

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 423



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

Welcome to the July / August 2012 Edition

We have a packed bulletin this issue, with reports on the raptor watches, conference and field trips from September, another great event from the Club. I will use this space to mention two BTO activities that are underway at the moment, neither of which have anything to do with birds of prey but both are very appropriate to the coming season! Firstly, there is a winter thrushes survey which anyone can participate in. The idea is to conduct a couple of walks (minimum) between now and mid-April. You can either choose your own site, or register for one of the 'core squares' which have been pre-selected at random and will help the BTO to work out if self-selected squares have an inherent bias for better thrush habitat than random patches of the countryside. For more info go to <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thrushes> and to request a core square email one of our BTO regional reps Mark Welch for 'old Cambs' (m.welch@nhm.ac.uk) or Derek Langslow for Huntingdonshire (derek.langslow@btinternet.com). Secondly, the BTO are also interested in berry feeding by birds, such as which berries birds prefer, which berries are available, and how long they last. This survey can be done from the comfort of your own garden. For information on this survey go to <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/about/background/projects/berries>. These types of surveys are a great way to make your bird watching count, with everyone's contribution of a few hour's birding adding up to a big national picture of what our birds are doing.

From the Bulletin Editor



Black-tailed Godwits by Graham Easy

RECENT BIRD REPORTS July / August 2012

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.

The first weeks of July continued with the wet, cloudy and cool summer, but we then got a period of improvement, with some hot sunny spells in late July followed by an 'average' August. By then, of course, it was too late for most breeding birds to attempt to replace broods lost to floods, chills or lack of food in this memorably poor year. Those who study insects will know it has been poor for things like bees, butterflies, moths and beetles. This, in turn, has led to difficulties for birds searching for insect food. Of course, a few things have enjoyed the wet cool conditions, mosquitoes and slugs to mention a couple, and it will be interesting to see what the various studies reveal when all the data is finally analysed.

The top birding site during the period was the Ouse Washes, where spring floods receded to leave shallow pools, lush vegetation and soft soil. It appealed to a variety of wetland birds, both rarities and good numbers of regulars.

Starting with the Ouse Washes, the only **Whooper Swan** recorded came from the Mepal end on Aug 1st, and there were 115 **Mutes** on the 26th, only beaten by Grafham Water with 174 on their Aug WeBS count. Of the various breeding geese in the county, **Greylag** had the largest counts, with several sites in the hundreds, whereas **Canadas** were generally in double figures and **Barnacle** and **Egyptian** in single figures, although up to 30 of the latter were seen at Earith GP. **Common Shelduck** bred successfully at a number of sites.

Mandarin were seen at 3 sites in small numbers. **Wigeon** numbers were in double figures at the Ouse Washes and Fen Drayton lakes; **Gadwall** went over 150 at Fen Drayton, with 66 at Paxton Pits, 50 or so at the Ouse Washes, and 33 at Grafham Water; **Teal** hit 65 at Grafham and 52 at Wicken Fen, **Mallard** topped three figures at 4 sites and were widely reported, including late broods, whereas **Pintails** were only seen on one occasion, with 4 at the Ouse Washes on Aug 27th. That site also did best for **Garganey**, with a record breaking county total of 92 on Aug 27th being smashed again by the 30th, when 127 were counted! One or two were recorded elsewhere as well. **Northern Shovelers** were rather more widely distributed, with 25 at Godmanchester, 21 at Fen Drayton and 16 at Grafham Water.

A few **Red-crested Pochards** were found around the county, with 3 at the Ouse Washes the peak; **Common Pochard** bred at Berry Fen and the Ouse Washes, and good counts were received from several locations, such as 108 at Ouse Fen, 75 at Block Fen GP, 58 Colne Fen GP and 30 at

Bradley Fen. **Tufted Duck** bred at Fowlmere for the first time since 1994, and breeding reports came from 6 other sites, while big WeBS counts came in August from Fen Drayton (993) and Grafham (657). Rarer species were represented by a **Greater Scaup** at Grafham Water on 22nd Jul, 3 **Common Scoters** at Paxton Pits on 8th Aug, and 10 **Goosander** over the Ouse Washes on 28th Aug. Bookending the ducks with another 'alien', **Ruddy Duck** were recorded from 2 locations including one breeding record.

Game birds breed poorly in wet summers and only one mention of young **Red-legged Partridge** was received, while for **Greys** there was a suggestion of late nesting at Cambourne, when an adult carrying an eggshell was seen on Jul 3rd – presumably from a recently hatched clutch. **Common Quail** were heard at 4 sites, with 2 at Thriplow for several days in July.

