

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 426



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

Welcome to the January/February 2013 Edition

The main body of the bulletin is, as always, the roundup of recent sightings from across the county, and I am pleased to report that a new writer has been persuaded to contribute this issue's synthesis. When Chris Brown had his first look at the database for the current period – which includes nearly 5000 bird records – he realised what an advantage it is to get first look at the output of two month's birding across the whole county; it really puts things into perspective. His comment by email to me is worth quoting: "I must say it does look interesting – you get a different picture of what is going on when you see all of this information (and how come someone can see seven Smew from the guided bus when I've been there three times this winter and not seen any!)" If you would like first look at the spreadsheet in the future, let us know, we can always use another writer!

I am using 'we' and 'us' rather than 'me' and 'I' because change is afoot once again, and a new bulletin editor will hopefully be putting the next one together. One or two stalwarts of the council have offered to do this, but ideally someone new would be involved as well, perhaps as an assistant or deputy initially. We have had numerous changes in club officers lately, as described in this issue, and it brings home the need to always have someone on standby to fill the inevitable gaps when key members move on, retire or find other commitments mean that work for the club becomes impossible to fit in. So here's another unpaid job advert – bulletin sub-editor anyone?

From the Bulletin Editor



Shoveler by Ben Green

RECENT BIRD REPORTS January / February 2013

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.

Temperature, rainfall and sunshine were all below average, with wind directions often from the east. The middle part of January brought some snow and frost with milder spells either side, and from mid-February the weather was again cold and cloudy but dry. This pattern did not produce any dramatic bird movements. The Waxwings which arrived in December remained in very good numbers and though less exciting for most of us, there were very high counts of Coot. A scattering of rarer visitors and unusual records included a Yellow Wagtail on the Nene Washes in January.

Mute Swans were widespread as usual, with the Ouse Washes dominant, reporting 5 counts of over 100 and an impressive 535 on 28th Jan; counts of 40–80 came from three other sites. **Bewick's Swans** peaked at 1150 on the Nene Washes (11th Feb) and 258 on the Ouse Washes; 6 other sites had much lower numbers. **Whoopers** were slightly more numerous, peaking at 1807 on the Ouse Washes and 1112 on the Nene Washes in mid-February; 12 other sites reported this species.

Of the scarcer visiting geese, **White-fronted Geese** were reported from 5 sites with 23 on the Cam Washes on 18th Feb; the same area had 14 **Pink-footed Geese** for a week at the end of that month. **Brent Geese** were confined to a single bird on the Nene Washes and 2 over Purls Bridge, both sighted in late January. Our resident geese were much more numerous; several sites reported **Greylag Geese** in flocks exceeding 200, 11 sites had over 30 **Canada Geese** (maximum 180), **Barnacle Geese** were, as for Jan–Feb 2012, at 5 sites including 9 on the University West Cambridge site, whilst **Egyptian Geese** were seen at 20 sites reflecting the steady spread of this species.

In contrast, **Shelduck** numbers were lower than the same period in 2012, with just 7 locations and a maximum of 40 (on the Nene Washes), half of last year's figure. **Mandarin Duck** were at just 2 sites, Elton on the River Nene (1 bird) and Wimpole, where 26 was the highest count. Numbers of all the main wintering duck species increased from their pre-Christmas figures, with the following notable counts; **Wigeon**: 18,995 on the Ouse Washes on 28th Jan (14,000 still by the end of Feb), 4000 on the Nene Washes and 5 other sites with over 1000; **Gadwall**: 346 at Wicken, a site which also had 640 **Teal** in January; **Mallard**: 1626 on the Ouse Washes and 501 at Grafham (WeBS counts); **Pintail**: 512 on the Nene and 126 on the Ouse Washes; **Shoveler**: the 6 highest counts were all from Wicken Fen (119 to 165) with some of the deeper

water sites reporting very few. **Pochards**, on the other hand, peaked at 2099 on the Ouse Washes whilst the Nene Washes built up to 791 by the end of Feb. The Ouse Washes **Tufted Duck** count of 3911 on 27th Feb is a new county record, with Grafham (421), Paxton Pits (547) and Nene Washes (1095), also reporting strong numbers. **Red-crested Pochards** were at 3 sites along the River Ouse (2–5 birds); single **Scaup** frequently dropped in to Grafham (not always the same bird) and 2 were at Paxton Pits on 24th Feb.

A report of **Eider** at St Neots was unusual. **Goldeneye** numbers were normal for this time of year (140 at Grafham and 100 at Paxton Pits, with 4 other sites reporting 10 or more), and **Smew** were seen at 8 sites of which Needingworth GP was the best with counts of 18 and 15 in February. For **Goosander**, Maxey GP was the top site with counts of 19 and 28 in February, whilst numbers at Grafham dropped away from the max of 17 on 1st Jan; a female **Red-breasted Merganser** was at Grafham from 12th Jan to 6th Feb; was this the same bird that turned up at Paxton Pits on 12th Feb?

Grey Partridge coveys exceeded 6 at 10 sites with a peak of 18 at Swaffham Prior Fen; **Red-legged Partridge** numbers are of course somewhat artificial but a count of 70 near Kings Ripton would have been impressive.

