

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 418



---

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

## Welcome to the September / October 2011 Edition

In this penultimate edition for the year, I want to thank all those who have contributed to the Bulletin – either regularly or as occasional article writers and artists – and especially the bird observers who send in their records bi-monthly. These records are gratefully received as they form the bulk of the systematic lists in each edition. Our bird drawing on this occasion is the second of Rob Law's that I have used – he tells that his contact address is: [thejazzlab@googlemail.com](mailto:thejazzlab@googlemail.com). The Club is now on Facebook, why not take a look at our page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cambridgeshire-Bird-Club/246564612060364>; apparently 50% of UK internet users now look at or use Facebook!

A very happy Christmas to everyone.

*From the Bulletin Editor*

*Fieldfare  
By Rob Law*



## RECENT BIRD REPORTS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2011

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records, sourced from sightings received by our County Recorder or reported on the 'What's About?' page on the CBC website.

Migration was well underway at the start of September, and with a blocking high over Europe and covering our part of England, passage was fairly straightforward, resulting in good runs of regular waders and passerines for example, but little in the way of major rarities. To the north of Britain, there were high winds and storms, which touched us briefly in the middle of September, bringing some seabirds to our county, but Cambridge saw a hot end to the month at 29.2° C. This heatwave continued into early October. Elsewhere there were floods, but October saw a continuation of a very long dry spell in Cambridgeshire, perhaps reducing the potential of some of our smaller washes to attract birds, but increasing the shoreline habitat of reservoirs and lakes. Winter thrushes arrived steadily as autumn progressed and there was a good scatter of winter raptors and owls, but relatively few wildfowl.

Whereas Grafham Water and Paxton Pits held over 100 **Mute Swans**, **Bewick's Swans** were confined to just 11 at the Ouse Washes on Oct 7th and **Whooper Swans** peaked at 45. **Pink-footed** were the only northern geese of note with 12 over Chatteris on Sep 12th. A single **Ruddy Shelduck** was seen at Grafham Water on Oct 7th, while 7 **Common Shelducks** were reported from Ouse Fen. There were 10 **Mandarin Ducks** (four pairs & two drakes) at Wimpole Hall but no records from other sites. Numbers of **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Gadwall** and **Eurasian Teal** reached triple-figures through September at a few sites but nowhere were there huge flocks even by the end of October. There were just double-figure counts of **Northern Shoveler** and single-figure counts of **Northern Pintail**. A single **Garganey** was seen at Isleham on Sep 10th.

Of the diving ducks, **Common Pochard** attained numbers of only 20-40 at good sites, while 1000+ **Tufted Ducks** were noted at Grafham Water in both months. A single **Common Scaup** was at Wicken on Oct 23rd and two **Common Scoters** at Grafham Water

on the 14th. **Common Goldeneye** started to appear from mid-Oct, with 20 by the month's end at Grafham Water where a **Goosander** was also seen on Oct 16th and 23rd. Occasional single **Ruddy Ducks** were also reported from a scatter of locations.

Autumn is gamebird season, and large numbers of **Red-legged Partridges** were noted as probable released birds at Duxford Grange (141) and Barrington (50+), while numerous **Common Pheasant** casualties adorned the M11. By contrast, smaller numbers of **Grey Partridges** were noted from seven locations, with several double-figure coveys indicating some successful breeding. **Water Rail** records came from several wetlands, with five at Wicken Fen being the peak count.

**Manx Shearwater** records came from Peterborough's CEGB reservoir on Sep 9th, Brampton Pits (Sep 13th – 14th) and the River Lark (Sep 14th), while there was a juv **Northern Gannet** on Sep 24th at Grafham Water, where there was also a regular report of **European Shag** from Sep 15th – Oct 25th.

Single records of **Great Bitterns** were reported from Wicken Fen and the Nene Washes in September, while at Fen Drayton there were two together on Oct 1<sup>st</sup>, and possibly up to three birds recorded on the reserve by the 30th. **Little Egret** numbers peaked at 13 on Sep 25th at Barleycraft GPs, with three other sites holding five or more during the period – quite a small showing compared to the spring. A **Spoonbill** was seen at Dog-in-a-Doublet (River Nene) on Sep 7th and Nene Washes on the 8th, while another was seen flying over Grafham Water on Oct 25th.

A new county record was set for **Little Grebe**, with 62 in the WeBS count at Grafham Water on Oct 16th (when there were also 185 **Great-crested Grebes**), and records of scarce grebes were restricted to just this one site – a single **Slavonian Grebe** on Oct 9th and 30th.

