

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 412

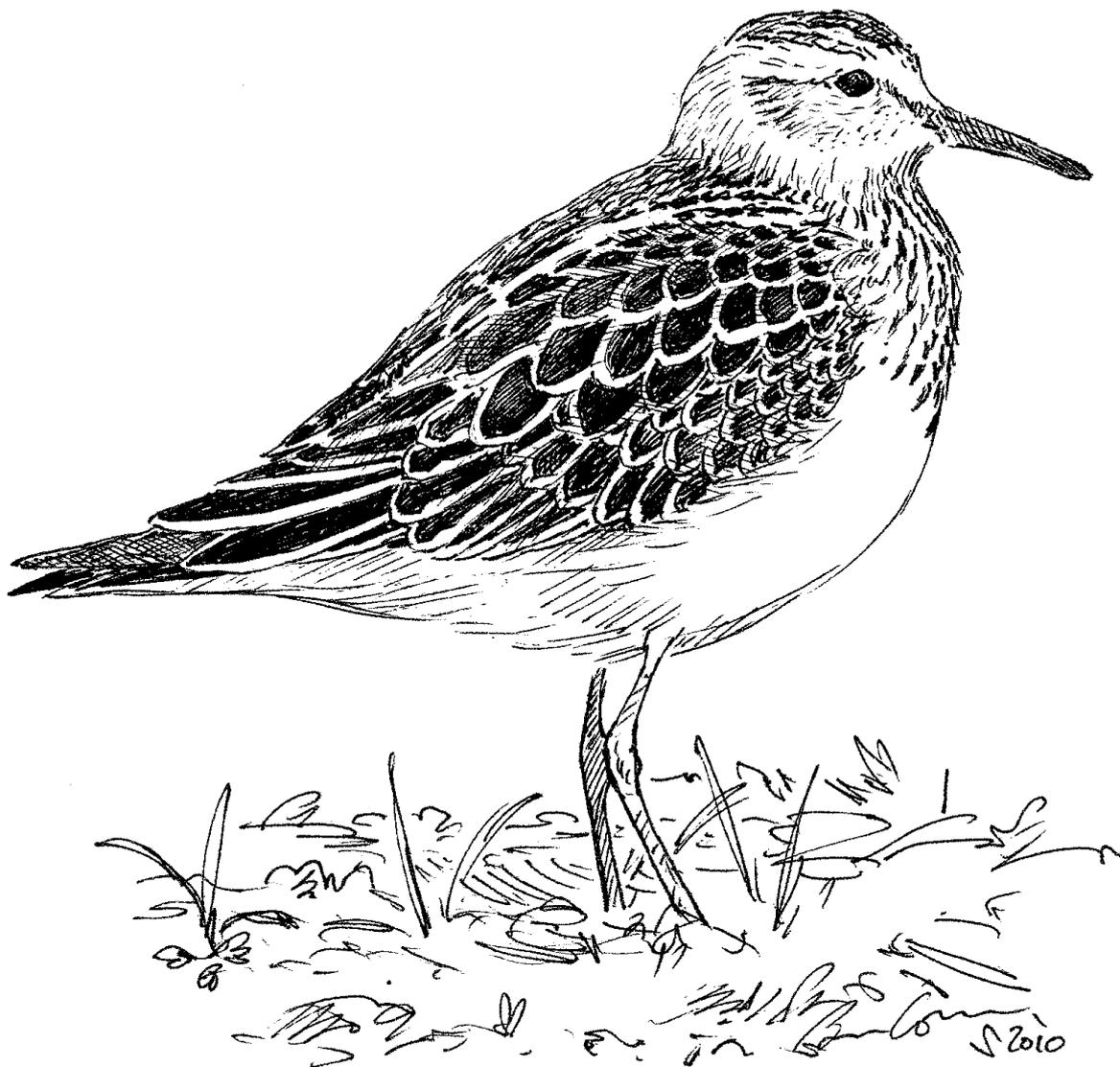


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RECENT REPORTS SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records sourced from sightings received by the county recorder or reported on the "What's About?" page on the CBC website.

Pectoral Sandpiper by Ben Green



September was unsettled at times with several spells of rain, the strong north westerly winds and unsettled weather of the 24th being notable for a large skua and Gannet movement across the county. October was also often unsettled; a period of high pressure and easterly airflow was a feature after the first week of the month. Where numbers are given in parentheses these indicate the monthly maxima for September and October respectively at a given site.

Triple figure counts of **Mute Swan** were made on WeBS counts at Fen Drayton (203, 137) and Ouse Washes (281 on 10th October). The lack of **Bewick's Swan** was typical of the later arrival of this species in comparison to **Whooper Swans**, which numbered 1673 on the Ouse Washes by the end of the month.

Wild geese were also on the move. On 24th Sept flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** flew over Grafham Water (21) and Foul Anchor (45), with 18 seen there the next day. There were larger counts of 145 over Ferry Meadows on the 26th Sept and 100 seen at the Nene Washes on 24th Oct. With huge numbers flocking along the North Norfolk coast, can we hope to receive some overspill and see this species return to the regular three-figure fenland counts of the mid 20th century? A small flock of 4 **White-fronted Geese** flew over Fen Drayton Lakes on 12th Oct. In contrast, hundreds of feral geese are a common sight at many of our wetland sites. Kingfishers Bridge (800), Ouse Fen (620), Grafham Water (370) and Ouse Washes (287) held the highest counts of **Greylag Geese**. Peak counts of **Canada Geese** were at Ouse Washes (570), Kingfishers Bridge (512) and Ouse Fen (223), and single **Barnacle Geese** were seen at Ouse Washes, Isleham and Bourn. A single **Brent Goose** at Grafham Water on 9th Oct had certainly travelled a greater distance than the couple of **Mandarins** that frequented Boltons Pit during September.