A single **Great Northern Diver** was at Grafham from 13th Jan to 1st Feb, and a **Gannet** was seen over Ouse Fen on 19th Jan. The distribution of **Cormorants** across the county was similar to 2012 with 20 sites and a peak of 81 at Fen Drayton Lakes, but no **Shag** were reported. **Bitterns** were reported from 11 sites (compared to 7 in Jan–Feb 2012), all single birds except for 2 at both Wicken and Woodwalton Fens. **Little Egrets** were seen at 29 sites (the same as in 2012) and these included 3 records within Cambridge City; the Cam Washes/Upware/ Wicken area was a stronghold with counts up to 12. As per winter

2012, there were fewer reports of **Grey Herons** (17 sites) compared to the Little Egret, but this can hardly represent the relative populations of these two species.

Little Grebe numbers appeared slightly up on Jan–Feb 2012 with 4 sites having counts of over 20 (Colne Fen GP the highest with 31). By contrast, **Great Crested Grebe** numbers appeared lower than Jan–Feb 2012, with a maximum of 61 at Grafham (compared to 98 last year), and below the pre-Christmas period, when numbers exceeded 250 at that site. Their rarer relatives were represented by a **Red-necked Grebe** at Grafham on 31st Jan and single **Slavonian Grebes** at 4 sites throughout the period: Grafham and the Fen Drayton/Needingworth/Barleycraft gravel pits area. The possibility of movement between these sites means that the actual number present was between 2 and 4.

Red Kites were seen at 24 sites including 5 birds at Dogsthorpe landfill site in both months. **Marsh Harriers** were widespread over the Ouse, Cam and Nene river systems and associated sites, with peaks of 6 at Woodwalton Fen (15th Jan), Kingfishers Bridge (3rd Feb), and Wicken (25th Feb). The latter site was also the main **Hen Harrier** roost (peaks of 7, 5) with 5 other sites regularly reporting singles. **Sparrowhawks** were seen at fewer sites than in Jan–Feb 2012 (17 compared to 35) but 2 lucky observers watched one at their bird table, devouring a less fortunate Goldfinch! **Buzzards** were seen at 50 sites (peak count 10) and Kestrel at 47 sites (peak 4). **Merlins** appeared at 13 sites (as 12 months ago), with Fowlmere being the most reliable site and the only one to record 2 birds together. **Peregrines** were slightly more widespread, with singles at 21 sites, mostly but not exclusively wetlands.

Reports of **Water Rail** were similar to Jan-Feb 2012 (12 sites) but the peaks of 10 at Woodwalton, 8 at Fowlmere and 6 at Wicken were rather higher than last year. **Coot** numbers on the Ouse Washes rose to 4867 on 28th Jan, 4-times higher than this location last year and a new county record. The Nene Washes had 850 and Grafham 794, and a further 10 sites had over 100 birds. The maximum number of **Moorhens** was, by contrast, a mere 135, also from the Ouse Washes. Anything from 2 to 10 **Cranes** could be seen throughout the period on the Nene Washes, but the only other sighting was at Burwell / Wicken Fen on 28th Feb.

Winter brings its own characteristic wader populations, dominated by **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**. The former were regularly seen in flocks from 10 to 400, but the 3400 at Overcote on 1st Feb and 2000 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 1st Jan stood out. **Lapwings** were more regularly seen, with twice as many records submitted (72) but the peak numbers were similar, 3000 at Fen Drayton, 1657 on the Ouse Washes and 1000 at Overcote. The more occasional waders at this time of year included: **Oystercatchers** at 6 sites in the second half of February (mostly singles but with a single count of 5); **Ringed Plover** singles at 5 sites; 2 **Knots** reported in January; **Sanderling** regularly at Grafham and singles at 2 other sites; and **Dunlin** and **Ruff** predominantly on the Ouse Washes with peaks of 90 and 94 respectively on 27th Feb. No **Avocets** were seen this year in contrast to counts of 18 and 22 last year at this time. **Snipe** were well reported and 14 sites had counts in the range 10–80 suggesting a greater total wintering population than Jan–Feb 2012 when only one site away from the washes had over 10. The Ouse Washes at Earith dominated with counts of 125 and 210+. **Jack Snipe** were seen at 8 sites including 4 birds at Maxey GP. **Woodcocks** were reported from 27 sites varying from singles to 12 flushed by beaters at Kingfishers Bridge. **Black-tailed Godwits** were confined to the River Ouse and its washes and to the Nene Washes; the peaks were 1350 at Mare Fen and 805 on the Ouse Washes, both in late February. A single **Bar-tailed Godwit** spent 3 days on the Ouse Washes in January. 5 **Curlews** stopped off at Wicken Fen in the last week of February. **Green Sandpipers** were at 8 sites including 5 at Grafham on 4th Jan, whilst there were single **Greenshanks** at 4 sites. **Redshanks** were largely confined to washlands, with a peak count of 40 at Earith. Grafham Water also held a few, and was as usual the only site for **Turnstone**, with 1 or 2 present in both months.

A previous reviewer noted a shortage of reports of **Black-headed Gulls**, and observers have responded with over 60 reports from 20 sites. There were many counts of several hundred birds but the Nene Washes with 25,000 in mid Jan stood out. Milton and Cottenham landfill sites had 3000 and 4500 respectively. The Nene Washes also had the peak count of **Common Gull** (4000); 5 sites had 3-figure counts and Kingfishers Bridge had a pre-roost count of 1250. **Mediterranean Gulls** were recorded at 8

sites and there was a **Little Gull** at the Ouse Washes on 17th Feb. Back to the Nene Washes for the top count of **Herring Gull** (6000) with the landfill sites at Cottenham, Dogsthorpe and Milton recording between 1500 and 3000+. **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were most numerous at the Fen Drayton Lakes roost (1700+). **Great Black-backs** roosted at the Nene Washes, Kingfishers Bridge and Fen Drayton Lakes (900, 840 and 400+ respectively) but daytime counts from rubbish tips did not exceed 300+. **Yellow-legged** (peak of 14 at Fen Drayton) and **Caspian Gulls** (9 at Milton) were reported from all the main gull sites; single **Iceland Gulls** were at Dogsthorpe on 6th and 12th Jan, and single **Kumlien's Gulls** at Tanholt GP and Grafham in the same month. There were 30 sightings of **Glaucous Gulls**, mostly singles and from 6 sites, but it is difficult to say how many individual birds this represents.