Great Cormorants may not have been troubled by the floods, with the colony at the Ouse Washes certainly producing young. There was a sighting of **European Shag** on 16th July in Cherry Hinton. Single **Great Bittern** sightings came from 5 sites, some of which in the Peterborough/ Nene Washes vicinity may have been the same bird moving around; another area with one or two was Fen Drayton/Ouse Fen. At the Ouse Washes, 2 were seen on Aug 17th. Perhaps the freezing winters of late have reduced our local population slightly? Plenty of **Little Egrets** were reported however, especially from the Ouse Washes; 233 were counted on the Cambs section on 21st Aug, and 250 estimated on the 26th. These numbers were the peak of a gradual build up which started mid Jul with 60 on the 15th and 80 by the 26th. Nowhere came close to such counts, with Nene Washes and Berry Fen holding 32 the closest but they were widespread (20 sites). **Grey Heron** also did well at the Ouse Washes, with counts of 88 and 140 being reported. They presumably made searching for **Purple Herons** at this site a little bit tricky; an adult from the end of July to mid Aug was followed by a juvenile in late Aug, which also visited Witcham gravel pits. The excitement at the Ouse Washes continued with a **Glossy Ibis** from the 24th Aug to the end of the month at least. Grebes may have been less affected by floods than other water birds, with late breeding attempts possible well into the period. Double figure counts for **Little Grebe** came from several sites, while Grafham Water & Fen Drayton held over 100 **Great-crested** by the time the August WeBS counts were conducted. Once again, we had

potential breeding activity by **Black-necked Grebe**, with one regularly present at a site.

Two observers saw a **Honey Buzzard** at King's Dyke NR on 5th Aug, with one observer's description including details of an assortment of birds mobbing it. **Red Kite** records came from 14 sites, with a max of only 3 seeming rather low compared to recent years, although this is typically a quiet period for this species. By contrast, **Marsh Harrier** records came from 22 localities; 8 at the Ouse Washes, 7 at King's Dyke and 6 at Wicken Fen were the largest counts. There were also 3 records of **Hen Harrier** and 2 of **Montagu's** for lucky observers. **Sparrowhawks** were widely reported including breeding observations, and one was released from entanglement in a garden fruit cage. **Common Buzzards** were even more widespread, at 50 localities; highest counts were 5 at Paxton Pits and 4 at Westfield Farm, Comberton. Sightings of **Ospreys** were made at 10 locations, a very good showing, and some of these involved 2 birds (Grafham on 8th Jul and Godmanchester on 20th Aug). Some sites held birds for several days or were visited by different individuals – e.g. at Grafham there were Ospreys on 7th, 8th, 10th and 13th Jul and again on 27th Aug. They were also recorded on 4 dates at Paxton Pits and 3 dates at Maxey GP. There were only 2 indications of breeding by **Hobbies**, but a very wide spread of sightings were made across the county, although no high counts were made. There were far fewer reports of **Peregrine**, but, perhaps because they were using human sites and are so obvious when going about it, breeding reports came from 2 locations as well with successful fledging at both.

Six sites held **Water Rails**, with breeding confirmed at two of these by the presence of downy young. The even more elusive **Spotted Crake** was regularly recorded calling at Wicken Fen in the first half of July, with further reports from the Ouse Washes and oddly from a wheat field by the guided busway at Longstanton on Aug 1st. Just a single **Corn Crake** was reported at the Nene Washes, where the wet spring did little to help the reintroduction programme. Better news for the **Common Cranes** there, where 2 pairs were seen, one of which had an attendant juvenile; there were sightings of 2 in flight over Wicken Fen and Witcham Gravel pits on Aug 31st.

An impressive 29 species of waders were recorded during this autumn migration period. Only 4 of these species were confirmed as breeding – **Oystercatcher**, **Little & Ringed Plovers**, and **Redshank**. It was probably a bit late for **Lapwing** breeding activity to be observed, while **Snipe** and **Woodcock** are too secretive to be easily confirmed as breeders, but all three were recorded during the

period. Lapwing numbers built up into winter flocks such as 1000+ at the Ouse Washes.

Rarities are what birders hope for at this time, and a **Long-billed Dowitcher** clearly heads this list, a county first. Found on the 7th Jul at Ouse Fen, it was seen again the following day. Other American species included an **American Golden Plover** at the Ouse Washes on 21st Aug, which moved to Chain Corner the following day, and several **Pectoral Sandpipers** starting with one at Ouse Fen again on 14th Jul when one was also recorded at the Ouse Washes at Earith, where further singles came on the 27th Jul and 3rd Aug – how many different birds were involved?

A few other scarce waders, from this side of the pond, made an appearance; one **Stone-curlew** was seen at Landbeach, towards the end of July, and a **Dotterel** was seen at Gamlingay in mid-August, both showing that you don't need to go to wetlands to see good waders. There were 1-2 **Red Knot**, **Sanderling**, **Little Stint** and **Curlew Sandpipers**, and more impressive numbers of **Whimbrel**, **Curlew**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Green**, **Wood** and **Common Sandpiper**, and **Ruddy Turnstone**. We started to see some large build-ups of the regular wintering waders. **Golden Plover** reached 500+ at Ouse Fen, there were **Dunlin** at numerous sites including 22 at Grafham Water, and over 50 **Ruff** were at the Ouse Washes where there were also 90 **Black-tailed Godwits**.

On Aug 29th an **Arctic Skua** was at the Ouse Washes, with 2 the next day at Grafham. The reservoir also held 1 of the 2 **Mediterranean** and 4 of the 5 **Little Gulls**. **Yellow-legged Gulls** were more widespread and numerous, peaking at 57 at Paxton Pits on 31st Aug, and 4 **Caspian Gulls** were recorded, including a Polish ringed bird. **Sandwich Terns** were seen at Grafham Water and Paxton Pits. There were **Common Tern** records from over 30 locations, with a peak of 90 at Fen Drayton, and many breeding reports. A few **Arctic Terns** passed through in Aug, some of which were juveniles, and there was a single **Little Tern** at Block Fen. The first **Black Tern** appeared at Grafham Water on 11th Aug, with numerous records through till the 23rd when one was at the Ouse Washes. Peak counts were at Grafham, with 18 birds present between the 16th and 18th Aug.