Eurasian Wigeon numbers built up through the period with October peaks at Ouse Washes (4935), Buckden GP (841), Fen Drayton Lakes (722) and Needingworth GP (724). **Eurasian Teal** follow a similar trend, and numbers rose to October peaks at Ouse Washes (760) and Wicken Fen (270). **Mallard** had their highest numbers in September during the dispersal of local breeders, with 632 at Grafham Water and 461 at Ouse Fen notable on the 19th Sept WeBS count. **Gadwall** were mainly counted in double figures from a wide variety of sites with higher counts of 244 and 203 at Fen Drayton Lakes on the Sept and Oct WeBS counts, and

104 at Buckden GP on 21st Oct. **Northern Pintail** were recorded returning in small numbers from early Sept, including a pair at Isleham water meadows on the 2nd where the species is unusual. In contrast to our wintering wildfowl arriving from the north and east, **Garganey** were migrating southwards during the period and Grafham Water, Ouse Washes and Fen Drayton Lakes recorded birds during the first half of September. **Shoveler** were counted in small numbers at most wetlands with the only site holding triple figures being Fen Drayton Lakes (155, 140). A little exotic flair was added to Fen Drayton at the end of October when 2 **Red-crested Pochards** took up residence.

Common Pochard peaked at Ouse Fen (107) and Needingworth GP (185) during September with lower numbers reported from more sites during October. **Tufted Duck** were more abundant with peak numbers at Grafham Water (838, 597), Fen Drayton Lakes (415, 492), and Block Fen GP where there were 149 on 19th Sept. At Grafham Water a drake **Tufted Duck** was observed on 5th Sept with a blue nasal-saddle embossed with the code 9LA; this bird proved to have been ringed in Saint-Philbert-De-Grand Lieu, France on 15th Jan 2010. **Common Scoter** were seen at Grafham Water on 6th Sept (3 drakes) and 25th Sept (5 female types). Goldeneye returned in small numbers with the only double figure count of the period being 20 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 25th Oct. The **Ruddy Duck** cull is evidently having an effect as only 6 birds were noted at 2 sites; however these did include juveniles.

The shoot is an integral part of the farming community across the county and with the summer spent rearing gamebirds for winter sport the record of 80 **Red-legged Partridge** at Fen Drayton Lakes on the 4th Sept is likely to be mirrored across many farming parishes. Red data listed due to population decline, **Grey Partridge** are infrequently reared for the shoot as they tend to move away from the rearing areas when disturbed and often have high winter mortality. Twenty at Fowlmere on 6th Oct, two coveys of 15 at Barton on 30th Oct, 13 at Hope Farm on 17th Oct, 9 at Whittlesford on 4th Oct and 6 at Coton on 22nd Sept are all, sadly, notable.

A **Great Northern Diver** arrived at Grafham Water on 8th Oct and remained until the following day, the earliest ever winter record of the species in the county. Rarer grebes were

represented by a **Red-necked Grebe** at Grafham Water on 8th Oct and 2 **Slavonian Grebes** at Paxton Pits on 18th Oct. **Little Grebe** peaked at Grafham Water (38,46), Ouse Fen (28,9) and Needingworth GP(8,20). High counts of Great Crested Grebes were also from Grafham Water (200,155) and Fen Drayton Lakes (91, 71).

There was a remarkable run of **Northern Gannet** sightings during the period, generally associated with spells of strong north to north westerly winds. Two birds along the Nene at Wisbech on the 18th Sept were followed by a single during a significant passage of skuas at Foul Anchor on 24th. On the 25th there were 22 birds recorded as follows: Coldhams Lane, Cambridge (9), Ferry Meadows (6), Little Wilbraham Fen (2), M11 junction 11 (2) and singles over Nene Washes and Orton Mere. The following day one was seen at Fen Drayton and during October a single over the Nene Washes on the 1st, 2 over Ely on the 7th and 4 seen at 2 different sites in Peterborough.

The county is a good place to find and see rare herons and at least one roaming **Cattle Egret** put in appearances at Kingfishers Bridge on 3rd and 14th Sept, and at Nene Washes from 7th to at least 21st Oct. A single **Great Egret** was seen, in flight, at the Dog-in-a-Doublet on 7th Oct, and a **Black-crowned Night Heron** was seen on a fence post by the A47 at Eye on 2nd Oct. Bitterns were recorded from the usual regular wintering sites at Ely BF, Fen Drayton Lakes, Woodwalton Fen and, more unusually, the Ouse Washes. There was a peak of **Little Egrets** at Ouse Fen, where up to 12 were recorded; otherwise low single figure counts from a wide variety of sites was the norm. **Grey Herons** were also widely recorded, with Fen Drayton (11, 13) and the Ouse Washes (10, 29) being sites favoured by larger numbers.

September and October are exciting months to look skywards for all kinds of migration, including those of raptors. **European Honey Buzzards** were seen at Wimpole, where a juvenile flew south on 11th Sept, and 2 further birds were seen over Peterborough on 30th Sept. Ospreys were also on the move and singles overflew Hinxton on 10th Sept and Cambridge on 13th. **Common Buzzards** and **Marsh Harriers** are the most frequently seen large raptors and remain widespread. In the recent past there have been some reasonably sized harrier roosts during the autumn, but with the increase in breeding numbers it is perhaps surprising that there has not been an increase

in numbers observed at traditional roosts. Perhaps there are now more smaller roosts dotted around the fens, or observer attention has decreased as the **Marsh Harrier** has become more regular. **Hen Harriers** were reported in singles from 7 sites with the first recorded on 7th Oct at the Nene Washes. **Northern Goshawk** was recorded at Fen Drayton Lakes and Needingworth GP on 10th Oct and may have been the same bird. **Red Kites** maintain a steady increase in population in the county, and 17 entering a roost at Sawtry was a new county high.

Merlin and **Hobby** play tag as the seasonal small falcons of our farmland; the first **Merlin** was recorded on 30th Sept and the last **Hobby** on 12th Oct. **Sparrowhawks** remain widely recorded, and **Kestrels** become particularly visible in the autumn with hovering birds evident across most suitable areas; 11 on the Ouse Washes on 11th Oct was the highest count.