**European Honey-buzzard** passage was limited to a single 'probable' over Hinxton on Sep 26th and one over Paxton Pits on the 28th, closely followed by a **Rough-legged Buzzard** arriving at Ouse Fen on the 29th. That bird (or another) remained at the site through October. There was a single **Black Kite** at the Nene Washes on Oct 30th while 17 widely-spread localities had records of **Red Kite**, with a maximum of seven at Morborne Hill. **Marsh Harriers** had a similar spread of records, with a higher proportion from wetlands of course. **Hen Harriers** were first note on Sep 13th, followed by quite a gap before the main arrival in late October. By the month's end there were 1–2 at six sites. The star raptor of the period was a **Pallid Harrier**, first considered as a Hen Harrier when photographed by a less experienced observer; the photos were seen in time for observers to get to Sugley Wood (an area of rough grassland, set aside for woodland to develop next to Gamlingay Wood), by the following morning and record the bird departing. This was a juvenile bird, so not a return from previous individuals – we are becoming a regular host to this mega! **Common Buzzard** records came thick and fast through the period, but 50+ between Barrington and Duxford (about 10 km as the bird flies), and not fly-overs, shows how this species has become our most successful raptor lately. There were 10 **Osprey** records from various sites, some of which may have been the same bird seen twice on passage, e.g. Witcham and Grafham Water both on Sep 9th. **Eurasian Hobby** sightings were reported throughout September, with a maximum of just four at Paxton, but the last for the period was on Oct 7th. As these left, so further raptors joined us for the winter, with **Merlins** arriving from Sep 7th but mainly late October – a similar arrival-pattern to the Hen Harriers. A male and female were together at Fowlmere NR. **Peregrines** are now with us year-round, but few records came during September compared with October when there were eight widely-spread records.

**Common Coot** numbers started building at the larger wetlands, with 2060 at Grafham Water by far the highest count. **Common Crane** numbers continue their impressive rise, with eight seen around the Nene Washes in

mid-September, followed by smaller numbers into October.

Twenty-seven species of waders were recorded in the two months under review; the most records were received for **Green Sandpiper**, with 47 observations including 13 at Kingfishers Bridge on Sep 18th. At the other end of the scale, there were just single records of **Stone Curlew**, **Grey Plover**, **Red Knot**, **Pectoral Sandpiper**, **Eurasian Woodcock** and **Ruddy Turnstone**. It is getting harder to connect with **Eurasian Dotterel** these days, and only two records came in – one around Wimpole and one staying for two days at Ouse Fen. The flooded fields at Stretham (Chittering Farm) were a great, new attraction for passage waders, with records of 14 species including 48 **Common Snipe** on Sep 29th and a **Jack Snipe** on Oct 16th; up to 8 **Ringed Plovers** and 575 **European Golden Plovers**; 2 **Little Stints**, 4 **Curlew Sandpipers**; and the occasional **Dunlin**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, and **Ruff**. More permanent sites had their fair share of good waders too, with Grafham Water producing the greatest variety. Perhaps the most popular were the 1–2 **Grey Phalaropes** which occurred from Sep 12th to 23rd, followed by another in mid-October.

The winds that brought in the phalaropes also gave us a few other seabirds, some mentioned earlier. No skuas were reported in September, but there was an **Arctic Skua** over the Cambridge Research Park on Oct 9th and seven skuas probably of this species, over Witcham on the 19th. More amenable was the adult **Sabine's Gull** at Grafham Water, from Sep 13th to 24th, along with a **Little Gull** or two from the 14th to 29th, and a **Mediterranean Gull** adding to the Grafham scene on Sep 14th, with a different bird there on Oct 9th. Less typically, there was also one at Foxton following a plough on Oct 19th. Other scarce gulls included the rubbish tip specialists **Yellow-legged Gull** and **Caspian Gull** (also seen at some more attractive sites). The former peaked at nine birds at the Cambridge Research Park, while singles of the latter were at six different locations throughout the period. A single **Glaucous Gull** graced Dogsthorpe Tip on Oct 25th, while there were just two records – both of singles – of **Great Black-backed Gull**.

There were hardly any 'sea' terns in the period, with last dates of Sep 25th for **Common Tern** and 24th for **Arctic Tern**. **Black Terns**, however, passed through in quantity, being seen on 16 dates and at four locations, predominantly Grafham Water, where a peak of six was attained on Sep 6th. The last record was of two there on Oct 6th.

The Milton 'Maize Maze' [Rectory Farm] has probably not featured in bulletin reports before, so it now has its moment: 136 **Collared Doves** were recorded there on Oct 30th, feeding on the cut-down maize! **Turtle Doves** trickled out of the county during September, with three at Witcham on the 27th being the last record. One **Cuckoo** was recorded, at Paxton on the 10th. There was also just one record of **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, a single at Lode on Sep 4th.