The largest **Wood Pigeon** flocks were in the north and west of the county, 8000 roosting in decoy wood at the Nene Washes, and 3000 at Wistow. The highest **Stock Dove** count was 110 from near Wimpole Park. **Barn Owls** were reported from 39 sites (well up on the pre-Christmas period), mostly single birds but with 12 sites reporting 2 or even 3 together. 15 sites held **Little Owls**, and 11 sites recorded **Tawny Owl** including 4 calling at Woodwalton Fen. **Long-eared Owls** were recorded from 4 sites. Confirmation that the **Short-eared Owl** influx of 2011/12 was not being repeated this winter came with just 12 sites producing records, compared to 23 in January 2012, and a peak count of 3 (24 in 2012).

Kingfishers held on to a presence at 22 sites, similar to this period last year. **Green Woodpeckers** were more frequently reported than **Great Spotted** perhaps because of their obliging habit of flushing easily from grassland feeding sites; they were often seen in twos and threes. Great-spotted were drumming from mid-January. Just 2 sites reported single **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers**.

There was just 1 sighting of **Great Grey Shrike**, from Harston, but no long-stayer this year. **Magpies** rarely get an entry in this reviewer's notebook (do we all have our prejudices?), but 6 sites had counts of 10 or more birds and the 24 at Kings Dyke must have been impressive. **Eurasian Jay** (which always get into my book!) were seen at 21 sites with counts of 5 at 2 large sites. There were no particularly high counts of **Rooks** going to roost (300 reported from 3 sites)

but **Jackdaws** reached 1000 at Fowlmere and 800 at Ferry Meadows; there were 2 separate reports of the paler Nordic subspecies. Up to 2 **Ravens** were seen on 4 days in January in the Wimpole area, but there were no other reports.

2 **Firecrests** were reported including one that stayed at Girton through much of February; **Goldcrests** were at 19 sites with a peak of 11 at Godmanchester GP. The sighting of a **Penduline Tit** at Ouse Fen on 17th Jan suggests that at least one of the pre-Christmas birds had stayed on. **Bearded Tits** were reported from 4 locations, down from 11 in late 2012. **Marsh Tits** were seen at 9 sites (up from 5 in Jan–Feb 2012), including an unusual record from Girton College.

Skylarks appeared to be more numerous than in Jan–Feb 2012, with 8 sites reporting over 100 (compared to 5) and a peak of 730 at Fowlmere in January (compared to a 200 peak last year).

Cetti's Warblers over-wintered at 6 sites, the largest number being 5 reported from Wicken Fen. **Chiffchaff** reports came from 11 sites and reports of **Blackcaps** from 50, with a concentration in Cambridge and other town and village gardens.

As before Christmas, **Waxwings** were widespread (274 reports) and numerous – most often in groups of 10 to 30, but with impressive flocks of 190 at Ferry Meadows, 88 in Cambridge and 75 at Cambourne. As usual there were a handful of **Nuthatch** and **Treecreeper** records. **Wrens** were reported from only 11 sites, though this species seems to pop up from unpromising ditches on most birding outings; perhaps we don't bother to note what is estimated as the UK's most numerous species!

The huge pre-Christmas flocks of **Starlings** did not gather again, but Wicken, Cambridge and the Cam Washes had flocks of over 1000. The picture was similar for **Fieldfares**, and though there were plenty of counts of 100–400, the large counts at the beginning and end of 2012 were not repeated. There were 3 counts of **Redwing** exceeding 100, with a peak of 250 from Wimpole Park. **Song Thrushes** were reported from only 7 sites, and though observer familiarity may be a factor, this species seems to be genuinely scarce this winter. A **Mistle Thrush** was heard singing on 6th January, but again there were few records. As in Jan–Feb 2012, there were reports of **Stonechat** from 7 sites, all wetlands.

House Sparrows were reported from 6 sites with maximum of 35, and **Tree Sparrows** from 10, including notable counts of 35 at Abbots Ripton, and 63 at Farcet Fen.

A single **Yellow Wagtail** was at the Nene Washes from 14th to 16th Jan; could this have been the same bird as seen on 27th November 2012, already a possible late-staying record? **Grey Wagtails** were seen at 24 sites (mostly singles), and though there were no huge **Pied Wagtail** roosts, 40 were at Woodwalton Fen and 57 at Granta Science Park. All but one of the 14 reports of **Water Pipit** came from the Ouse Washes where they peaked at 4 birds on New Year's Day.

Peak counts of the commoner finches were as follows: **Chaffinch** 200 (Wimpole), **Greenfinch** 60 (Fowlmere NR), and **Goldfinch** (c200 at Ailsworth and at Burwell Fen). Castor Hanglands had an excellent count of 60 **Bullfinches** in January and Godmanchester GP had counts of up to 22. **Siskins** were quite well spread with reports from over 30 sites and a peak of 100 at Woodwalton Fen. **Bramblings** were more scarce, with 17 reports mostly from the south and east of the county, but numbers never exceeding

5. **Linnets** also appeared to be slightly down on the same period last year, with only one count of over 100 (compared to 3 last year). **Lesser Redpolls** again peaked at Woodwalton Fen (60) and at Gamlingay (70) and 13 other sites had double figure counts; but there were only 3 reports of **Mealy Redpoll**, singles from different sites. The same number of reports of **Crossbill** included a Southey Wood count of 12, and 10 seen over Six Mile Bottom. Many members will have enjoyed the single **Hawfinch** which obligingly took up residence near the restaurant at Wimpole Hall, from 26th Jan to 25th February. There were also singles at Upton for a week and at Orton Wistow.