Water Rails were present at 5 sites, mostly heard uttering their pig squeal call from a reedy lake fringe or well vegetated ditch; the maximum were 3 at Kingfishers Bridge. Most records of **Common Moorhen** were received from WeBS counts; these organised monthly counts of birds at the wetlands across the country provide an invaluable data resource to map and follow trends at national, regional, site or species level. **Common Coot** were also mostly recorded during WeBS counts with thousands present on the county's open water including Grafham Water (2006, 1290), Fen Drayton Lakes (1203, 1479) and Needingworth GP (566,551). The **Common Crane** family of 2 adults and 1 young bird remained along the Nene Washes, and a recognisable bird missing its right foot was present from 9th to 17th Oct. Four possibles were seen along the River Ouse at Huntingdon on 23rd Sep and a single flew over Ferry Meadows on 12th Oct.

The autumn wader passage of 2010 will not be noted for its volume of birds. There was little suitable habitat away from the usual wetlands, and none of the farmland flooding that has made temporary wader hotspots in the past. Juvenile **Little Plovers** were seen in early Sep at Isleham Water Meadows, and 2 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 4th Sep. **Ringed Plovers** were more widely recorded, with 8 at Paxton Pits on 21st Sep, 3 at Kingfishers Bridge on 2nd Sep, and ones and twos at 3 further sites. **European Golden Plovers** steadily built up in numbers throughout the period with just one

triple figure count in Sept of 130 at Kingfishers Bridge. Higher counts were received during October from Wilburton (1000), Brampton (200), Trumpington (162), Turves (150), Wicken Fen (150), Berry Fen (100) and Dry Drayton (100). **Northern Lapwing** follow a similar pattern with large numbers returning to Ouse Washes (2000,3478), Nene Washes (130,700) and lower numbers at many other sites. Two **Grey Plovers** flew over Kingfishers Bridge on 28th Sep, and up to 3 were present on the Ouse Washes from 24th to 30th Oct.

Calidris sandpipers were scarce, with just 3 juvenile **Little Stints** reported, at Paxton Pits on 21st Sep, Ouse Washes on 25/26th Sep and Fen Drayton Lakes on 17th Oct. **Curlew Sandpipers** peaked with a flock of 13 juveniles at Paxton Pits on 19th Sep and 2 had been present the previous day. A bit of mud fringing the pools at the Ouse Washes attracted up to 4 birds at the end of Oct. In contrast **Pectoral Sandpipers** were well represented with juveniles at the Ouse Washes on 12th Sep, Paxton Pits on 14th Sep and 2 there on 18th and 19th, up to 3 at the Ouse Washes on 25th/26th Sep, and finally one was seen at the Ouse Washes again on 31st Oct. **Dunlins** were reported from 8 sites with only one double figure count of 10 at the Ouse Washes on 26th Sep.

Ruff built to some reasonable numbers on the Ouse Washes; 110 there on 12th Sep were probably passage birds, but the 75 present on the 25th Oct were likely to be birds that will remain for the winter. Elsewhere numbers were generally in single figures, but 41 at Isleham Water Meadows on 23rd Sep was a good count. Single **Jack Snipe** were recorded during October at the Ouse Washes, Fowlmere and Barton. **Common Snipe** were widespread, being reported from 18 sites with peaks at Ouse Fen (99 on 26th Sept), Ouse Washes (70 on 7th Sep), Woodwalton Fen (40 on 10th Oct), Fen Drayton Lakes (32 on 10th Oct), Fen Drayton GP (34 on 12th Oct), Needingworth GP (32 on 10th Oct), Isleham Water Meadows (26 on 8th Sep) and Nene Washes (25 also on 8th). An unusual **Woodcock** record was of a bird that flew into a kitchen in Cambridge on Oct 8th. **Black-tailed Godwits** were thin on the ground, with 6 at Fen Drayton on 10th Oct the highest count received. Likewise **Curlews** were mostly seen as singles on the Washes, with 3 on the Ouse Washes on 12th Oct.

Two **Spotted Redshanks** flew over Fen Drayton Lakes on 6th Sep, and these or 2

others were at Grafham Water the same day. At the Ouse Washes 4 were seen on 7th Sep and a single there on 24th to 26th, and at least one was seen at Kingfishers Bridge on 18th Sep. **Common Redshanks** were not widely recorded, with 12 at Grafham Water on 31st October the highest count. In contrast, **Common Greenshank** were regularly recorded with 1-3 birds at many sites; 14 on the Ouse Washes on 7th Sep and 6 at Grafham Water on 4th Sep were the highest counts. **Green Sandpipers** have a protracted migration period and seem omnipresent during the late summer and autumn at wetland sites; 7 at Cam Washes on 3rd Sep, 6 at Grafham on 4th Sep and 5 at Kingfishers Bridge on 30th Sep were the highest counts. The elegant **Wood Sandpiper** is a much scarcer migrant; a single on the Nene Washes on 6th Sep, 2 at the Ouse Washes on the 7th, and a further bird there on the 24th represented this year's passage. A **Ruddy Turnstone** took up residence at Grafham Water from the 2nd to 9th Sep, and the highest count of 4 **Common Sandpipers** was received from the same site on 19th Sep.

The 24th September saw an exceptional passage of skuas along the River Nene at Foul Anchor, north of Wisbech, where 42 **Great Skuas** including flocks of 9, 11 and 15 were recorded. Five **Arctic Skuas** and 3 **Pomarine Skuas** finished the show, although 3 **Arctic Skuas** were seen later in the day at Grafham Water, and 2 at Paxton Pits. The 25th saw a continuation of the strong north westerly winds thought to encourage the south westerly movement of skuas from The Wash overland towards the Severn Estuary. Four **Great Skuas** were seen at Foul Anchor and a single arrived at Grafham Water and remained until 31st Sep; a different bird was seen there on 10th Oct.