A late brood of **Barn Owls** was ringed at Ouse Fen, and a scatter of other records was also received including one road casualty. **Little Owls** were only reported from five locations, but **Tawny Owls** were reported from 14. There were no **Long-eared Owl** reports but **Short-eared Owls** made a good appearance, starting with a very early bird on Sep 18th at Barton. Numbers built up from Oct 9th, with peaks of nine at Wicken Fen /Burwell Fen proving very popular – keep an eye out for these birds on any areas of rough grass this winter, we seem to be in an invasion year! A great record of a **European Nightjar** came from Godmanchester Gravel Pits on Sep 27th, the bird seen hawking at dusk, but this bird was not seen the following day.

**Swifts** were seen on a number of occasions through September, the last on the 20th, and the largest group was just five over Cambridge. **Kingfisher** records came from 18 sites, with three at Paxton Pits and also Fen Drayton being the high counts.

Anything can turn up in autumn, but this year there were rather slim pickings in terms of 'southern' species, so a reported **Hoopoe** at Hemingford Abbots on Oct 2nd was all the more special. One **Eurasian Wryneck** was reported, sadly as a road casualty at Steeple Morden. A single record of **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** from Wicken Fen on Oct 18th is

all that came to the Club's attention during the period – things are getting desperate for this little treasure.

Pairs of **Ravens** were seen at five separate sites, with singletons from a further three. Clearly this species is likely to be our next coloniser. One pair was seen in tumbling display flight. **Goldcrests** were first noted at Wicken Fen on Sep 15th, described as the first of a good arrival for Sep / Oct. **Marsh Tits** were reported from six locations; most notably the full census of Monks Wood revealed 65. There were plenty of records of **Bearded Tits** all coming from a set of five sites. The peak was 25 at Ely Beet Pits. Otherwise it was single figure counts throughout the period.

**Skylarks** started gathering into flocks toward the end of September, with 81 at Comberton being the high count, and there were also reports of passage birds overhead. The hirundines were also preparing for their longer journeys, with 500 **Sand Martins** at Fen Drayton on Sep 4th, and passage counts such as 272 **Barn Swallows** and 23 **House Martins** past Mepal in just half an hour on the 4th; and 300+ **Barn Swallows** and 200+ **House Martins** south during three hours at Barrington Quarry on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Passage of both these latter species continued into October with last dates of 29th and 19th respectively. **Cetti's Warbler** records came from 10 locations – when there were notes accompanied the records, they were mostly singing males. Adding all the sites' autumnal peak-counts together allows us to estimate 35 males for the county. The highlight of the warbler records was a single **Yellow-browed Warbler** at the RSPB's Grange Farm on Oct 18th. Other than that, it was all about our regular breeding species slipping away, with last dates of Sep 15th for **Lesser Whitethroat**, Oct 2nd for **Common Whitethroat**, and Sep 18th for **Willow Warbler** – all fairly run-of-the-mill.

**Grasshopper Warbler** records came only from Wicken Fen and Stretham and **Sedge Warblers** performed little better, with one at Wicken and six at Holt Island, St Ives, including juvs on Sep 30th – a very late breeding attempt. Later still, there were

**Eurasian Reed Warblers** through to Oct 26th with six at Fen Drayton.

**Starling** flocks were building up during the period, and most excitingly, roost sites were performing well, with for example, 2000+ leaving the Ouse Fen reed bed on Oct 23rd. On the 30th, separate roosts of 1300 at Bolton's Pit, Cambridge and 4000 at Fen Drayton were reported, to be targeted by Sparrowhawks.

**Ring Ouzels** were restricted to two singles in mid-Oct at Witcham and at Wicken. As they left, so did the winter thrushes come in – first the **Redwings** with one at Whittlesey on Sep 18th, then **Fieldfares** with five at Waterbeach on Oct 9th. On Oct 16th 10+ **Continental Song Thrushes** and 30+ **Blackbirds** arrived at Fowlmere NR. Oct 13th was a good day for **Fieldfares**, with 20 at Barton, 100 at Hardwick Wood, 390 at Ferry Meadows and bigger numbers were seen as the month wore on. Redwing passage included 40 at both Bar Hill and Cambridge, flying west or south-west on Oct 9th, and 200 at Devils Dyke also on the same date. The high count of 500 came from Haslingfield on Oct 14th. A couple of **Mistle Thrushes** were mixed in with one of the Fieldfare migrant flocks, but the high count was of 24 at Six Mile Bottom.