Stock Pigeon records came from several locations, including some breeding sites, but Colne Fen consistently had double figure counts, the only site to get to this sort of quantity, with 55 on the 14th Aug the peak. There were far more records of **Turtle Dove** than **Collared**, presumably as concern for the migratory species mounts as their numbers continue to dwindle. The majority of

records were of single birds, with only Fowlmere and Paxton Pits hosting as many as 4 birds. At the latter site these were a pair plus 2 young on the 20th Aug, while at Fowlmere there were 4 territories. In total, 23 sites held Turtle Doves. A random check of the archives showed that in 2006, the bulletin for this same period noted: '*21 sites with typically 1-4 birds. Paxton Pits held 11 pairs*'. Showing a similar local plight, though fortunately doing better further north in Britain, **Common Cuckoos** were recorded from just 9 locations; however, many birds may already have left by July, and calling is largely reduced to just the females. Three of the four BTO tagged Norfolk males had left before the end of June for example. The majority of our records came from Wicken Fen, where there were 3 on 12th Jul. The latest was at Soham on Aug 18th.

Barn Owl records came from 13 locations, all single birds. **Little Owl** records came from fewer sites, although there was a pair at Sutton and a trio at Litlington, indicating breeding attempts. **Tawny Owls** were heard at several locations, as pairs re-assert their territorial boundaries after the chicks have gained their independence. A single record of **Long-eared Owl** was received, but **Short-eared** records were relatively widespread for the time of year, coming from 6 locations all in July.

As the so-called summer faded away our **Common Swifts** departed, some of them probably wondering why they had come! The majority of records came in Jul, including the peak count of 1400 at the Ouse Washes on the 19th; birds continued to be seen to the end of Aug however, including in urban areas, indicating some successful pairs. **Common Kingfisher** records came from 24 locations with some breeding noted. The Ouse Washes not only had the highest count of Kingfishers (4) but also of **Green Woodpeckers** (7)! One member has been privileged enough to host a **Lesser-spotted Woodpecker** coming regularly to roost in his garden; the only one noted in the period. This male overnights in holes in an old plum tree, occasionally excavating a new roost hole as the tree continues to decay and crumble.

Being close to a tip explains why Godmanchester GP hosted the highest counts of 11 **Magpies** and regularly around 50 each of **Jackdaw**, **Rook** and **Carrion Crow**. There was also a **Common Raven** there on Aug 20th, with other singles of this species, still a county rarity, earlier in that month elsewhere, at Wendy on the 10th and Fenstanton on the 15th.

Three locations reported **Goldcrests**, but breeding was noted at one of the sites, close to the Botanic Gardens in Cambridge; 2 young fell out of a high nest, but at least one juvenile was later seen with parents. The low numbers may reflect our run of cold winters. **Marsh Tit** records came from 4 sites

(mainly wetlands), with 1 caught and ringed at Grafham Water. **Bearded Tit** records came only from Wicken Fen, where they were present throughout the period in reasonable numbers, the peak being 12 on the 28th Jul.

Sugley Wood is in it's infancy; the Wildlife Trust are hoping that woodland will develop on this site, adjacent to Gamlingay Wood, and bird monitoring is in place to see how it develops over time. Ten **Sky Lark** territories show the site is currently dominated by open grassland.

The Ouse Washes came top for **Sand Martin** numbers, with 100 on Jul 30th, but 30 at Block Fen was also significant, with several nest holes in use there. Sixty **House Martin** nests at Addenbrookes Hospital shows how important the site is. Two hundred or so were seen at both Paxton Pits and Quy, towards the end of the period.

Cetti's Warblers were found at 8 sites, most consistently at Wicken Fen, where a count of 7 on the 1st Jul was the highest. Breeding was proved at Fowlmere for the first time. By July, **Long-tailed Tits** were in family parties where breeding had been successful, with 20 noted on the 1st at Sutton Gault. It's not always easy to tell migrants from local birds, but a singing **Chiffchaff** in a Barton garden on 9th Aug was deemed to be on the move, as this is not a regular species here. The day before, an adult and juvenile **Willow Warbler** in the same site were also just briefly passing through. This latter species had rather fewer records and lower counts, than the former, reflecting their changing fortunes. **Lesser Whitethroat** records came from 9 locations, but breeding activity was noted at only 2 of these. It's good that some observers retain the habit of noting things like 'carrying food' after the atlasing regime. **Garden Warbler** records came only from wetland sites, though a good spread of them.

Blackcaps were more widespread, including a garden breeding record from Mepal and a passage bird noted, in the same Barton garden that had the *Phylloscopus* warblers mentioned above, on the 8th Aug. **Grasshopper Warbler** records came from 4 locations, with regular reports from Wicken (singing) & Bradley Fens (including a fledgling), one singing at Chippenham Fen and a juvenile seen at Monks Wood. Double figure counts of **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers** came from Wicken & Bradley fens, but there were records from a good range of other sites as well, with Fowlmere having 60 of the latter species.