And finally some good news of our buntings, all of which reported numbers higher than last winter: 4 sites had **Yellowhammer** counts of over 50, Whittlesford had a count of 100 and a surveyed farm at Melbourn had counts of 230 and 280+, three weeks apart. The same farm had over 200 **Reed Buntings** on 2 occasions and Colne Fen GP also reported 100. Finally the Melbourn site had terrific counts of 364 and 230 **Corn Buntings**, and 4 roost sites also had flocks of over 50.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Chris Brown, assisted by Doug Radford and Vicki Harley.

Contributors: Colin Addington, Richard Allison, Jake Allsop, David Avis, Louise Bacon, Rowena Baxter, Guy Belcher, Jenny Brightwell, Chris Brown, Ian Burfield, Malcolm Busby, James Cadbury, David Collins, Ade Cooper, Ali Cooper, Steve Cooper, Andy Cotton, Robin Cox, Pauline Cozens, Carole Davis, Ian Dickerson, Sheila Dickerson, Brendan Doe, Steve Dudley, David Elliott, Ian Ellis, Mike Everett, Mike Foley, Don Gardener, Andrew Green, David Green, Mark Grooms, J. E. Hagger, Dennis Hall, James Hanlon, Mike Hannah, Vicki Harley, Ron Harold, Geoff Harries, Kevin Harris, Jeff Harrison, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Peter Herkenrath, Alan Hitchings, Michael Holdsworth, David Hollin, Peter Holt, David Hopkins, John Hoppett, Bob Humphrey, S. Jarrett,

Richard Johnson, Colin Kirtland, Charlie Kitchin, Andrew Knights, Jim Lawrence, John Le Gassick, Christina Leadlay, Peter Leonard, Rita Lingard, Stuart Lingard, Tony Mallyon, Monica Marks, Owen Marks, Bruce Martin, Gwen Martin, Paul Mason, Duncan McNiven, Matthew Mellor, Dick Newell, M. J. O'Leary, Daniel Osborne, Dave Palmer, Richard Palmer, John Parslow, Gavin Paterson, Mark Peck, Rob Pople, Doug Radford, Mike Redshaw, Gareth Rees, Nick Richardson, Duncan Ritchie, Tony Roberts, RSPB Reserves, Paul Rule, Clive Sinclair, Jo Sinclair, Howard Slatter, Simon Stirrup, Brian Stone, Andrew Taylor, Jonathon Taylor, Kevin Taylor, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne, Andrew Tongue, Hugh Venables, Alan Wadsworth, Mark Ward, Matt Webb, John Wells, Peter Wells, Chris Went, Barbara York, Christoph Zöckler

From the County Recorder

Following the message in bulletin 425, Mike Foley has handed over recorder-ship to me. We thank Mike for his two years as recorder, and he will continue to be involved following up on 2012 records for the annual report. Many of you will know me from indoor meetings or through participation in club surveys, which were my responsibility during the time I spent as the club's Research Officer.

I hope that the transition of recorders will be a smooth one, and many of you will probably not notice much of a change in the record submission process. There is no need to change email addresses,

assuming you have been using the published ones: recorder@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk or cbcrecorder@gmail.com. I will be taking over these contacts, so any message which you send will now be seen by me rather than Mike. Please try not to email either Mike's or my own personal email addresses with records or related issues.

I have been a member of the club since moving to the county over 20 year ago, and whilst not out and about at reserves and the obvious birding hotspots as regularly as I might like, I do a lot of birding in south-west Cambridgeshire, as well as survey work for a few landowners with a strong interest in conservation. My regular patch stretches from the edge of Cambridge out to Wimpole and Cambourne, and when not in a farmer's field I am usually to be found birding in woodlands – probably one of my favourite habitats.

As well as the routine jobs of recorder, I would really hope to encourage you all out into the wider countryside, away from the reserves – co-ordinating and participating in the atlas has shown me, and others, just how much diversity is out there, in the unprotected and managed parts of the county. Much of it goes unrecorded from one year to the next.

Finally, as it is spring, I will give a timely reminder to think carefully before putting sightings into the public domain, (includes cambirds, peterbirder, website sightings) of birds which may be breeding, especially if they are rare, sensitive to disturbance or specially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. By all means send a record in to the club, either directly to the recorder, or through your records sheet, which of course you all submit every two months, but please think carefully if disturbance caused by visits by birders might cause problems. If in doubt, consult me first.

Louise Bacon

County Atlas The cover picture for this bulletin, of a Shoveler, is one of the pieces of artwork which were surplus to requirement for inclusion in the County Atlas, production of which is very near completion.

First copies will be with proof-readers as this bulletin goes to press, and the public launch date of the Atlas will be announced shortly on Cambirds and the CBC website.

Who's the Chairman?