A peak count of six **Spotted Flycatchers** came from Kings Ripton on Sep 1st; the last record was on the 14th.

There was a brief slight passage of **Common Redstarts** with three singles in early September followed by two at Fen Drayton on the 18th. **Whinchat** and **Northern Wheatear** passage was rather more pronounced and prolonged, with records of both from numerous locations: five Whinchats at Wicken on Sep 3rd and 4th, and four at the Nene Washes on the 20th were notable, while the Wheatear records included five at Fowlmere on Sep 4th, six at Nene Washes on the 5th and ten at Aldreth on the 9th with the last two on Oct 26th. **Stonechat** individuals can be breeders, passage migrants or winter visitors in our county and their status has fluctuated recently with a series of mild winters helping them expand their range, only to be knocked back again by the last two harsh winters. During this period, there were just five

records, starting with one at Paxton Pits on Sep 23rd, a peak of two at Castor on Oct 12th, and with one at Ferry Meadows on the 19th finishing the run, so it may be that all were on passage. Keep a look out for any wintering birds and report them in!

Melbourn came up with the best sparrow records, with flocks of 35 and 40 **House Sparrows** in different gardens, and **Tree Sparrow** flocks of 6 and 11 as well. The best of the rest was 10 Tree Sparrows at Long Drove, Cottenham.

Thirty-three **Yellow Wagtails** were recorded on the Mepal 'Vis Mig' watch on Sep 11th, though none were seen on the 25th. There were larger groups there (80+) on the 13th, feeding with the cattle; and 87 at Paxton Pits on the 7th were the peak of the period, but records came from a wide spread of other locations too, finishing with seven at Ouse Fen on Oct 2nd. Reports of **Grey Wagtail** were thinly spread.

A single **Tree Pipit** record came from Grafham Water on Sep 23rd, but **Meadow Pipit** passage was noted with 80 then 91, at the Ouse Washes at Mepal on Sep 11th (at the 'Vis Mig') and then on 25th resp. One or two **Rock Pipit/Scandinavian Rock Pipits** came to Grafham Water from the end of September.

There were half a dozen **Brambling** records, mainly just of singles, with two in a private garden in Croydon being the maximum; all were in October. Several double-figure flocks of **Eurasian Siskins** were noted, e.g. 25 at Whittlesey on Sep 4th, 27+ at Paxton Pits on 14th, and 38 at Fowlmere NR on the 18th. **Lesser Redpolls** were also widespread though in smaller numbers, but just two **Twite** were found, at Grafham Water on Oct 11th. **Common Crossbills** came from nine locations throughout October, with a maximum of 16 at Bevills Wood. The highlight of this family however, must be the two **Hawfinches** which were found late on in the day and then probably roosted at Fowlmere on Oct 21st, with another recorded at Upton Wood on the 28th.

Peak counts of both **Yellowhammers** (46) and **Reed Buntings** (24) came from the well-

watched Westfield Farm site in Comberton, while **Corn Buntings** managed a maximum of 22 at Ouse Fen. A single **Snow Bunting** came at the end of October, also at Ouse Fen.

In addition to the usual waterfowl escapees, exotica records included two reports of singles of the much admired **Lilac-breasted Roller**, at Abbot's Ripton and Balsham (surely the same escaped bird – enquires lead to confirmation that one was known to have escaped locally – Ed.); plus four **Reeve's Pheasants** at Stow-cum-Quy.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Vince Lea, assisted by Doug Radford.

**Contributors:** Colin Addington, John Austin, Louise Bacon, Rowena Baxter, Peter Bircham, Malcolm Busby, James Cadbury, Ade Cooper, Steve Cooper, Pete Cornish, Michael Crosby, Ade Cooper, Steve Cooper, Robin Cox, Ian Dawson, Mark Eaton, Eugene

Flanz, Mike Foley, Paul French, Mark Gregory, John Harding, Keith Harris, Mark Harrison, Andy Harrold, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Peter Herkenrath, David Hollin, Derek Holman, Jonathan Hook, David Hopkins, Andrew Knights, Colin Kirtland, John Le Gassick, Colin Kirkland, Vince Lea, Jim Lawrence, Christina Leadlay, John Lindsell, Dan Lupton, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Andy Massey, Matthew Mellor, Dave Millard, David Milne, Mark Missin, David Nation, Dave Palmer, Alan Paterson, Gavin Paterson, Garth Peacock, Robert Pople, Michael Price, Doug Radford, Mike Redshaw, RSPB (several reserves, & HQ), Tony Roberts, Stephen Roughley, Martin Runchman, Nigel Russell, Clive Sinclair, Nigel Spowell, Jeff Stanning, Brian Stone, Andrew Taylor, Chris Thorne, Alan Wadsworth, Mark Ward, P M Warrington, John Wells, Chris Went and Mick Whitehouse, Terry Wood, Christoph Zockler. Also, records were taken from the CBC website and Cambirds, with special thanks to **Tony Roberts**. And thanks to all other contributors to the CBC database.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHRISTMAS QUIZ!