During July there was a record of 2nd brood **Starlings** at Stretham and evidence of post-breeding flocking, with 39 at Buckden GP, along with a range of other records. There were also a few breeding records for **Blackbird** and **Song**

Thrush which are more typically known for late summer broods, and presumably took advantage of the soft soil conditions. Post-breeding groups of **Mistle Thrushes** numbered 12 at Little Shelford and 13 at Fowlmere.

Twenty-three locations had reports of **Spotted Flycatcher**, with several of these involving breeding birds. Others were perhaps on passage already, such as the single in a Girton garden, a first there. One or two **Nightingales** were heard calling at Paxton Pits, up to the late date of Aug 25th, but more unusually one was singing at Woodwalton Fen on 18th Jul – very late for this spring songster. A **Black Redstart** was singing in the Peterborough area on 17th Jul, while a female was seen in Little Shelford on the 26th. The latter record was a nice garden tick to go along with the Lesser-spotted Woodpecker! Two **Common Redstarts** were recorded, both at Fowlmere; a 1st winter male on 19th Aug and a female on the 28th. **Whinchats** were rather more widely available, starting with a single at Ouse Fen on the 8th Jul, and finishing with 2 juvs at Paxton Pits on 26th Aug, with 7 other birds between, coming from another 3 locations. A reasonable spread of 18 **Wheatear** records were received, but all of single birds. The only site with **Pied Flycatcher**, however, held 2; Grafham Water on the 27th Aug.

The only decent count of **House Sparrows** was 30+ coming from Wicken Fen. **Tree Sparrows** were far less frequent, with a couple each at the Ouse & Nene Washes and 5 at Rampton the only records.

There was a fair spread of **Yellow Wagtail** records, particularly from fenland, and flocks started to be noted towards the end of Aug, with 40+ at the Ouse Washes and 110 at Grafham Water. **Grey Wagtail** records were far less numerous. Just 2 passage **Tree Pipits** were recorded, 1 at Ferry Meadows on Aug 19th, and another from a St Neots garden on

the 27th. At Sugley Wood there were 7 **Meadow Pipit** territories while 4 territories were at Mepal Airfield.

The recent decline in **Greenfinch** numbers, attributed to *Trichomonas*, is causing concern among many, which may mean that people are more likely to report this bird now than in previous times; 34 locations were reported to have this species, a considerably higher number of returns than we received for **Chaffinch**. The highest Greenfinch count was 60, a flock feeding on Oilseed Rape at Kneesworth. A larger flock of **Goldfinches** was seen at Bradley Fen, with 150 estimated. A single **Siskin** was recorded, at Ramsey Mereside on 13th Jul, but more disappointingly only one **Lesser Redpoll** was seen, at Histon on Jul 4th. This species remains firmly in the 'former breeder' category. A nice set of **Common Crossbill** records were received, 24 in all, some coming from the same site on different dates which may or may not relate to the same birds; this irruptive species is hard to follow exactly. The best count was 18 at Orton Brimbles on the 5th Jul, but records came from many and varied locations, including urban settings.

All 3 resident buntings were recorded from a widespread set of locations in small numbers; the highest number was a meagre 15 **Yellowhammers** while **Corn Buntings** came from the least number of sites, just 11 places.

The only notable escape/exotica records concern **Northern Bobwhite**. This small American gamebird, between Quail and Partridge in size, was heard at Elsworth on Jul 9th, then it or another spent time in Barton from 7th to 15th Aug, travelling widely around the fields and gardens there. Both records concern a male, it's distinctive disyllabic note is supposed to recall the name 'Bob White'.

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

Contributors: Colin Addington, Richard Allison, David Avis, Louise Bacon, Rowena Baxter, Andy Bayes, Guy Belcher, Jenny Brightwell, Chris Brown, David Collins, Ali Cooper, Ade Cooper, Gillian Cox, Robin Cox, G Davies, Tim Dee, Ian Dickerson, Steve Dudley, Stuart Elsom, Mark Evans, Mike Everett, Mike Foley, Don Gardener, A Gomez, David Griffiths, Dennis Hall, Kevin Hand, James Hanlon, Ron Harold, Kevin Harris, Jeff Harrison, Mark Hawkes, Peter Herkenrath, Michael Holdsworth, David Hollin, Peter Holt, David

Hopkins, S Jarrett, Colin Kirtland, Andrew Knights, Jim Lawrence, Vince Lea, Christina Leadlay, John LeGassick, Tony Mallyon, Monica Marks, Owen Marks, Bruce Martin, Gwen Martin, Paul Mason, Andy Massey, Duncan McNiven, Matthew Mellor, Dick Newell, Dave Palmer, Richard Palmer, John Parslow, Rob Partridge, Gavin Paterson, Richard Patient, Mark Peck, Doug Radford, Duncan Ritchie, Tony Roberts, RSPB, Ann Scott, Stuart Sharp, Bob Smith, Nigel Spowell, Simon Stirrup, Brian Stone, Richard Thomas, Hugh Venables, Mark Ward, Peter Wells, Chris Went.

From the County Recorder

It has been a long-standing tradition for the Club to acknowledge individual observers who send in their sightings. We include a list of contributors at the end of the systematic section in order to thank the birders whose records were sent in for the period covered by the bulletin. The Club's preferred

way to receive records is by spreadsheet direct to the Club (see <http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/records.html>), but some may send records by post. Especially in the past year or so, there is an increasing number of observers who post sightings, and many of these may not be club members. Sightings are posted often on bird forums such as Cambirds and Peterbirder, and in BTO BirdTrack, and some birders may not even live within the county.