Peter Herkenrath's departure for Germany left us with a major vacancy and, despite extensive efforts on his behalf, no individuals outwith the council felt able to commit to the role of Chairman. I had offered to take it over, if no-one else could be found; the whole of council would really like to see more new faces taking an active part in the running the club and a Chair from outside the Council would have been ideal, but as a relatively new member of Council I guess I will have to do! For now, I shall commit to chairing the club for what is left of Peter's tenure, i.e. another 2 years until April 2015, at which time I hope another individual can be persuaded to take on a full five-year term.

This means that I really won't have time to continue with my current role in the club, editing the bulletin. If anyone can offer to take on this role, I would be extremely grateful. Full support in the handover would be provided of course. We have had two other changes to club roles recently; Louise's move to County Recorder (described above) creates another vacancy, that of Research Officer. If you would like to organise club-wide surveys or investigations into our county birds, then here is your chance! Our new treasurer, Matthew (Matt) Mellor had a useful period of handover from Kevin Harris, who we thank warmly for his service to the club in this important if unglamorous role. Kevin continues to participate in club activities, maintaining the club's Facebook page, a job which will, I imagine, become increasingly important in our aim to recruit new and younger members. Matt is a regular birdwatcher at Fowlmere. Another new name on council is Alison (Ali) Cooper, who is a

professional editor and has worked on the last two Annual Reports and now, the new County Atlas. I've known Ali since we were brought together by the BTO's nest recording officer as part of a group of keen nest-finders in the county; her ability to recognise the species and age of chicks in the nest, based on their begging calls, is amazing! Before actually finding the nest she can be sure they are week-old Greenfinches or tiny Dunnocks so will know where the most likely nest location is going to be. Mike Foley remains on Council as a 'minister without portfolio'; after periods as Bulletin Editor and County Recorder (including a time when he had both those roles) he deserves a break, but will be extremely useful to have as an advisor to the new incumbents on these roles.

Vince Lea

Cambridgeshire Swift Survey

Cambridge City Council in partnership with Action for Swifts are seeking records of breeding swifts in the City, towns and villages of Cambridgeshire. CBC members are encouraged to note the address and exact breeding site details of all breeding pairs, colonies and screaming parties located in 2013 (or old records) and record them via the Living Record Cambridge Swift Survey website:

<http://www.livingrecord.net>

Please note you will need to join Living Record which is free and tick Swift Survey on the options page. Then open the Records page and follow the notes on how to add new records.

It is hoped that in time the records collected through the Cambs Swift survey a few years ago will be included, but they all have to be input one at a time!

This website allows detailed descriptions and precise map based plotting of nest site locations. It is hoped that these records will build on our knowledge of the distribution of the species in the County, allowing local authority officers to identify nest sites at risk from planning proposals and seek appropriate retention or mitigation.

Contact: Guy Belcher

Guy.belcher@cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 457000

Cambridge City Council
Po Box 700
Cambridge
CB1 0JH

House Sparrow Survey – update

Thank you to all those who have sent me records of House Sparrow locations in Cambridge City. Please keep them coming with locations as precisely as possible – i.e. street, house number. I would also like to know areas/streets where sparrows are absent.

I have tried to follow the “Protocol for censusing urban sparrows” (Laet, *et al*, 2011. British Birds **104** 255–260). In north Cambridge – Arbury and Chesterton it is probably the commonest bird. They like housing estates: close proximity 2-storey dwellings – terraced or semi-detached with established garden shrubs. I have found “active nests” in 3-storey flats in St Kilda Avenue but apart from that they don't like heights! Ramsden Square is sparrow heaven!

In the south of the city – Hills Road and Grange Road, areas with big detached houses and large mature gardens, they are inexplicably absent. Cavendish Avenue is a typical example: absent from

the Hills Road end with the large detached houses but 3-4 active nests in the ex-local authority terraced houses at the Cherry Hinton end.

So far I have surveyed the north of the City. I haven't looked at Cherry Hinton or much of south Cambridge yet. I have found that:

- Access to roof space to nest is crucial; they like low-rise terraced/semi-detached housing environments with pantiled roofs. There are lots of sparrows in Arbury except in the 1990s development around Sunflower St/St Catharines Sq/Howgate Rd. Here the leading edge pantiles have a grill preventing access = no Sparrows (and no Starlings – see below)!
- They are colonial: they nest in loose colonies – a minimum of 3–5 pairs within 50 m of each other. A new housing development without suitable nest sites can cause the colony to stall or partially collapse especially if it is at a minimum level – 3 pairs.
- Dense shrubbery within 100 m of the active nests is essential for colonial behaviour and feeding – they assemble in noisy groups of 12–15 birds in the afternoons. Ivy seems to be a very important food source/communal venue.
- Where House Sparrows occur so do Starlings and vice-versa

I look forward to the County Atlas. As a schoolboy in the 1960s and 1970s I found House Sparrows nesting in farmland hedgerows. They built untidy domed nests of straw and grass. I believe a catastrophic decline in House Sparrows has seen the virtual extinction of farmland sparrows. In parts of Cambridge City they are holding their own.

Bob Jarman

Contacts: bob.jarman@tiscali.co.uk

07906 783256 – texts also gratefully received

01223 460742 – leave answerphone message if I do not pick up.

Online Survey

Thanks to those who participated in the online Corvid survey from Alison Greggor at the Animal Behaviour group of Cambridge University Psychology Dept. The survey will be closed by the time this issue goes to press, and over 1000 entries have been received, a terrific response. The analysis of this survey will be summarised in the next issue.

Brampton Parish Biodiversity Project 2013/4

News of this new project came in too late for the last bulletin, and the project start date (6th April) will miss the publication date for this one.

Nonetheless, the project will run for two years and anyone who wishes to get involved is urged to contact the co-ordinator, Pat Doody.