The compiler of the previous quizzes, the Venerable P. Witt has reluctantly decided that with advancing years he is no longer able to undertake this arduous task. He can still devise questions but alas is unable to remember the answers! Fortunately his young grandson, Perry Green, and a keen student of the classics, has stepped into the breach with some linguistic posers. His girlfriend, Anna Gramm, has also offered a contribution, thinking that it would be fun to stimulate our members. For mental exercise after the festive celebrations she has added some questions of her own. Answers will be given in the next bulletin.

*These are the literal translations of the scientific names of which birds?*

1. Laughing Gull
2. Black-headed Gull
3. Black-tailed Gull
4. Puffin
5. Cave dweller
6. Kernel breaker
7. Resounding Bull-head
8. Black-headed Warbler
9. Sardinian Warbler
10. Bald Raven
11. White-bellied coast dweller
12. Peak-headed Marsh dweller
13. Money changing leaf watcher
14. Red-necked anus foot
15. Little winnowing fan
16. Chattering silk-tail
17. Starry Bull
18. Sentinel butcher
19. White-rumped ocean runner
20. Coot-footed like a Coot

*Find the birds (all are on the British list)*

1. Big dune tern
2. Tell a ticker
3. Dirty grape, Reg?
4. A pale ricicle
5. Gulp in bland ant
6. Ed pulled raw worms
7. I strangled sour cooler
8. Damp pipits, under where?
9. Teeny grows
10. Able cat rolled a wren
11. Ram her, Harris!
12. Hailing gent
13. Hit the rat, ow!
14. Dated tribe
15. Damn trains!
16. Target it
17. Comment, Ron!
18. Er...plod lamely
19. Large wig, Ay!
20. Lose red rat, how?

**\*\*\*\*\***

**From the Chairman**

*Peter Herkenrath*

Perhaps readers will share my impression that there are way too few young people active in birdwatching today. Young people are a rather rare sighting in the field or at our meetings. As we all know too well, there is so much distraction for young people in our computerised world and it is harder to get them out and discover the wonders of the natural world. In our county, the Wildlife Trust and the RSPB as well as other organisations do a good job in mentoring kids into the discovery of nature and wildlife. I am sure we could also do more toward this cause in our Club.

It is not least for that reason that the Club has recently launched the Bob Scott Prize for Ornithological Research in Cambridgeshire. The prize is in memory of our former Chairman Bob Scott, who was influential in British nature conservation, having worked for the RSPB for several decades on nature reserves and many other issues. Bob was Chairman when I became Council member and his friendly but determined way of chairing the Club has become a lasting memory of mine. Bob was very keen on research so the idea arose to establish a prize in his name. We would like to encourage everyone – of any age - but in particular young people to undertake a piece of research on birds in our county and to submit it for the prize. The research does not need to be high-tech or long-term; it does not need to refer to a particular rare species; simply developing some methodology for watching a particular species or birds at your local patch, drawing conclusions and comparing them to similar findings in the literature would be sufficient. There is also lots of potential for desk studies using the enormous database of records of our Club.

I would like to ask you whether you could encourage a young person to start watching birds in a more systematic way. I really hope that our prize will be a success and stimulate more ornithological research in Cambridgeshire. I also hope that the prize will help us to get more young people involved in birdwatching and caring for our environment. You can find more information on the Bob Scott Prize in the last Bulletin and on our website. I am particularly grateful to the Department of Zoology of Cambridge University and the Department of Life Sciences of Anglia Ruskin University for their promoting the Club among students. Please get in touch if you have any question about the prize or would like to seek advice on possible research projects.

The days have now (in late November) become shorter, most leaves have fallen and most summer migrants have left us. I was delighted the other morning to see a pair of Blackcaps feeding on ivy berries in my garden - possibly wintering birds from central Europe. This morning I heard and saw several Redwings and some Meadow Pipits on the move over Girton. Bird migration has never

ceased to fascinate me. Now I look forward to discover wintering birds at the excellent reserves in our county or simply in the wider countryside, be it Lapwings and Golden Plovers in the vast fields of the fens, winter ducks on our lakes, or Marsh Tits and Nuthatches in our woodlands. I wish you all happy birding during the festive period, a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

### **Reports from other bird clubs**

The Club exchanges the annual Cambridgeshire Bird Report with annual reports of other bird clubs. These reports are deposited at the Cambridge Central Library at the Lion Yard where they are available to members to view on showing the annual programme card of the Club. The library can be contacted at 0345 045 5225.