It has been decided that the large list of contributors needs to be reduced in size as currently it is taking up a lot of space and at the present rate can only get longer! The best way forward is to continue to show full names (rather than initials that are listed in the Annual Report), but to restrict the names to those who are Club members. This change only affects the bulletin – the observers' list that appears in the Annual Report will contain all birders whose records are in the year's database. If you have sent in a sighting directly to me for the July / August period and you are a member and your name is not on the list, please contact me at recorder@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk. All records are gratefully received from members and non-members alike.

From the Chairman

At this year's AGM, we awarded the first Bob Scott Prize for Ornithological Research in Cambridgeshire. The prize is intended to stimulate ornithological work in the county, doing field work or analysing and writing-up existing data, for example from our database. We would in particular like to encourage young people, be it pupils, students or undergraduates, to go a little bit further than just watching birds. Any paper or research report that clearly states aims, methods, results and conclusions, discussed in the light of existing publications, by non-professionals is eligible (the research should have finished not longer than three years ago). If you know of anyone who might be eligible, or who could be asked to undertake such research, please make them aware of the Bob Scott Prize. More information is available on our website <http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/prize.html> or from me. I'd also be happy to provide support to anyone thinking of starting, or writing up, a research project. Like last year, we are advertising the prize at the two universities in Cambridge, members of which are part of the panel that will select the winner. The prize will be awarded again at the 2013 AGM. The winner will receive a reward of £100 and a certificate. Submissions should be sent to me by 15 January 2013.

While writing these lines, autumn is in the air. I see hirundines and Meadow Pipits heading south over Cambridge during the day. Twice in the last weeks, a migrating Spotted Flycatcher graced my garden. The autumn migration has already brought many remarkable birds to the county and I hope that all of you had the chance to see migrants, be it in your garden, the local wood or at our major bird watching sites.

On 22 September, I took part in our Raptor Watch, the results of which will be reported elsewhere. I enjoyed the company of 14 other birdwatchers, some of them newcomers, at Fowlmere, hosted by the RSPB. The splendid weather allowed us good views of several Common Buzzards and the highlight was a Marsh Harrier, which migrated south high up in the sky. Earlier in September, we had our first indoor meeting of the autumn, a very informative talk about the decline of the House Sparrow by Will Peach of the RSPB. And we 'enjoyed' a first for the Club (as far as I know), when a fire alarm sounded so we had to evacuate the building! We have a packed programme for our members this autumn and winter, following the Raptor Conference (see the separate report in this Bulletin). There are three meetings in addition to the regular monthly meetings held on the second Friday of each month. These extra events are: in October (on wildlife trade); November (on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper); and January (focusing on bird identification). I hope that many of you will be able to attend these meetings.

As you know, our Club completely depends on volunteers. Today I'd like to extend my thanks to Howard Slatter, who has stepped in to help with managing the Club's database, taking some burden off the County Recorder.

I wish all of our members a happy late autumn birding.

Peter Herkenrath

Peter Conder

Peter Conder was Chairman of the Cambridge (now Cambridgeshire) Bird Club from 1975 to 1979, then Vice-President from 1981 to 1986 and President from 1987 until his death. He played a significant role and is well remembered by many members. He and three others were held in a prison camp during WW II and studied the birdlife in their surroundings as a way of coping. The story of their time and their subsequent activities to become powerful forces for nature conservation after the war was told in a BBC Radio 4 play in April, and will soon be available in a book written by Derek Niemann, who will also be giving a talk on this subject to the Club in autumn 2013.

The book will be available from Amazon from November at

<http://www.amazon.com/Birds-Cage-Remarkable-Prisoners-Captivity/dp/1780720939>

Raptors: Conservation and Ecology” – Cambridgeshire Bird Club Conference, 29 September, Cottenham Village College

The Club organised its third conference in collaboration with BTO and RSPB, with raptors being the subject this year. With members of a variety of other organisations attending and more than 120 bookings, this was the best attended conference so far. Robin Cox, the Club President, opened the conference, paying tribute to the former Chairman of the Club, the late Roger Clarke, who remains well known for his research on harriers. Simon Gillings (BTO) provided an overview of the status of raptors in the UK from 40 years of BTO data. His presentation allowed a preview of the sophisticated maps of the forthcoming national breeding and wintering bird atlas, showing the increase and range expansion of species like Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Marsh Harrier and White-tailed Eagle, while species like Kestrel are declining. And there is a new breeding species for the UK: Harris’s Hawk! Malcolm Nicoll (University of Reading) reported on a review of scientific studies of the impact of predation on bird populations in the UK. A rather complex picture emerges, with sometimes incompatible findings. Unlike with raptors, the prey of mammalian predators and corvids is generally insufficiently known. Malcolm pointed to a likely increase in competition between raptors in the future, with the recent increase in the populations of large raptors.

Ed Drewitt (freelance ornithologist) introduced the astonishing world of urban-dwelling Peregrines from his research in Bristol. Like in many parts of Europe, British Peregrines have over the last decades increasingly moved into cities, for reasons insufficiently understood. Using the artificial lighting, they often hunt nocturnal avian migrants, resulting in a wide spectrum of bird species being preyed on. Urban Peregrines provide a unique opportunity to raise awareness of urban people for wildlife. Another falcon, the Kestrel, is not doing well in Europe and the UK, as Staffan Roos (RSPB Scotland) demonstrated in his presentation. The most likely reasons are habitat changes (agricultural intensification, afforestation) and changes in food availability, but increased use of rodenticides, wetter springs, competition with other raptors and nest-box competition might play a role as well. Rounding up the morning session, Louise Bacon (CBC Research Officer) presented the results of the CBC Raptor Watch, described below.