The parish includes Brampton Wood in the west, Cambridgeshire's third largest wood, and Portholme meadow in the east, Englands largest flood meadow. There are several gravel pits, areas of pasture, ridge and furrow grassland, arable and built up areas as well as inclusion of Brampton Racecourse (technically outside the parish boundary) which is a SSSI grassland. Part of Hinchingsbrooke CP is in the parish, as are stretches of the River Ouse and Alconbury Brook.

The aim of this project is to provide a comprehensive description of the Parish its landscape, history and natural history. It will be a snapshot in time, a lasting legacy for future generations. It will also contribute biological data to the National Biodiversity Network.



Setting the context

The first stage in preparing a Biodiversity Action Plan for a Parish is to identify the distribution of the habitats and species occurring within the Parish boundary. For this, a Parish Map is required. This will show the underlying geology, landscape characteristics, habitats, vegetation, species distribution and land use. It may also have many layers to reflect changes in land use and the impact on the wildlife of the area. In this context information on the historical environment, including its archaeological legacy and built environment is important.

Who should be involved?

The project is open to anyone who would like to get involved. All records are welcome. Do you have old postcards or recollections of the way farming practice changed, especially during the Second World War? Perhaps you have information on some of the many pubs that existed in the village. Do the deeds to your house include common rights to pasture sheep and/or cattle on Portholme? Perhaps you know of the location of interesting plants, animals or historical artefacts.

During the coming two years, much activity will be going on in the parish:

- CPERC will set up a dedicated web site for all biological records;
- 6th April 2013 Launch Day – 4pm–8pm. Open Village Meeting, demonstration and introduction to the project;
- May first public engagement and recording day (date to be agreed);
- Mid July second public engagement and recording day (date to be agreed);
- Throughout 2013:
 - collation of existing information and detailed survey by biological specialists
 - Information collection and collation, archaeological and historical information
- Winter 2013/14 information collation, identification of knowledge gaps;
- Spring and summer 2014 further data collection to fill knowledge gaps;
- Late summer 2014 Brampton Parish BioBlitz weekend.

Pat Doody (BPBP Co-ordinator)
5 Green Lane, Brampton
Huntingdon, Cambs., PE28 4RE

Tel: 01480 392706
Mobile: 07847 949667
Email: pat.doody@ntlworld.com

Fauna Cantabrigiensis

The vertebrate and molluscan fauna of Cambridgeshire by the Rev Leonard Jenyns (1800–1893): **transcript and commentaries.**

Edited by Richard C. Preece and Tim H. Sparks

Members of the club might be interested in a new publication by The Ray Society of this manuscript written by Leonard Jenyns. The part concerning birds is the earliest attempt at an avifauna of our county, that is the part we think of as 'old' Cambridgeshire, although some reference is made to Hunts. The records date from between 1820 and 1849 and as Leonard Jenyns lived at Bottisham Hall and was Vicar of Swaffham Bulbeck there is an inevitable bias to the area of those parishes and nearby. Apart from the works of Gilbert White, records of this type of local observation from that period are unusual and particularly when from a reliable source. Jenyns was in touch with most of the naturalists of his time and was a particular friend and correspondent of Charles Darwin.

Richard Preece and Tim Sparks, not being ornithologists, have received some help with the commentaries the nub of which will be familiar to members of the Club, although there is some inconsistency in the final product inevitably the consequence of some species being more noteworthy than others. The book is beautifully produced if a trifle expensive but it is a rare opportunity to have in your collection the original 'Birds of Cambridgeshire'.

Copies are available from The Ray Society price £65

Review by Peter Bircham

Editor's note – the book cover is illustrated with a photograph of a female Great Bustard, part of Jenyns' collection which is still housed in Cambridge University Zoology museum, and illustrates the sort of birds we have lost since his era, not to mention Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Montagu's Harrier, and a host of other wildlife.

171 or Bust, the Final Countdown

...Continued from bulletin 425... further adventures from a year in Over Parish and Ouse Fen...

July is possibly the most tedious month in the birding calendar; the slack between spring and autumn passage. Thus it was with zero anticipation and almost out of force of habit that on the early morning of 7th I went to check a private part of the site for any late breeding waders earlier surveys had missed. As I scanned with my scope, a sleeping wader with orange underparts caught my eye. Although stood in water, the exposed part of its legs looked relatively long. Presumably it was a godwit – but hang on it was smaller than the Redshank close by. My mind raced through the possibilities – Bar-tailed or Black-tailed Godwit (too small); Red Knot (too long-legged); Curlew Sandpiper (way too big)...it could only be only of the dowitchers. Sure enough, when the bird woke up it revealed its long snipe-like bill. Another round of air-punches ensued, followed this time by a dance of delight: I knew I was watching a first for the County, but which species – Long-billed or Short-billed? Separating these two species is one of the toughest wader identification challenges that exists. Several telephone calls later, greeted by incredulity by local birders, plus one to Sarah – with instructions on which field guides to bring (and to inform her mother we might be a little late for her 70th birthday party that day) and the dowitcher promptly walked into long grass and disappeared. I knew statistically it was almost certainly Long-billed, but it was essential to confirm identification. Sarah, Richard Bradbury, Jeremy and Dennis all swiftly arrived. The bird however was missing, but eventually I relocated it, and was able to confirm it was indeed a Long-billed Dowitcher in full summer plumage. The bird almost immediately took flight, and it was a nervy few more minutes before the other observers had all seen it too. Half an hour later Ricky arrived – having

holed his sump driving too quickly along the Fen's rough tracks in his hurry to get there. Sarah and I left for our party appointment in Stafford. Late in the afternoon of the following day, Jeremy called me to say the dowitcher had moved location and was now visible from the public bridleway. It was with a great sense of relief then, that I posted the news on Cambirds and telephoned Bruce Martin. Fortunately the dowitcher was seen by the majority of local birders who got to the Fen that evening – but it was gone by the next morning, almost certainly to take up residence in Slimbridge, Gloucestershire. July had one more quality bird: a Pectoral Sandpiper, and it was also the only month I saw a Spotted Flycatcher – a sad example of the dramatic decline of this species in the County. 162 by the end of July, entering the final countdown.