Just a single **Mediterranean Gull** was reported at Maxey GP on 12th Oct. Grafham Water hosted a juvenile **Little Gull** frequently from 5th Sep through to 2nd Oct with 2 on 24th Sep. A juvenile **Kittiwake** at Ferry Meadows on 16th October completed the smaller gull interest. The common larger gulls flocked to the usual tips and roosts and were joined by a few **Yellow-legged Gulls** at Fen Drayton, Grafham Water, Milton and Long Drove, Cottenham, and a **Caspian Gull** was at Kingfishers Bridge on 26th Oct. A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** at Grafham Water on 24th Oct sets a new earliest county record.

Seven **Sandwich Terns** were seen on 24th Sep at Foul Anchor during the seabird passage, and also 4 **Black Terns**, an **Arctic Tern** and 2 **Common Terns** there were the last reported of the year. There was a healthy and prolonged migration of **Black Terns**, with birds seen at many wetlands; however Grafham Water held birds regularly from 4th Sep until the 4th Oct. On the 22nd Sep an impressive 200 or so **Black Terns** arrived mid evening; they showed very well over the water, but having fed a while, they promptly departed. The observer had taken many photographs of the birds, and when looking thorough the images found that there had also been a juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** present. Luckily for the rarity seekers there had already been a less fleeting visit by a juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** to Grafham Water, one being found on 10th Sep and remaining until the 13th.

Visible migration observations revealed 606 **Wood Pigeons** over North Hill, Haddenham on 21st October, and counts of 700 at Wicken Fen and 300 at Ouse Fen in late October reflect the winter abundance of this species in the Fens. **Collared Doves** don't usually flock in such numbers, so 120 near Kingfishers Bridge on 31st Oct were notable. **Turtle Doves** were last reported on 12th Sep, when 4 were at Ouse Fen, and the last **Common Cuckoo** was a juvenile at the Ouse Washes on 19th Sep. **Barn Owls** were widely recorded and **Little Owls** were also present in their favoured haunts across the county. **Tawny Owls** become more vocal into the winter months and calling birds were recorded in both rural and suburban areas. A **Long-eared Owl** was unfortunately found dead at Block Fen on 20th Oct, and Short-eared Owls were seen at Fen Drayton Lakes, Ouse Fen, Ouse Washes and Woodwalton Fen.

The last **Common Swift** was seen on 22nd Sep heading south over Stretham. A **Common Kingfisher** at Catchwater, Little Thetford was the first there for 4 years, and many others were reported brightening up riversides, lakes and ponds. A **Eurasian Wryneck** found its way into a ringer's mist net at Pymoor on 14th Sep and was still present the next day. A **Green Woodpecker** was observed trying to get into a swift box in St Ives on 30th Sep, and ground display was seen between 2 birds at Toft on 26th Oct. A **Lesser-spotted Woodpecker** was seen at Paxton Pits on 27th Sep.

Skylarks moving overhead are a feature of many October mornings; this visible migration was evident on 11th October when 40 flew over

Cambridge, and 69 were counted at North Hill, Haddenham on 21st Oct. *Hirundines* were on the move throughout September; few **Sand Martin** records were received, but 850 **Barn Swallows** moving over Fowlmere on 21st Sep were notable, and the last of the season was noted at Stuntney on the 29th Oct. **House Martins** still had 2 broods in nests at the end of September in Shepreth, and the last was seen at Little Shelford on 18th Oct.

Tree Pipits are hard to connect with as a passage migrant and a bird heard twice at Mepal on 9th Sep was likely to have been the same bird seen at Sutton Gault the same day. Another was reported over Fen Drayton Lakes on 18th Sep. Lots of **Meadow Pipits** were reported, many as migrant or passage birds; the largest numbers were at Nene Washes (100 on the 9th Oct) and at Grafham Water (70 on 7th Oct). Five **Rock Pipits** arrived on 9th Oct (3 at Ferry Meadows and 2 at Grafham Water), remaining at both sites for a couple of days. **Yellow Wagtails** were present in large post-breeding numbers on the washlands; 450 at the Nene Washes on 6th Sep and 100 at the Ouse Washes on the 3rd Sep were the peaks. The last of the year were 2 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 31st Oct. **Pied Wagtails** were noted roosting in the reedbed at Ely BF where up to 120 birds were recorded. Eleven **Bohemian Waxwings** were reported from mainly urban environs during the last four days of October and with many arriving along the east coast it looks like we will enjoy a "Waxwing winter".

Single **Common Redstarts** were reported from 7 sites from 2nd Sep to 2nd Oct, and a **Black Redstart** at Old Weston on 10th Oct was the sole record during the period. **Whinchats** peaked at the Nene Washes with 4 on 6th Sep and 3 were seen at Fen Drayton Lakes on 8th and Ouse Fen on 12th Sep. The Nene Washes also attracted **Stonechats**, with 6 on 24th Oct, but Fen Drayton and Wicken Fen were the only other sites reporting birds. **Northern Wheatears** trickled through the county with 21 birds reported, 4 at Over on 11th Sep being the highest count.

There was an abundance of coastal **Ring Ouzels** in fall conditions during the period, and 7 were reported during October including 2 along the Witcham ridge and at least 3 at Fowlmere. Winter thrushes were also arriving at this time; the thin notes of nocturnal **Redwings** were heard from 25th Sep and the first chattering **Fieldfare** passed over Over on 17th Sep.

In contrast to their vibrant and vigorous springtime arrivals warblers seem to just ebb away imperceptibly in the autumn. **Whitethroats**, **Lesser Whitethroats** and **Garden Warblers** had all moved through by the end of September. The last **Sedge Warbler** was recorded on 4th Oct at Ouse Washes and the **Reed Warbler** at Woodwalton Fen on 31st Oct, although late, would have to go some to beat the latest county record at the Ouse Washes on 12th Dec 1987. However a **Willow Warbler** seen at Ferry Meadows on Oct 30th is now the latest county record ever. **Chiffchaffs** were recorded in dwindling numbers right through to the end of October and on the last day of the month a **Siberian Chiffchaff** was ringed at Wicken Fen. Also from the east a **Yellow-browed Warbler** joined **Goldcrests** moving through a garden in Murrow on 29th Sep inviting the pleasant daydream, "How would that look in my garden?" **Goldcrests** were seen in some numbers after many months of scarcity, and **Firecrests** were found at Abbotsley on 9th Oct and 2 at Fowlmere on Oct 30th.