Displays from BTO, RSPB, Hawk and Owl Trust, CBC, Cambridgeshire Mammal Group, BirdLife Malta and John Stimpson’s nest boxes were viewed during the lunch break before Robin Prytherch (freelance ornithologist) presented his results of a more than 30-year long study of Common Buzzards in Somerset. Sketches of agonistic and display behaviour in flight gave an insight into Buzzard behaviour. The population in his study area has massively increased, with 60% of pairs breeding successfully. The high density has resulted in cases of males being paired with more than one female and of helpers at the nest – young birds from the previous year helping their parents raising chicks. Daniel Hayhow (RSPB) presented the results of the national Hen Harrier survey 2010. With some 660 pairs, the population is down by 18% from 2004, mainly due to persecution. Only the Welsh population is increasing, while just a few pairs remain in England.

After tea, Nigel Middleton and Phil Littler (Hawk and Owl Trust) showed a film about the Trust’s Marsh Harrier research. They explained that the use of a nest camera and wing-tagging have resulted in better understanding of breeding behaviour and migration of this ‘iconic bird of the reedbeds of East Anglia’. Their talk was dedicated to Roger Clarke, recognising the inspiration that

Roger had given to raptor research. The final talk was presented by Jeff Knott (RSPB), who provided an overview of the conservation of the UK raptors. He focused on the success stories of Red Kite and Osprey and lamented the terrible role that persecution continues to play for rarer raptors such as Hen Harrier and Peregrine. He called for enforcing, improving and defending legal protection of raptors.

The raffle and additional donations resulted in £400 raised for BirdLife Malta's hard work for bird conservation in an extremely hostile environment, where bird hunters continue to massacre birds on a large scale. Feedback on the conference was entirely positive but Peter Herkenrath and Vicki Harley would be happy to receive more feedback and comments (see contact details on the last page). The conference was followed by field trips on September 30th to the RSPB reserves at Nene Washes and Ouse Fen (a morning and an afternoon group at the latter). At the Nene Washes Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Red Kite and Sparrowhawk were seen. Ouse Fen produced sightings of Marsh Harrier, Kestrel and Hobby and the group in the morning was graced by a total of four Bittern sightings.

We thank BTO and RSPB and all our members who helped in various ways to make the conference a success. Special thanks go to Vicki Harley, who over the past weeks and months spent many hours planning and organising the Conference.

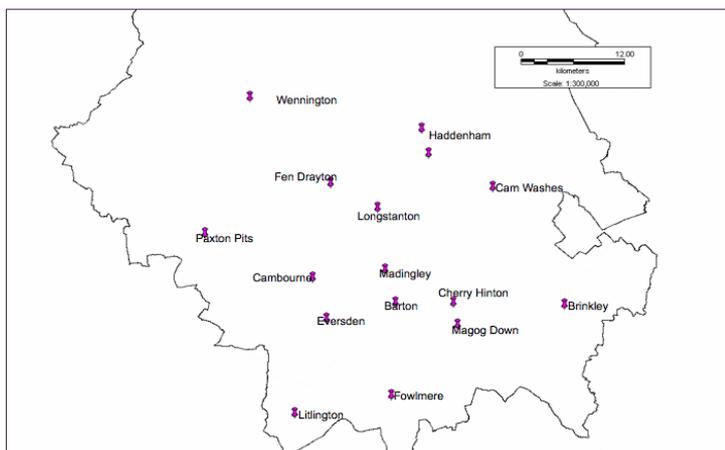
Peter Herkenrath

Raptor Watch Day September 22nd 2012

Louise Bacon

OK, I booked the best weather possible for the day, clear skies, light NE wind, not too cold. What could be better for two hours of raptor-searching. A record 16 sites were watched, varying between private gardens to public events at locations such as Fowlmere and Fen Drayton as at previous watch-days. I think the pleasant conditions resulted in a few last minute decisions on participation, and new sites. I hope everyone enjoyed their morning, I certainly did.

The map below shows the sites from autumn 2012 on the county boundary outline.



There are no prizes for guessing which species was the commonest; once again, the Buzzard far outnumbered the other 6 species recorded on the day, with most sites recording over 10 individuals. It can be very difficult to work out exactly how many Buzzards have been seen – sometimes a distinctive tail or missing feather in wing helps to identify birds, but we do not seem to have a high diversity in colour, so it can be hard to work out how many local birds and/or others passing through are being counted.

Activity has to be a key aid in this, so most counters have been listing their observations through the watch period, noting whether they come up from a local wood, appear from north or west or whatever, high in the sky or low over the local features. It is usually then possible to work out a minimum number of birds involved, which is the figure represented in the tables in this report.

Of the other species, all but one site had Kestrel, and 11 recorded Sparrowhawk. Of the “scarcer” raptors, Peregrine was seen at four sites, Marsh Harrier at 2, Hobby at 4 and Red Kite at only a single point, despite it becoming a far more regular sight in the county as a whole. No site had more than five species out of these 7, and most places only had 3, the regulars.