### **Cambridge Conservation Forum Annual Symposium**

The Club is a member of the Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF), which will hold its Annual Symposium 2012 on Thursday Jan 5th, 09.00 – 17.30 at the Judge Business School, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1AG. The programme includes a range of issues, from nature improvement areas to marine nature conservation, and from gaming and conservation to breeding birds in the Cambridge Botanic Garden. The booking fee is £35 before 16th December and £40 afterwards and includes tea/coffee, lunch and a post-symposium wine reception. Club members are welcome to attend. Please see <http://www.cambridgeconservationforum.org.uk/> or contact Peter Herkenrath for the programme and a booking form.

### **A message from the Wildlife Trust: Voluntary bird surveyor (Ecology Groups)**

Join your local Ecology Group and help monitor local reserves using your skills to identify birds by their songs. Monitoring the structure of our nature reserves is of great importance to the Trust and just one way of approaching this is to focus on the wildlife using that structure. We are looking for new volunteers to join our existing teams, the Ecology Groups, to help carry out breeding bird transects annually, gathering data to sample the birds breeding in woodland and scrub habitats. Reserves currently in need of monitoring include Brampton Wood, Cambourne, Gamlingay Wood, Grafham Water and Lattersey. Essential skills required include the ability to identify birds by their songs and calls. If you would be interested in joining us or would like further details about the Ecology Groups please contact me, Henry Stanier, Ecology Groups Officer at The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH / email [ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org)

**\*\*\*\*\***

### **A summary of on-going work by Stuart Newson, BTO, who gave a talk to the CBC in November entitled ‘Are Deer to Blame for Woodland Bird Declines?’**

*Thanks to Nigel Willits, RSPB, and also Beds BTO Regional Organiser, who wrote this summary, dated 8th November.*

Deer may be affecting some bird species on far larger scales than previously appreciated, new research has found. The study, published in the British Ecological Society's Journal of Applied Ecology, provides evidence that the populations of several woodland birds fare worse in areas that have high, rather than low, numbers of deer.

The research led by Dr Stuart Newson from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) applied new methods of analysis to large national bird and deer monitoring data. The study focused on eleven woodland bird species in lowland England and their relationships with three widespread and abundant deer species: Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*), Roe (*Capreolus capreolus*) and Fallow (*Dama dama*). The eleven bird species depend on low, dense vegetation in woodland and scrub, and are therefore potentially vulnerable to browsing by deer which tends to reduce this vegetation. There was evidence that increases in deer have been associated with large-scale population declines for five of the eleven bird species. Of these, it was suggested that the impacts of deer are likely to have

been greatest for two species of conservation concern, the amber listed Nightingale and the red listed Willow Tit. These two birds have declined by 54% and 65% respectively over the last ten years.

Currently deer management aimed at reducing the impacts of deer typically takes the form of excluding deer through the use of various types of fencing and / or culling of deer. According to Dr Newson, "Our results emphasise the importance of developing co-ordinated national strategies for minimising deer impacts. With numbers and ranges of deer predicted to expand even further, it is suggested that such strategies should be targeted on areas that continue to support concentrations of species that are especially vulnerable to over-browsing by deer."

This study is not suggesting that deer are the only, or even the main, factor driving woodland bird declines; many other factors are potentially implicated. Nonetheless, these findings build on earlier experimental work carried out on Nightingales by the BTO that has shown that deer can reduce habitat quality for this species. "More widely, growing evidence from other parts of the world suggests that increases in deer abundance may be depressing population levels of breeding woodland birds that are associated with dense understorey habitats." This study is important because it indicates that deer browsing may affect some bird populations on a large scale.

Stuart Newson, Alison Johnston, Anna Renwick, Stephen Baillie and Robert Fuller (2011), 'Modelling large-scale relationships between changes in woodland deer and bird populations' was published in the Journal of Applied Ecology on 4 Nov 2011.