Single **Spotted Flycatchers** were seen through September with 3 being the highest count at Great Eversden on 3rd, but there was just one **Pied Flycatcher** (at Little Wilbraham Fen on 25th Sep). Eight sites reported **Bearded Tits**, which may now have secured more than a toe hold as a breeding species within the county. **Blue Tits**, **Great Tits** and **Coal Tits** started to frequent gardens and feeders as the autumn progressed, and **Marsh Tits** and **Wood Nuthatches** were recorded at their regular woodland sites.

Handsome and scarce, **Great Grey Shrikes** are brilliant birds to watch and short stayers were found at Fen Drayton Lakes on 15th Oct and near Chatteris on 24th Oct. **Jays** were evident throughout the autumn making regular flights back and forth between copious food supplies and winter food stores. The other notable corvid records for the period involve **Ravens**; a single was reported coming to roost at Fen Drayton on 28th Sep and a pair was seen over Melbourn on 24th Oct.

Common Starling roosts are an impressive sight and numbers at Fen Daton built to 8500 something odd has just happened here by the 30th Oct. 70 **House Sparrows** in Stuntney was the peak count and **Tree Sparrow** records were notable by virtual absence. 106 **Chaffinches** passed over North Hill, Haddenham during

visible migration counts on the 21st Oct. Many records of noisy, migrating **Bramblings** were received; those that lingered included 50 at Southey Wood on 18th Oct. A flock of 140 **Goldfinches** at Fen Drayton Lakes on 10th Sep were sure to have charmed the observers, and in an autumn with good numbers of **Eurasian Siskin** moving around, 250 at Southey Wood on 18th Oct was an excellent count. Five sites recorded **Common Linnet** flocks 150 – 200 strong, hopefully indicative of a healthy breeding season. Migrant **Lesser Redpolls** were widely recorded in small numbers with double figure counts at a couple of favoured woodlands. A flock of 8 **Common Crossbills** was located in Upton Wood at the start of October.

Nationally a feature of the autumn has been an unusually early and pronounced invasion of **Lapland Buntings**; as a result the earliest county record now stands as 4th Sep when a bird was reported flying over Fen Drayton Lakes. A further 4 birds had been recorded by the end of October and it is likely more will be found. Familiarising oneself with the distinctive but subdued, rolling trill frequently given by flying birds will be the best way to locate one of these over your patch. **Corn Buntings** tend to flock in the winter months; 40 at Ouse Fen on 12th Sep was a healthy number and 16 at Trumpington were considered unusual for this site, but a flock of 200 on wheat stubble and sugar beet at Fowlmere in late September was not unexpected.

Fence hoppers and avian houdinis included a red and blue **Macaw sp** at Hemmingford Grey and Godmanchester. Waterfowl included a roaming **Wood Duck**, a **Bar-headed Goose** at Ouse Fen, and the **Ross's Goose** still commuting betwixt Wicken Fen and Kingfishers Bridge. A range of hybrid geese and ducks were also recorded including a Ferruginous type at Kingfishers Bridge on 10th Oct.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Duncan Poyser, assisted by Doug Radford.

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ONE THAT GOT AWAY.....

Richard Patient

We've all had them. Half seen glimpses of birds that were not common ones. Flickers of things that should not be there, and all too quickly really were not there. Whatever anyone else says, friends over a pint in the pub or members of a records panel, you know what you saw but you just don't have quite enough to prove it. My latest such incident occurred a few weeks ago, and I have only just got to the position where I can bring myself to write about it. However, having mentioned it to a few regular birding contacts they all said they would like to see the full story in print. So, here's my painful tale of the latest 'one that got away'...

On 10th October I set off for the hour long drive to Woodwalton Fen (WWF) full of hope and expectation. The wind had been from the east for several days, and it seemed to me that anything was possible. With friends reporting numerous thrushes and Bramblings arriving 'in-off' the sea in Norfolk the conditions certainly were promising. Over the years I have visited WWF hundreds of times, most frequently in search of redpolls. It is my personal belief that birds arriving from the east follow the Norfolk coast westwards, and then move off inland. It is of course also possible that birds arrive from the north too, having followed the Lincolnshire coast southwards into the Wash. With WWF being an oasis of mixed deciduous woodland habitat within a suitable geographic area of fenland 'desert' it seems logical that birds will find it during appropriate conditions. Indeed in the past I have managed to locate Wryneck and Yellow-browed Warbler here after autumnal easterlies, lending a little support to this theory. Although the 10th was clear and sunny this was no obstacle – while such conditions may be suboptimal for grounding coastal migrants it is my experience that this may not matter too much when looking for 'filter downs' - and it is certainly makes for more pleasant meandering.

Sometimes it can be so slow here that barely a bird name makes it as far as the notebook, and I cannot recall a single unusual bird that I have found here without spending at least a couple of hours searching first. Today proved to be no exception. Eventually I located a nice flock of continental Song Thrushes gorging on sloes. Shortly afterwards a 'hoo-eet' call was too disyllabic for a Common Chiffchaff, and soon the expected Common Redstart hopped into view – a welcome year bird for me. A few small flocks of Redwings and a couple of Bramblings added to the air of expectation – migrants were clearly present. A quick pause for some refreshments, and then at c16:00 with maybe an hour left of decent sunlight, IT happened.