The regular late summer influx of Common Crossbills into the County took place as usual in 2012, and a couple of groups flew over the village in August; the key to finding this species is to learn the call. They, along with returning passage waders that included both Turnstones and, very fortuitously, a pair of Sanderlings, all helped to push the year list along, as did an Osprey passing over on the final day of the month. 166; only 5 to go.

September always promises to deliver, but in 2012 it almost failed; only the autumn Siskin passage added to the year list, moving me on to 167.

A reasonably early Brambling on 4th October was an expected but welcome year tick: once again, knowledge of the call is essential. A holiday to Cornwall took out the middle weeks of the month, but soon after our return, a flock of Whooper Swans passed over the Fen early one morning before work on 26th. The following day dawned with strong north-westerly gales. Late autumn northerly gales means watch the skies for seabirds: always bird to the prevalent conditions. Richard Grimmett called to say an adult Kittiwake had just flown over the Fen. I was gutted! It was his third record at the site of a species I had yet to record there. But as I said earlier, persistence pays with birding. The gales howled on all day, and in the late afternoon, I was finally rewarded with the sighting of an immature Kittiwake over Brownhill Staunch. It was clear that evening from the messages on Cambirds that the 27th had been an exceptional day for seabirds – and Kittiwakes in particular – in the County. Kittiwake was the species that equalled the record; 170, two months to go, just one species needed, surely it was now a formality?

Every autumn I spend hours and hours going bird by bird through the vast Golden Plover flocks that visit Ouse Fen. My rule of thumb is that in any flock at this time of year more than 3,000 strong there is certain to be an American Golden Plover. And with a huge flock, perhaps 5,000 strong present on 3rd November, I felt sure my luck would be in. Sure enough, after a couple of hours – bingo! I finally found a juvenile American: 171, record achieved and still almost two months to go. It was my fifth find of this species in Cambridgeshire over the past decade; Golden Plover flocks are happy hunting grounds for rarity seekers. The 11th November added not one, but two new birds; a Rock Pipit at Ouse Fen, while Richard Grimmett located a flock of Tree Sparrows over at Barleycraft – 173. How many more could I add to set the record?

December is another tough month in the birding calendar. I rate it alongside July in terms of dullness. Once again I visited the Patch with zero expectation on a glorious calm sunny second day of the month. As I walked along the canal zone, I heard a call that sounded like a drawn out Reed Bunting. Shortly afterwards I saw a small bird in the base of a reed patch. I could only glimpse parts of it through the stems: pale chest, perhaps a Chiffchaff? Next I glimpsed a dark face mask – my heart pounded...Penduline Tit! The bird soon flew to a more distant patch of reeds while I simultaneously danced another dance of joy, punched the air several times, went for my phone, and tried to get a digiscope image. During this time I heard several more of the “drawn out Reed Bunting calls” that are diagnostic of Penduline Tit. While I never saw more than one at any time, I was sure from the frequency of calling there was at least two Penduline Tits present. Richard Grimmett was the first to arrive, joined soon afterwards by numerous other observers. It was almost three hours after my first sighting before the birds reappeared to delight the assembled crowd. In retrospect, it seems incredible that I had chosen precisely the right moment to be walking along that stretch of

canal. It makes one realise what a great deal of luck there must be involved in finding rare birds. The two Penduline Tits stayed for the next fortnight or so, entertaining many observers, although they remained stubbornly elusive at times. They were the third record of the species in the County. December still wasn't over, however. A nationwide invasion of Waxwings was underway, and while it was no surprise when Andy Cotton phoned me at work to say one was present in the Health Centre car park, I nevertheless felt the urgent need to dash home to secure it for the year list. In the end, up to six Waxwings spent several days in the area, at one stage being visible from both the front and back of my house. Meanwhile, the evening roost at Ferry Lagoon on 15th held a surprise, though not a gull. Swimming close inshore was a fine Slavonian Grebe. It was my first on the Patch and ample compensation after earlier disappointment, for I had been watching the gull roost in January while, unbeknownst to me, others were watching a Slavonian Grebe at the other end of Ferry Lagoon. That was my final year tick at the Patch, leaving me on a record 176.

But there was one final twist to the year. On 28th a Barn Owl with a broad dark breast band, buffy underparts and a grey mantle and crown was hunting on Ouse Fen; all features suggestive of the dark continental form of Barn Owl. However, it was conclusively shown not to be one, and revealed the inadequacies in the online literature describing the appearance of this subspecies. In all, it was a highly instructive individual and demonstrates just how much more there is to learn about identification of even the familiar birds around us. It's another of the reasons that keeps me birding down the Patch, along with the chance of stumbling into something really rare.

Richard Thomas

Forthcoming Events

Indoor meetings We move to Cottenham Village College in the spring.