To view the abstract <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2664.2011.02077.x/abstract>

### **From the Research Committee**

#### **An atlas of Cambridgeshire's birds**

All of the vital leg-work (fieldwork) done by many of you over the past four years is now starting to take shape as the forthcoming County Atlas, which will be published in addition to the national BTO atlas, and at a finer resolution. The Research Committee has been collating the data and starting to produce maps, to decide how best to present the knowledge of distribution which we have gained. Two dedicated volunteers have trawled the Club's records and looked for gaps in the data submitted to the atlas and have found lots of records which hadn't been recorded by atlasers – these will be included in the final data. We will also include data gathered by the club for specific surveys such as the screaming swifts, spring raptors, breeding owls etc. Several folk have come forward with offers of help writing one or more of the species sections – all these accounts are planned on being fairly short, with maps and a summary of the species occurrence being the main part of each account.

The Atlas will also have introductory sections on how we gathered the data, and the main findings, including some broad summaries of changes since the last atlas. A section on habitats in the county will be followed by the main species accounts. An additional bonus will be the inclusion of a disc reproducing the pages from both the previous Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire breeding atlases from 20 and 25 years ago; both of these have long been out of print. We hope you are looking forward to this book being available later in 2012, and if any of you have a particular species or group of species which you have a particular liking for and would like to be involved in writing the species account for it, then please get in touch.

*Louise Bacon*

### **From the Membership Secretary**

We welcome the following new members – Andrew Chapman of St Ives, Roger Coey of Dry Drayton and Gary Thornton of Fowlmere.

*Bruce Martin*

### **From the County Recorder**

With the 2011 year rapidly closing to an end, I would like again to express my thanks to Mark Hawkes for his help and support while he transferred the work of Recorder to me. I would be grateful if members who will soon be thinking about compiling their bird records for the whole of 2011 might complete the task as soon as possible in January. You can check which records the Club would like to be sent at: <http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/Records/guidelines.pdf>. I shall shortly be adding the 2011 'Work-in-Progress' list to the CBC website. This will list those bird sightings for 2011 that require a full description to ensure that the records make it into the next Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Bird Reports, and I give thanks to those who have had the time to submit their 'rarity' or 'confusion' species records already. There are still observers of other records whom I will be contacting by email to ask if they want to provide a description to the CBC Records Committee (the CBCRC). The ideal way to present a description is to use the official CBCRC form, which can be downloaded at: [http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/Records/CBC\\_Rarities\\_Form.rtf](http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/Records/CBC_Rarities_Form.rtf)

*Mike Foley (see details on back page)*

### **From the Treasurer**

I would like to repeat my thanks to all our members for their valued support throughout the year. Annual subscriptions for 2012 fall due on January 1st 2012. If you do not have a current standing order in place, please ensure that you send a cheque to me in time. 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 2012 remain unchanged at:	Full	£14
	Senior/Concessionary	£10
	Student	£6

*Kevin Harris (see contact details on back page)*

### **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

*Vicki Harley*

**Friday 13th January, St Johns Community Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge**  
**The Biggest Twitch by Ruth Miller & Alan Davies**

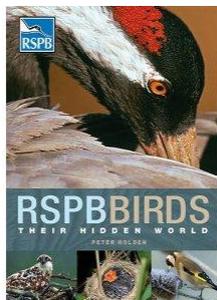


Everyone has dreamt of doing it but very few have actually done it. Packed up their lives and lived their dream, leaving behind the safe and secure for the freedom and excitement of doing exactly what they've always wanted to do. This is the tale of two people who did just that, the tale of a world record-breaking journey around the globe. Alan Davies and Ruth Miller had reached a point in their lives when they wanted something more and knew that if they didn't go for it now, they probably never would. They could find no good reason for not undertaking this fantastic journey and once they'd started telling people about their dream, there was no going back. As keen birdwatchers, both with a love of travel, it seemed obvious to combine these two passions in an odyssey of discovery to see the world's birds. As the plan developed, they soon realised that this journey could become something more: a world record breaking attempt to see more bird species in a single year than ever achieved before. With an itinerary covering more than twenty countries and a target bird list of over 4,000 species, it was never going to be easy. Could they do it? Follow the ups and downs of their birding year in this fast-paced adventure of birds, people and places. Anyone with an interest in travel, wildlife or human relationships will be gripped by this epic tale. Alan Davies was Site Manager of the RSPB reserve at Conwy on the North Wales coast, and oversaw its development into a popular visitor attraction as well as a haven for wildlife. Ruth Miller used to be the RSPB's

Head of Trading. Together they now run The Biggest Twitch, their Llandudno-based birdwatching tour company.