I think the most surprising thing was that at least half of the watchpoints thought that only local birds were involved in their observations – the similarity of counts to the March 2010 day when weather was great could back this up, but I definitely saw birds high up, not originating from any of the woods close to my watchpoint, which I would have considered to be birds on the move. They are likely to be young birds dispersing to find a spot of their own.

Table 1: September 2012 counts

Site	BZ	K.	SH	PE	MR	HY	KT	Min. individuals	species
Eversden	18	2	1	0	0	0	0	21	3
Magog Down	6	1	1	0	0	0	0	8	3
Wennington/Raveley Woods	15	3	3	1	0	0	3	25	5
Madingley Hill	16	1	2	0	0	3	0	22	4
Haddenham North Hill	15	3	2	0	0	0	0	20	3
Brinkley	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	9	3
Fowlmere Manor Farm	19	2	2	0	1	0	0	24	4
Fen Drayton Lakes	6	1	1	0	0	1	0	9	4
Cambourne	9	2	2	0	0	0	0	13	3
Litlington/Steeple Morden	14	1	1	0	0	1	0	17	4
Cam Washes	12	2	1	0	1	0	0	16	4
Barton	15	4	0	0	0	0	0	19	2
Cherry Hinton East Pit	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	3
Longstanton	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	6	2
Haddenham fens	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	7	2
Paxton Pits	14	2	1	1	0	1	0	19	5
Totals	176	30	17	5	2	6	3	239	
Key to BTO 2-letter codes	BZ = Buzzard		K. = Kestrel		SH = Sparrowhawk				
	PE = Peregrine		MR = Marsh Harrier		HY = Hobby		KT = Red Kite		

The Buzzard numbers have not increased over our watch period, and Sparrowhawk and Kestrel do indeed seem to be lower than in 2010, if we look at all sites counted. This is shown in Table 2.

totals per species	sites	BZ	K.	SH	KT	MR	PE	HY	BO	totals
2010	16	205	62	41	8	9	4		4	333
2012 spring	13	83	31	11	16	11				152
2012 Autumn	16	176	30	17	3	2	5	6		239

It would be a fairer comparison to look at sites counted in both years, either on all three occasions or on at least 2 occasions, one in each of 2010 and 2012.

Site	2010			2012		
	BZ	K	SH	BZ	K	SH
Cambourne	13	6	2	9	2	2
Eversden/Kingston	19	4	3	18	2	1
Fen Drayton Lakes	25	5	4	6	1	1
Fowlmere	18	2	1	19	2	2
Haddenham North Hill	27	7	3	15	3	2
Wennington/Raveley Woods	12	4	4	15	3	3
Totals per species	114	28	17	82	13	11

Table 3 above compares the three regular species, Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk at the six sites which were counted in spring 2010 and autumn 2012. Whilst all three have decreased, the numbers of Buzzard and Sparrowhawk may not be significant, and may reflect a poor breeding season. The numbers of Kestrel do really seem to have declined. Maybe this illustrates a real trend, and our Kestrels are becoming less common than before.

The main things we can learn from our series of raptor watches is that we have have a lot of Buzzards, most places have Kestrels and Sparrowhawk in lower numbers, and that a number of club members and regular observers enjoy spending an hour or two once in a while just watching from a fixed point. The numbers of people who join in on the raptor counts shows that it is a good way to participate and to learn from others about the delights (and the pitfalls) of raptor watching.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Note: Evening meetings at Cottenham Village College will now take place in the Tony Cooper Suite on the first floor of the new 6th form block at the back of the college. A plan of the college is available on the meetings page of the Club website. Our winter venue remains at St John's Church Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge. As before doors open at 7.30pm for 8pm.

Friday 12th October, Tony Cooper Suite, Cottenham Village College

Talks by Gabrielle Davidson on Cognition in Crows, and Samantha Lee on Wintering Wildfowl on the Ouse Washes Ramsar Site. For details see previous bulletin.

Tuesday 30th October Joint CBC and Cambridgeshire Mammal Group indoor meeting at Tony Cooper Suite, Cottenham Village College

Bird & mammal trade; everything you ever wanted to know about CITES by Richard Thomas

At this additional indoor meeting, Richard Thomas of TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, and a member of the Club, will be speaking about the international trade in wildlife, in particular birds and mammals.

Friday November 9th at St John's Church Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge

Earth, Wind and Fire: potential impacts of renewable energy on wildlife in the UK by Benedict Gove, Senior Conservation Scientist at the RSPB, specialising in bioenergy and wind energy and related impacts on birds and wildlife.

Climate change is arguably one of the biggest threats that we and wildlife face in future decades. Tackling carbon emissions will involve the deployment of renewables on a huge scale. Bioenergy, wind power and solar energy are currently the most advanced renewable technologies available in the UK and are likely to see substantial growth in the next few years, if we are to meet targets for renewable energy production. Benedict's talk will cover these technologies and the impacts they may have on wildlife.

Monday November 19th. Wildlife Trust offices, The Manor House, Cambourne 6pm for a 6.15 screening: "Saving the Spoon-billed sandpiper"

The CBC, in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust, will be screening this new DVD from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust documenting the conservation efforts underway to help save the world's most endangered wader. Shot guerrilla-style, in the field, "Saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper" shows the real-life human drama behind the conservation. The film features stunning footage of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers as the last few remaining pairs attempt to breed in the fleeting Arctic summer. It also follows the small conservation team tasked with finding and safely transporting tiny, fragile eggs from the Russian wilderness to Gloucestershire.