Friday 12th April at the Tony Cooper Suite, Cottenham Village College
Our scheduled speaker, Tim Loseby, has had to cancel due to personal circumstances. In his place we have:

The Nene Washes: highs and lows in the Fens *by Charlie Kitchin*

The talk will be about the RSPB management on the washes, the things that are going well, those that aren't and what the future holds for the site.

Charlie Kitchin has been the site manager since August 1991. He had been approached to give this talk in 2014 and we are extremely grateful that he has been able to bring it forward at such short notice.

Friday 10th May at the Tony Cooper Suite, Cottenham Village College
Beyond Bases: Applying next generation techniques to Antarctic Ecology *by Tom Hart*

Although penguins are some of the best studied species in the Polar regions, we know surprisingly little of their ecology and their response to climate change and emerging fisheries. Moreover, as much of the Southern Ocean is recovering from whaling and sealing, we know very little of what is a return to "natural" and what is modern anthropogenic change. Over the last four years, Tom Hart has put together a set of new techniques which are revealing population structure and change since the last ice age, as well as current shifts in penguin populations.

Tom Hart is a Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, where he works on population genetics and detecting population change in Southern Ocean penguins.

Field Trips Please register interest for any of these trips with Vicki Harley (details on back page). Some trips have upper limits on numbers that can be accommodated, some have detailed parking arrangements that need to be conveyed, and any trip may be cancelled at short notice if weather conditions or other factors intervene – if we don't know you're coming, we can't let you know!

Friday 7th June field trip Kings Dyke

Meet 7.30pm This 50ha reserve was created from former clay quarries for the nearby brickworks. There are breeding waders, good numbers of Cuckoo and Turtle Dove in the area and abundant Sand Martins from a nearby breeding colony. At this time of year Great Crested Newts should still be in the ponds and there is a good chance of seeing Water Voles as well. Limited to a maximum of 20 visitors.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Vicki Harley (email Vicki.harley@care4free.net).

Bedford Purlieus National Nature Reserve

We are planning a visit to Bedford Purlieus NNR, a 500-acre ancient woodland site, near Peterborough. Bird life includes Nightingale, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Red Kite, Little Owl, Tawny Owl and Long-eared Owl, and there is a great variety of insects, especially butterflies.

This visit is likely to take place on a Saturday in late May or June. Full details will be announced on the Club website and at indoor meetings. If you are interested in attending, please contact Vicki Harley (email Vicki.harley@care4free.net).

July and August field trips are still at the planning stage. Full details will be given in the next bulletin and on the Club's website.

RSPB Cambridge Local Group

Indoor meetings at St John's, Hills Road, 7pm for a 7.30pm start; £2 charge for non-members:

Wed 17 Apr: Crossing Boundaries, a Story of Birds and People on the High Seas of Iraq *by* Rolf Williams

Wed 15 May: AGM / Through the year in a nature photographer's garden *by* Jeff Harrison

Field trips:

Wed 10 Apr: Evening guided walk at Kingfishers Bridge. Meet in parking area at 6.45pm for a 7pm start

Sun 14 Apr: Sculthorpe Moor, Syderstone Common and Foxley Wood. Meet at Sculthorpe Moor at 10am

Sat 4 May: Dawn Chorus Fen Drayton Lakes. Meeting car park, 5am, followed by BBQ breakfast £5

Wed 22 May: Nene Washes Long Drove evening guided walk. Park by gate on Long Drove 7pm.

Wed 12 Jun: Lakenheath Fen evening guided walk. Details tbc.

Sun 16 Jun: Hickling Broad. Details tbc.

w/e 28-30 Jun: Birding trip to Yorkshire. Details tbc.

For more details and bookings, please see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/cambridge/events> or call Andrew Camps, 01638 741018. Booking: 01954 202354, e: mel_brensmith@hotmail.co.uk

New Members

We welcome the following new members – Mark Eaton of Colne, Simon Gillings of Cambridge, Ron Hodgson of Radwinter End, Graeme Reed of Great Cambourne, Jennifer Rose of Yarwell, David Wagland of Cambridge and Kevin Wilson of Six Mile Bottom.

Club Contacts

Chair

Vince Lea

236 Wimpole Road, Barton, CB23 7AE

Tel: 01223 263962

Email: chairman@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Secretary and Ringing Secretary

Michael Holdsworth

4(a) Cavendish Avenue, Cambridge, CB1 7US

Tel: 01223 476643

Email: m.holdsworth@ntlworld.com

Treasurer

Matthew Mellor

21 Fowlmere Road

Foxton

CB22 6RT

01223 339080

Email: treasurer@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

County Recorder

Louise Bacon

236 Wimpole Road, Barton, CB23 7AE

Tel: 01223 263962

Email: recorder@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Bulletin Editor

Vacant

Research Officer

Vacant

Meetings Secretary

Vicki Harley

30 Margett Street, Cottenham, CB24 8QY

Tel: 01954 250340

Email: vicki.harley@care4free.net

Annual Report Editor

John Harding

3 Cotton's Field, Dry Drayton, CB23 8DG

Tel: 01954 780777

Email: johnharding44@googlemail.com

Membership Secretary

Bruce Martin

178 Nuns Way, Cambridge, CB4 2NS

Tel: 01223 700656

Email: bruce.s.martin@btinternet.com

Website

Chris Quy

35 Spring Close

Burwell, Cambridge, CB25 0HF

Tel: 01638 743023

Email: webmaster@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Other Council Members

Ali Cooper

Mike Foley

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 Louise Bacon by May 7th 2013, or send records by post to Louise Bacon by May 5th.

Next Bulletin due out early June 2013, covering March / April 2013.

GOOD BIRDING!