### **Friday 10th February, St Johns Hall, Cambridge**

#### **Birds: a Hidden World by Peter Holden**



A closer look at the behaviour of some of our common, and not so common, wild birds and other wildlife – some of the secrets that most books won't tell you, and some that can only be told after the watershed! This talk is based on Peter's new book with the same title. Illustrated with his own photos, this is a wide ranging talk on British birds and some other wildlife from the point of view of how little we know about them and some of the amazing discoveries we are making about their lives – which are much more complex than we first thought. Some of the sexual activities of birds, including infanticide and the Cain and Abel syndrome, make this

more suitable for an adult audience! The talk includes some new material of photos taken behind the scenes of the Natural History Museum – in the nests and eggs department. Peter Holden was a member of the RSPB Headquarters staff for 40 years, and while running the RSPB's junior membership he devised the ever popular Big Garden Birdwatch. He has written more than a dozen books, including the RSPB Handbook of British Birds and the RSPB Handbook of Garden Wildlife. A new book on bird behaviour is due in spring 2012. He is a regular lecturer on cruise ships and runs courses for Madingley Hall, Cambridge University and for the Bedford Education Retirement Centre. He was awarded an MBE for services to Nature Conservation in the 2009 New Year's Honours List and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

## **RSPB CAMBRIDGE LOCAL GROUP – FIELD TRIPS / INDOOR MEETINGS**

### **RSPB Cambridge Local Group – Indoor meetings and field trips**

Indoor meetings – all at St John's Community (Church) Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge, 7.15 pm for a 7.30 pm start.

- Wednesday January 18th: A Celebration of Birds, by Peter Holden
- Wednesday February 15th: Urban Birder, by David Lindo

#### Field trips

- Saturday January 7th: Holkham Woods & beach, and Roydon Common, meet at Lady Ann Drive at 10.00 am
- Saturday February 11th: Cley Marshes, meet at car park at 10.00 am

For more details and bookings, please see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/cambridge/events> or call Andrew Camps, 01638 741018.

## **LINKS ON THE CLUB'S WEBSITE TO VIDEOS POSTED ELSEWHERE**

We are happy to include on the Club's website links to videos of an appropriate nature, posted on other websites such as 'YouTube'. Please use the contacts on the photo blog (<http://cambsbirdclub.blogspot.com/>) for providing the information.

## **WILD BIRD FOOD**

Members of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club can buy wild bird food at a 10% discount from Rectory Farm, Landbeach, CB24 6DA (on the A10 1.5 km N of the A14). Just show your most recent Bulletin or Annual Report as proof of membership. Just one more benefit of joining CBC.

## Club Contacts

### **Chairman**

#### **Peter Herkenrath**

19b Pepys Way, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PA  
Tel: 01223 276553  
Email: peterherkenrath@yahoo.co.uk

### **Secretary**

#### **John Harding**

3 Cotton's Field, Dry Drayton, CB23 8DG  
Tel: 01954 780777  
Email: johnharding44@googlemail.com

### **Treasurer**

#### **Kevin Harris**

37 Vicarage Meadow, Stow-cum-Quy,  
Cambridge, CB25 9AL  
Tel: 01223 813085  
Email: treasurer@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

### **County Recorder**

#### **Mike Foley**

141 Shelford Road, Trumpington,  
Cambridge, CB2 9ND  
Tel: 07954 585953  
Email: recorder@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

### **Meetings Secretary**

#### **Vicki Harley**

30 Margett Street, Cottenham, Cambs, CB24  
8QY  
Tel: 01954 250340  
Email: vicki.harley@care4free.net

### **Bulletin Editor (from January)**

#### **Vince Lea**

236 Wimpole Road, Barton, Cambs, CB3 7AE  
Tel: 01223 263962  
Email: vincelea@btinternet.com

### **Other Council Members**

#### **Ken Hook**

The Coach House, Scotland Road, Dry Drayton,  
Cambs, CB3 8BX  
Tel: 01954 782407  
Email: kahook@aol.com

### **Research Officer**

#### **Louise Bacon**

236 Wimpole Road, Barton, Cambs, CB3 7AE  
Tel: 01223 263962  
Email: louise.bacon2@btinternet.com

### **Membership Secretary**

#### **Bruce Martin**

178 Nuns Way, Cambridge, CB4 2NS  
Tel: 01223 700656  
Email: bruce.s.martin@ntlworld.com

### **Website**

#### **Chris Quy**

5 Guyatt Court  
Burwell, Cambridge, CB25 0DP  
Tel: 01638 743204  
webmaster@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

### **Ringling Secretary**

#### **Michael Holdsworth**

4(a) Cavendish Avenue, Cambridge, CB1 7US  
Tel: 01223 476643  
Email: m.holdsworth@ntlworld.com

**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](http://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: Mike Foley by January 7th 2012, and send records by post to Mike Foley by January 5th.**

**Next Bulletin due out late January / early February 2012, covering November / December 2011.**

# GOOD BIRDING!