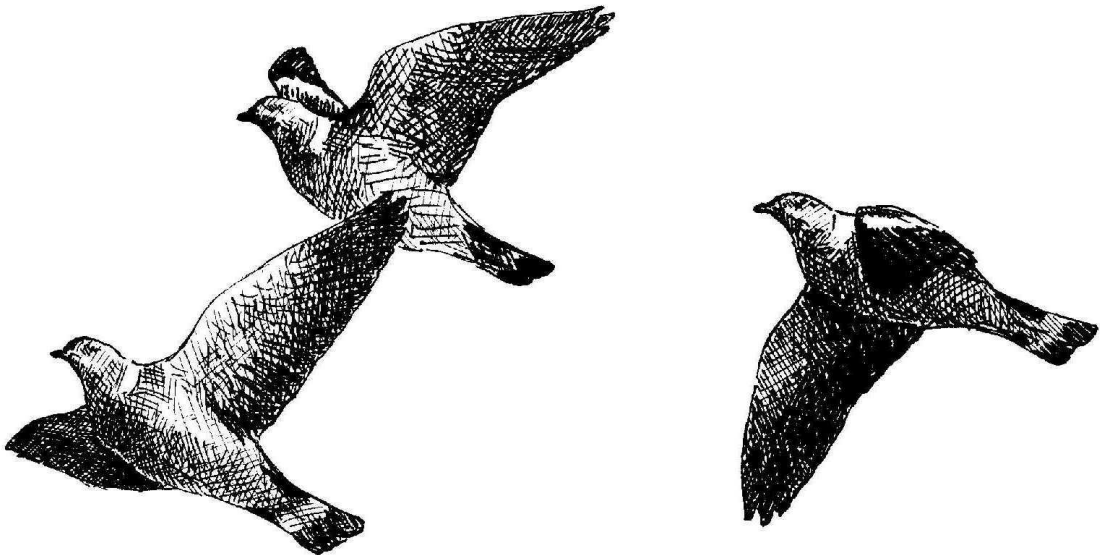
During April most of our woodland and garden residents will be territorial, and this is a good time to get breeding records (vital to the BTO & County atlases) for species like Woodpeckers, Tits, Treecreepers and the like. If you find a nest that is possible to inspect without disturbance, it would be great if the contents were recorded for the BTO Nest Record Scheme as well. See www.bto.org.uk/survey/nest_records/index.htm for details. Contact the Cambridge Nesters if you would like help from an experienced nest-monitor who can advise on how to approach, view and record a nest without undue disturbance to the breeding birds.

The Cambridge nesters are holding their first get-together of the season in late March, at Wicken Fen, with a firm plan to help find nests which can then be attended to by the licensed ringers there, who will fit chicks with rings. This is an excellent time to ring birds, as any subsequent recoveries will have the good provenance of a precisely known age and origin. We hope to continue with our other group activities at Cambourne and at a fenland Tree Sparrow colony – if you wish to join us, please contact Carl Barimore carl.barimore@bto.org (tel: 07879 052 337).

From the Chairman

Peter Herkenrath

The AGM on 12 March elected me as the new Chairman of the Club, after having served on Council for six years, and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to the membership. I am from Germany where I studied theology and biology. I did my diploma thesis on the ecology of urban Woodpigeons and I have to admit that I have since admired this understudied species. I also worked on ecology and behaviour of Feral Pigeons which I find fascinating, a passion which I am sure not many of our members would share... I have other favourite birds too, including warblers and gulls and you might find me watching gulls at one of our local rubbish tips. I moved to Cambridge in 1997 to take up a position at the BirdLife International Secretariat in Girton from where I moved on to my current position at the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme in Cambridge. My work involves a lot of travelling and I apologise in advance for not being able to attend and chair all indoor meetings. I am grateful for the encouragement I received from my predecessor Dick Newell, our President Robin Cox and other Council members to take up the position of Chairman of the Bird Club. I must admit that I feel slightly daunted when I look at the long list of names of great personalities in British ornithology that have been associated with the Club over the 85 years of its existence. But I feel encouraged by our members that take part in surveys, attend indoor meetings and provide records to the Club's database, which all helps the Club to maintain its excellent reputation. I look forward to the next years, with the completion of the field work for the BTO atlas and our own Cambridgeshire atlas as one of the 'big issues' we are addressing. If any member wants to discuss any issue, raise a concern or ask any question, please feel free to contact me (see the last page for contact details).



Survey Volunteers needed!

The Countryside Restoration Trust has 2 areas of farmland just outside Cambridge around Barton and Comberton. For the last 10 years the breeding birds have been monitored to record the response to the improved farmland habitats. Surveys are based on full Common Bird Census methods involving 12 or so spring-summer visits to the farm. There has been a great increase in populations of our target species, such as Skylark, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge and Linnet. Several pairs of Barn Owls have also moved in since the prairie landscape has been replaced with small fields featuring wet hay meadows, grass margins, beetle banks and nest boxes. Overall bird numbers have more-or-less doubled in the last 10 years, while farmland birds in the general countryside have mostly continued to decline. One of our stalwart volunteers of the past was the much-missed Bob Scott, a one-time chairman of the Countryside Restoration Trust.