As I turned a corner I heard a 'skeeze' call. "Olive-backed Pipit, that's nice" I thought casually. Perhaps I should explain a little further. Over the last decade I have been fortunate enough to spend a number of months birding in Asia, and have gained experience there of Olive-backed Pipit (OBP) of both *yunnanensis* and *hodgsoni* forms. I have camped with OBP's on their breeding grounds and on their wintering grounds, and have also had the pleasure of watching them in company with Paul Holt, a seriously sharp birder, as hundreds of migrants passed south over the Chinese coast. I remember discussing with Paul his opinion on distinguishing OBP and Tree Pipit on flight call in areas where either is possible. His response was that (at that time anyway) he was not completely confident of always telling them apart by call alone. To my ear at least I think that a typical OBP sounds purer and less buzzy than a typical Tree, but I certainly would not name one on call alone, especially if Paul wouldn't! It was however safe to say that the WWF bird was undoubtedly one of these two species based purely on the call. Sadly I don't remember the Cambridgeshire breeding Tree Pipits (they last nested in 1989), although I was birding at that time. My records of this species in the county – eleven of them – all refer to single birds on migration, all located initially by call, and only one of which I ever saw perched.

Anyway, back to the story. When I remembered that I was in Cambridgeshire, not far eastern Asia, I frantically scanned about for the source of the vocalisation. All too often I cannot pick up high flying passerines, but today I thought my luck was in as I saw a suitable shape flying past me, low down against a backdrop of trees. Raising bins swiftly I saw a tantalising glimpse of a greenish back, and definite white outer tail feathers, in addition to a small pipit shape. Better still it was flying towards a small isolated bush – surely I couldn't be that lucky?! However it seemed it was going to be my lucky day – the bird flew along and perched handily on top of the bush. There were just two snags – the

bush was still full of leaves meaning I had to find the correct line for viewing, and I did not have my telescope with me as I had been suffering from back ache, so I had to close the gap between us. Hurrying cautiously I drew closer and anxiously peered into the foliage. Where had it gone? Then there it was facing me, a mass of bold breast streaks and malar splotches. It sat looking at me for a while as if daring me to note as much detail as possible, and then casually dropped into the bush.

I was a bit of a mess now. I was very close to ringing the news out there and then as a definite OBP, but felt then, and still do, that I did not quite have enough to prove it, especially given such brief views. Trying desperately to compose myself I tried to force my mind to remain calm – but it was difficult. The overwhelming desire was to run at the bush and make the bird move so that I could see it again, but I would be sure to lose it. Faced with difficult birds in the past the best solution has tended to be to wait patiently, difficult though this may be at the time, and indeed the occasional careless move in the past has cost me dearly when searching for migrants. In the current situation, with very long grass surrounding the bush, but nice clear cut paths and leaf stacks nearby, and no obvious way of the bird flying away unseen, surely it was only a matter of time...An hour later realisation was dawning that the bird really had got away. Presumably when I saw it drop it had gone to the bottom of the bush and then sneaked away out of view along the ground amongst the long grass.

So, what had I actually seen on the bird? When facing me in the bush it somehow for all the world recalled a miniature Redwing. Detail noted included a combination of a short but obvious white supercilium behind the eye, obvious malar patches, an isolated white spot at the rear of the ear coverts, bold black streaking on the breast continuing more narrowly on to the flanks, greenish unstreaked back, and underparts whiter than I associate with a standard Tree Pipit, which usually shows a pale apricot wash at least to the breast. Which features of OBP did I fail to see? The yellowish-buff area forward of the eye, the black spot by the pale ear coverts spot, the narrow black line above the white supercilium, and the tertial pattern. This was a result of a combination of the angle of the view, and viewing only being with 8x binoculars.

As well as still being an official national rarity in Britain, and a potential first for the county, Olive-backed Pipit is exceptionally rare inland anywhere in Britain, with nearly all the handful of previous inland records having been in winter. If only I had been a bit closer to the bush when it initially perched, if only it had sat still for a bit longer, if only I had managed a photograph which may have revealed more details (I was literally seconds from getting one). If only... .

PS The bird was searched for next morning for five hours, but with no sign of it. Indeed the other migrants present the previous day all appeared to have continued on their migration.

PPS As I write this I have just enjoyed one of my best ever trips to WWF – Arctic Redpoll, Siberian Chiffchaff, Ring Ouzel and Firecrest being the highlights. However this followed a spell of south westerlies, proving that my migration theory certainly has its limits, as they probably all do. That's part of the fun isn't it?



Cambridgeshire Bird Club Farming and Conservation Conference 16th October 2010

Robin Cox

The largest meeting room of Cottenham Village College was filled to capacity with over 100 Club members, farmers, representatives of the RSPB, the BTO, FWAG and many others with an interest in such a topical subject. They were not to be disappointed by excellent presentations from an array of distinguished speakers on subjects ranging from the history of farming in Britain to “atlassing” and corn buntings.

In his introduction the President of the Club set out some objectives which he hoped the conference would achieve before the end of the day. He hoped we would have a better understanding of the causes of the decline in our farmland birds, what might help them to recover, what we can do individually or collectively to help and whether there was cause for optimism in the future.

In his concluding remarks he said there was no doubt that we now have a much better understanding of the reasons for the decline in our farmland birds which was certainly due to changes in agricultural practice. More specifically, Andy Evans in his presentation had cited the widespread application of organic nitrogen fertilisers, the expansion of autumn sowing of cereals and the great expansion in growing oilseed rape. Until the Second World War the persecution of raptors had also been of great importance and, although much less now, it had not been eliminated. The banning of organochlorine insecticides had also been beneficial, though his most telling illustration he kept to the end of his talk. This was a graph showing the exponential growth of the human population which, if not curbed and ultimately reversed, will lead to apocalyptic consequences not only for farmland birds.

Chris Stoate showed the importance of non-avian biodiversity in conserving bird populations. In particular all farmland birds ultimately depend upon a healthy population of a diverse variety of insects, whether this is for feeding themselves or their young directly, or for ensuring adequate crops of fruit and berries which are only produced when there are sufficient insects of the right species to effect pollination.

In considering what actions we can take, individually or collectively, Simon Gillings left us in no doubt about the value of the BTO Atlases and participating in the current projects is perhaps the single best contribution we can make at the present time. However there are many other opportunities and initiatives to help and advise farmers about the conservation and expansion of avian diversity on farmland which the Club may wish to consider as Simon Tonkin and Elizabeth Ranelagh explained.