The film lasts 1 hour, and we hope to have one of the conservationists involved present on the day. Tea/coffee available beforehand. Places limited to 50, please book in advance with Louise Bacon. Free to attend, but donations to the Spoon-billed sandpiper project will be collected on the night.

Christmas Social Friday 14th December – short talks sought

For our Christmas Social on Friday 14 December, we are looking for short talks and presentations by members. If you would like to contribute with pictures from a recent trip, a report from your local reserve or patch, or anything else of interest to our members, please contact Peter Herkenrath or Vicki Harley (see last page for contact details).

CBC INDOOR MEETINGS IN 2013 will once again present a rich variety of speakers and subjects. The year promises to get off to a rousing start when Mark Avery will present his views on nature conservation, past, present and future. Other views of conservation will come from Mike Pienkowski talking on British overseas territories and Tom Hart looking at how forensic science can help conservation. Other speakers will be Peter Brown, Tim Loseby, John Mallord and Mark Bolton.

In addition to the regular meetings, we will hold a special event on Monday 28th January (venue TBC) featuring Martin Garner (of Birding Frontiers) and his Norwegian colleague Tormod Amundsen (of Biotope) who will visit us as part of their winter lecture tour on 'Birds and People: Pushing the boundaries'. Martin will talk about ground breaking stories of bird ID, the places and the people, and Tormod about mixing architecture and birding in Arctic Norway. There may be a gull identification workshop, involving a talk and field visits, on the same date. The workshop fee would be £35. If you would like to express an interest in this, please contact Vicki Harley

WINTER MEETING AND AGM OF THE ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB

This meeting will take place on Saturday 13th October at St John's Church Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge. Doors open 10.30 and the meeting begins at 11.00. Talks will include 'Migrant wader monitoring on Sakhalin Island in May 2012' by Doug Radford and 'Update on Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation' by Debbie Pain. Sales by OBC, Wildsounds and others. Refreshments available throughout the day.

For more details, see the news page on www.orientalbirdclub.org. Everyone is welcome.

Birds of the Western Palearctic for sale Nine volumes (RSPB ed) for sale. Vgc, £250 (ono). Buyer to collect from Cottenham. Sold to make space for an office at home. Contact Vicki Harley.

WILD BIRD FOOD Members 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.

RSPB CAMBRIDGE LOCAL GROUP

I am writing this article having experienced a brilliant weekend at a conference entitled 'Raptors: Conservation and Ecology' followed the next day by a Field Trip to Ouse Fen. No points for guessing the organisers! Yes, your very own Cambridgeshire Bird Club! A superb event and, many thanks to Vicki and all your members who made it possible.

Many of you who are members of CBC may also be members of the RSPB but from the disparity of numbers between your club and our group (350:100) even I can deduce that many of you are not members of our RSPB Local Group!

As you are probably aware, since its inception, the RSPB has been a campaigning organisation, mostly centred on our mutual interest of birds. In recent years, particularly since achieving one million members and, in order to retain the momentum of recruitment, the emphasis to nature in general has been adopted, now under the banner 'Stepping up for Nature'. The emphasis on the protection of wild birds has not been relaxed but that the recognition of the dual benefits for both birds and all forms of the natural environment go hand in hand. Nature is under increasing pressure around the UK and across the world and is in steady, desperate decline. The RSPB is determined to stop this happening but it needs a lot of support. Our Local Group is part of that support but being relatively small, we could always do with more members. Please do consider joining our Local group; we have a good programme of Indoor Meetings and Field Trips and with extra members, we can all help support the aspirations of, not only the RSPB but, I am sure, your Club's aspirations for a better world for wildlife and of course, wild birds.

I reciprocate your Chairman, Peter Herkenrath's, appeal in our recent (September) newsletter, that our Group and your Club's collaboration, continue positively in to the far future and we look forward to meeting many of you soon. Please visit our website: www.rspb.org.uk/groups/cambridge, for more information or contact me on 01954 202354.

Melvyn Smith, Group Leader, RSPB Cambridge Local Group

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

Wednesday, 17 October: Birds of Northern Greece and Western Turkey, by Bill Baston

Wednesday 21 November: A Fair Isle Season, by Rebecca Nason

Wednesday 12 December: Christmas Social

RSPB Cambridge Local Group Field trips

Saturday, 20 October: Alton Water & Stour Estuary. Meet car park at Alton Water near dam, 9.45am.

Saturday, 10 November: Walberswick Marshes. Meet at the beach car park at 10am

Saturday, 1 December: Norfolk: Horsey area & Buckenham Marshes. Leaving Cambridge 8am.

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

NEW MEMBERS.

We welcome the following new members – Kevin Hand of Cambridge, Kate Merrell of Great Staughton, Mrs Chris Percival of Horningsea, Marilyn Peterkin of Cottenham, Robert and Christine Skeen of Meldreth and Howard Tapson of Longstanton.

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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 Mike Foley by Nov 7th 2012, or send records by post to Mike Foley by Nov 5th. Next Bulletin due out late November / early December 2012, covering September / October 2012.

GOOD BIRDING!