It would be great if one or two Cambridge Bird Club members could volunteer to help us continue with the survey; we have a small band of volunteers but extra help would be very welcome. The survey routes take about 3 to 4 hours to complete. Please contact Vince Lea, vincelea@btinternet.com or tel:01223 262962 if you would like to help.

Minutes of the 2009 AGM

Council apologises for not having sent out the minutes of the 2009 AGM in time for this year's AGM. We enclose the 2009 minutes with this Bulletin. The minutes of the 2010 AGM will be sent in time for the 2011 AGM and copies are available on request from the Secretary.

Rookeries Survey 2010

This year the CBC Research Committee would like to collect data on every Rookery in the county. This can be achieved if as many members as possible record simple information for every Rookery they find this spring. Ideally we would like all data to be submitted on the Excel sheet available from the club website and this format is used in the example below. If you do not have access to the internet then paper records in the same format can be sent to Louise Bacon (see the last page for contact details).

Site	Grid reference for 100m ²	Active nests	Tree species
Soham Village College	TL 594 727	39	2 Oak, 1 Scots Pine

The 6 figure grid reference is generated. To make data analysis and map generation as unambiguous as possible we would ask that all grid references are generated using the Grab a Grid website, using the 100m square function which is linked on the club website. The data gathered will be used for the BTO Atlas, the planned Cambridgeshire Atlas and for a Research Committee paper comparing the 2010 data with the historic database of previous surveys co-ordinated by Graham Easy. Completed Rookeries Excel sheets should be sent via e-mail to cambsrookeries@gmail.com at the end of May.

Raptor Vantage Point Surveys

On Saturday 13th of March over 50 observers scanned the Cambridgeshire skies from 22 vantage points, looking for birds of prey. The weather was ideal; bright with patchy cloud and a playful breeze. Buzzards were the predominant species with hundreds of birds recorded, peaks of 25 birds at Fen Drayton Lakes and 20 at Grafham Water. About 30 territorial pairs were observed. Territorial Kestrels and Sparrowhawks were observed on almost all watches. Scarcer species seen on the 3 hour survey included Marsh Harrier, Red Kite, Peregrine, Rough-legged Buzzard and Raven. All the data generated will be used in the CBC records spreadsheet and those with breeding codes will be also used for BTO and county bird atlases. A big thanks to all those skywatchers who helped make the survey a great success that we hope to refine and repeat in the future.

New venue and volunteers at indoor meetings

In 2010 our indoor meetings in April, May, September and October will be held at Cottenham Village College, High Street, Cottenham. There is plenty of parking around the college. Thank you to those people who have volunteered to help at indoor meetings. We always welcome help with making tea/coffee, serving refreshments, washing up and generally running a smooth refreshment break. If you are able to help or are not sure how to find the college please contact Vicki Harley (details on the back page)

Bird song workshop at Fowlmere

The Cambridgeshire Bird Club, in collaboration with the RSPB, is organising a bird song workshop at the RSPB Fowlmere Nature Reserve. Similar workshops with a focus on warbler songs in the last three years have proved to be very successful. This field-based workshop is especially suited for beginners, but more advanced birdwatchers and those who want to improve their song identification skills for BTO atlas work are welcome to join. All are welcome at this free event on Saturday 1 May 2010 starting at 6.30am. For more information and to reserve one of the limited places please contact Peter Herkenrath (peterherkenrath@yahoo.co.uk or tel: 01223 276553)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2010

INDOOR MEETINGS

Friday April 9th 2010 Cottenham Village College

The Listening to Birds Project by Andrew Whitehouse

The Listening to Birds project is an anthropological investigation of the ways that people think about and respond to bird sounds. This talk explores some of the key areas of the research, particularly the numerous stories that members of the public contributed through the project website. These stories have highlighted the significance of bird sounds to people's sense of place, time and season and the connections that bird sounds have with people's own life stories.

Friday 14th May 2010 Cottenham Village College

Into Africa: Where do our migrants spend the winter? by Phil Atkinson & Danaë Sheehan

As well as looking at the breeding ecology of migrant birds for the part of their life cycles that they spend in the UK, the BTO and RSPB are now beginning to focus on what is happening during the other half of these birds' lives, in a major new collaborative project.

OUTDOOR MEETINGS

Friday 11th June Nene Washes RSPB

Meet at 7 pm for a guided walk with the warden to see the reserve and its breeding birds. There will be an opportunity to stay late to listen for Corncrakes. Booking is essential. To book and/or for further details contact Vicki Harley (contact details on back page).

Field meeting on Friday 9th July – TBC, for details see the Club's website and/or next bulletin.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new members – Keith Gypps of Fowlmere, Phillip Mosely of Duxford, Christoph Teufel of Cambridge and Nigel Westwood of St Ives.

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 May 7th

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

Next Bulletin due out May 2010, covering March/April 2010

GOOD BIRDING!