Gavin Siriwardena showed how winter feeding can help but it is not simply a question of putting out food. To feed a total local population, feeding patches must not be more than 500-1000m apart, very specifically comprised in terms of seed and with great attention to detail and management design. However, after much experimentation the RSPB and Natural England are now beginning to get some positive results from supplementary feeding. At the end of the day it is important that we all pull together and no one at the conference will ever forget Simon Tonkin’s hilarious video to remind them of that. (It can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG1uRRksM-I>)

If only all conservation initiatives were as simple and successful as putting up nest boxes for barn owls as Peter Wilkinson described. The population of barn owls has more than doubled since thousands of nest boxes have been put up across the country and now, for example, 75% of our healthy population of barn owls in Cambridgeshire nest in boxes. Unfortunately some, such as corn buntings as Rosemary Setchfield showed, are extremely difficult to help because, for example, of their late nesting habits in cornfields when harvesting is in progress. Government funded conservation schemes (stewardship, entry level scheme and higher level scheme), which to date do not appear to have resulted in an overall benefit in bird numbers, have substantially increased bird populations on demonstration farms.

The day ended on a positive note with Vince Lea describing the pleasures as well as the trials and tribulations of farmland surveys but also the benefits. We really can help both the birds and the farmers to restore healthy populations of corn buntings, tree sparrows, lapwings, yellowhammers, skylarks and many others though for migrants, like turtle doves and swallows, there are factors beyond our control which may pose greater difficulties. Nevertheless this conference gave me great encouragement and confidence that all is not lost, and with concerted effort and determination we really can reverse the fortunes of most of our farmland birds.

The following day conducted visits were made to four very different farms, the Countryside Restoration Trust farm at Barton, the RSPB Hope Farm at Knapwell, Park Farm Thorney and Shropshire's Hainey Farm at Soham. These interesting and instructive visits really brought to life the theme of the conference.

Vicki Harley deserves our thanks and congratulations for organising such an enjoyable and successful event. If you wish to get in touch with any of the speakers, please contact Vicki Harley.

BTO farmland bird research: www.bto.org/research/projects/farmland/index.htm

Countryside Restoration Trust: www.livingcountryside.org.uk/

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group: www.fwag.org.uk/

Fenland Farmland Bird Recovery Project: www.rspb.org.uk/fenlandfarmbirds

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust: www.gwct.org.uk/default.asp

Christmas Quiz

The Venerable P.Witt

The Venerable P.Witt, one of our most long standing of members, has once again contributed a quiz designed to prevent, or more like induce, prolonged inertia following over indulgence during the festive season. He writes: *"Whilst clearing the cobwebs, dead mice and other assorted detritus from my library, a dusty tome tumbled from the highest shelf, narrowly missing my aged, balding pate. Haply it fell open at a page pertaining to a gentleman of my erstwhile acquaintance. This set me musing on ornithologists with some connection, albeit tenuous, to Cambridge. How many can you name?"*

1. Of whom was it written: "make the boy interested in natural history if you can, it's better than games."?
2. Which naturalist, with a statue in Cambridge, had twenty species named after him?
3. Which athletics blue, with a taste for birds, catalogued the bird collection at the Zoology Museum?
4. Which Swiss born Professor of Zoology had four species named after him, two of which are now extinct?
5. Which avid collector donated his fossil collection to the Sedgwick Museum and his bird collection to the Zoology Museum?
6. Which botanist and geologist had an American species named after him, although he never saw the bird, nor even visited the USA?
7. Who visited the city to promote his book, and wrote: "Cambridge on a Sunday is places where I would suppose the basest mind must relax.....all is calm, silent, solemn, almost sublime"?(Obviously in the days before Sunday trading!)
8. Which Cambridge graduate, on observing a Resplendent Quetzal, pronounced it "Unequaled for splendour among the birds of the New World" – and promptly shot it?
9. Another graduate, who was so wealthy he had no need to earn a living, travelled widely collecting birds and has a medal jointly named after him?
10. Who attended the Cambridge High School, was Curator of Ornithology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and has a hybrid warbler named after him?

A clue: nine of them have species named after them

From the Chairman

Peter Herkenrath

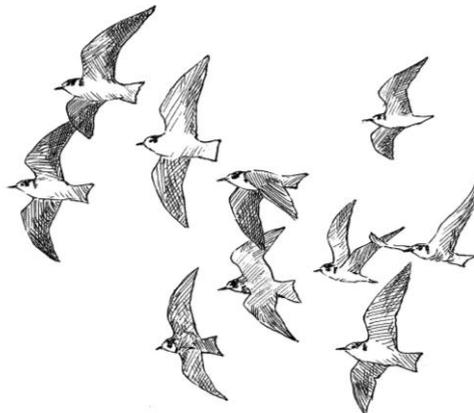
I have recently learned about the demise of the Manchester Ornithological Society. MOS was dissolved because there were not enough people to fill the positions. The apparent reason behind this is that the birdwatching information provided by the electronic media, the internet and paging services, has reduced the importance of the MOS to birders in the Manchester area. This is sad news not only for Manchester but for this country's birdwatching community as a whole.

Fortunately, the Cambridgeshire Bird Club is in a better position, with a range of people keeping the Club alive and moving it forward. For example, our indoor meetings are well attended and we just had a very successful conference, jointly with BTO and RSPB, on farmland bird conservation (as reported elsewhere in this Bulletin). I am not too concerned about the future of the Club but the lack of young people is noticeable. Council is looking into this problem and I welcome members' views on how to better integrate the young generation, particularly pupils and the university students.

I was sad to miss our farmland bird conservation conference as I was in Japan for my work. I attended the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), an international treaty on nature conservation and sustainable development. Over two weeks, there were intense negotiations by governments, including on a new treaty on genetic resources, on a new global target for biodiversity conservation and on financial resources to be made available to developing countries for implementing the Convention. Although the negotiations avoided a collapse – unlike the climate change negotiations in December 2009 in Copenhagen – and agreement over a variety of issues was finally achieved and widely reported in the world's media, it remains frustrating to see that, compared to other issues, so little money is made available for conservation. It seems that most governments still haven't understood that biodiversity conservation ensures not only the survival of species and habitats but also our own human well-being.

The CBD conference took place in Nagoya, which is a city with a population of more than 2 million. There are very few birds in the city centre, mainly Feral Pigeons, Tree Sparrows (replacing the House Sparrow in eastern Asia) and Brown-Eared Bulbuls. I had the chance to visit a coastal mudflat on the outskirts of Nagoya, a Wetland of International Importance, surrounded by factory buildings and a busy port. A well-manned visitor centre with excellent viewing facilities (and all information in Japanese – quite challenging) allowed for close observation of the hundreds of birds present. The range of species was remarkably similar to our coasts, with Little Egrets, Pochard, Greenshanks, Bar-tailed Godwits, Common Sandpipers and others. But seeing 9 Ospreys and several Great Knots was remarkable. The Great Knot has recently been upgraded to globally threatened after a substantial part of the world population, some 90,000 birds, seems to have vanished, following the recent reclamation and destruction of one of the most important coastal mudflats on the eastern Asian flyway, Saemangeum in South Korea. Thus, seeing these birds was a stark reminder of what we humans are able to do to the species we share our planet with. I hope that our Cambridgeshire Bird Club continues to do our little bit to honour the natural world.

I wish all members a very happy Christmas and a good year 2011 – happy birding.



Meetings of the RSPB Cambridge Local Group

Christmas Social, Meadows Community Centre, 1 St Catherine's Road, Cambridge, CB4 3XJ, Thu 9 Dec, 7pm for 7.30pm (£2 for members, £3 for non-members)

The Birds of East Anglia, a talk by Bill Baston, Chemical Laboratories, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, Wed 19 January, 8pm

Natural History Courses

The Field Studies Council (FSC) is an environmental education charity with a network of centres located in the most spectacular parts of the UK. A wide range of courses can be attended at the centres from identifying birds by sight and sound to discovering wild flowers. Courses vary in length from a weekend to a week and are offered at a choice of different levels. The course fee includes full board accommodation, transport during the course and the expert guidance of tutors. The 2011 courses are available to view at <http://www.field-studies-council.org/2011/birdsandotheranimals/birds.aspx>. Alternatively you can view a brochure at: <http://view.digipage.net/?id=natural%20history%20courses%202011&page=15>.

Cambridgeshire Mammal Group

The Cambridgeshire Mammal Group is gathering records of wild mammals within the county - it's intending to update the 'Provisional Mammal Atlas' for the county as published in 2005. Therefore it would much appreciate records of any you may come across (that even includes rabbits, foxes and mole(hills)) when out birding - alive or dead, native or introduced. Each record only needs the date, the species, the grid reference and a little location detail. There is as yet no specific deadline for records, but it's likely to be the end of 2011 for publication in 2012. A record form can be obtained from pgp1@hermes.cam.ac.uk or contact Peter Herkenrath (details on last page) - see also the Group's website at: <http://www.cambsmammalgroup.co.uk/>.

Volunteers at indoor meetings

Do you enjoy the chance to socialise with other members during the refreshment breaks at indoor meetings? Please help to make the refreshment break go well by volunteering to help with making tea, coffee, serving refreshments and washing up. If you can help at one or two meetings please contact Vicki Harley (vicki.harley@care4free.net)



FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2010/2011

INDOOR MEETINGS

Friday 10th December St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

Christmas Social

Come and enjoy mince pies and mulled wine in good company while listening to inspiring short talks by club members. Please contact Vicki Harley if you would like to give a short presentation.

Friday 14th January 2011 St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

Population limitation in migrants by Professor Ian Newton OBE, FRS, FRSE

Ian Newton has been interested in birds since his boyhood in 1950s Derbyshire. As a teenager, he developed a fascination with finches, which eventually led to doctoral and post-doctoral studies on these birds. During his career, he has published around 300 scientific papers on birds, and authored several books, including *Finches* (1972), *Population Ecology of Raptors* (1979), *The Sparrowhawk* (1986), *The Ecology of Bird Migration* (2008), and a recent New Naturalist volume, *Bird Migration* (2010). He has served as President of the British Ecological Society and the British Ornithologist's Union, and as Chairman of the Council of the RSPB. He is currently the Chairman of the Council of the British Trust for Ornithology. His talk to CBC is concerned with population limitation in migrants. He will discuss the current declines in migrant numbers, and whether limiting factors act mainly in breeding or wintering areas, or at migratory stopover sites.

Friday 11th February 2011 St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

Extreme Mothing by Paul Waring

Paul Waring will be speaking about some of his more extreme adventures with moths around the world. Paul is a well-known moth specialist, for whom moths are both a hobby and a profession. A boyhood interest developed into a zoology degree at Oxford University and a PhD about the responses of moth populations to various types of forestry management. Paul is perhaps most familiar to general wildlife enthusiasts in the UK for his regular column on moths in *British Wildlife* magazine and as senior author of the widely used *Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland*. He has appeared at many conferences, exhibitions, club meetings and field trips, and has written many hundreds of publications in the specialist journals, but tonight you will see the lighter side of all that!

FROM THE TREASURER

Kevin Harris

Thank you to all our members for your valued support throughout the year. Annual subscriptions for 2011 fall due on 1 January 2011. If you do not have a current standing order in place, please ensure that you send a cheque to me as soon as possible. If you wish to start paying by standing order, please let me know and I will send you a form (by post or e-mail).

Subscriptions for 2011 remain unchanged at:	Full	£14
	Senior/Concessionary	£10
	Student	£6

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Bruce Martin

We welcome the following new members – Ron Harold of Wistow, Colin Hothersall of Cottenham, Paul Lippett of Eaton Ford, Michela Marchi Bartolozzi of Abington, Ben Phalan of Cambridge Norman & Pauline Rushton of Fowlmere and Rosemary Setchfield of Great Cambourne.

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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 January 7th 2011

Please send records by post to: Louise Bacon by January 7th 2011

Next Bulletin due out early February 2010, covering Nov/Dec 2010

GOOD BIRDING!