

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

## Bulletin No. 428



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

## Welcome to the May/June 2013 Edition

Yes it's still me, but don't worry. We have probably got a new bulletin production team, though details are still being finalised and the handover will be taking place soon. The new editor has great plans for revitalising the format and making greater use of the possibilities that electronic formats allow; while many of us (me included) prefer to get our news on paper, there is no doubt that digital publishing has many advantages – environmental impacts are less compared to the use of paper, the club saves on postage costs, and time is saved, particularly important with the bulletin which may be broadcasting news of events coming up in the near future or giving a review of recent sightings. This issue, for example, is getting to members in August as southbound migrants pass through, but it covers events in May when they were heading north! If we can increase frequency and turnaround time of the newsletter it will make it more relevant and, hopefully, more appealing to the next generation of birders who are growing up in an instant world. The editor-in-waiting is considering a monthly e-bulletin, possibly as a downloadable file from the club website, but the bi-monthly paper version would still be produced for those members wishing to receive their news by snail-mail. This raises a few additional issues, such as whether members would be able to submit records on a monthly basis, and if the county recorder could handle the records in a short time each month to keep the monthly review as full and accurate as now. Plenty to discuss and no doubt members will have their views! We also, as ever, need articles and news from you, the members! If you have an urge to write about your latest birding trip, a bit of advice on bird identification or an observation that has given you some interest, share it with the club! You can continue to contact the editor on [cbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk](mailto:cbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk); or write to me (postal address on back page).

Finally, I hope you have got your copy of the new County Atlas! The launch and delivery of this has finally happened, and it has taken a lot out of us, but I hope you will agree it is a splendid piece of work. Just in case you haven't got yours yet, here's a shameless advert! More inside.

*From the Bulletin Editor (and Chair)*



*Cranes  
by  
James  
Hanlon*

*Cover  
artwork  
from the  
new  
atlas*

## RECENT BIRD REPORTS May / June 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.*

May carried on where April left off – a cold, nagging wind kept migration in check, and did little to encourage our resident birds to get the breeding season underway. Nonetheless, birds have to do what they have to do, and some good spells of migration did occur; a wide range of waders were seen on their way north and some big movements of terns, hirundines and Yellow Wagtails were noted, along with the tail end of the heavy Wheatear passage noted in April. A thorough survey of Castor Hanglands, one of our best pieces of scrub habitat, revealed good numbers of territorial warblers and Nightingales. June saw the start of return migration from the high arctic waders, perhaps failed birds, and some good news from several rarer breeding birds as the weather took a turn for the not-quite-so-bad.

**Whooper Swans** lingered at the Ouse Washes and Fen Drayton, individuals presumed injured or ill. **Greylags** peaked at 422 (Colne Fen), including 33 juvs, while the high count of **Canada Geese** was 214 at Barleycraft GP. Of the scarcer naturalised geese, 10 **Barnacles** were seen at Sutton North Fen, and **Egyptians** were seen at 13 sites.

**Shelduck** records came from 11 sites, with 30 at Little Fen being the max. There were 11 **Mandarin Duck** at Hauxton Pits, and records came from a further 3 sites.

**Wigeon** numbers peaked at 24, on the Ouse Washes, but no mention was made of breeding activity, and a note that 'no broods seen' accompanied the record of 145 **Teal** at the same site. By contrast, **Gadwall** had quite a few breeding records; bird numbers peaked at 200 or more at Ouse Fen and Wicken Fen. There was just one record of **Pintail** – two on the Ouse Washes; **Garganey**, however, had many records – five times more mentions than any other dabbling duck, coming from ten sites with 2 successful pairs at the Ouse Washes. There were 7 Garganey at Berry Fen Jun 11th and Ouse Washes, 9th May (six males) but the highest counts were of 8 also at Ouse Washes on a couple of occasions. A single **Blue-winged Teal** at Colne Fen was assumed to be an escape. **Shovelers** were at eleven sites, confirmed as breeding at four, particularly at the Ouse Washes with 8 broods.

One addition to the county's breeding birds revealed by the new Atlas is the **Red-crested Pochard**; its former status as a vagrant is now deeply confused by the success of escapes naturalising into the wild. They were present at 3

sites during the period, with a peak of 4 at Paxton Pits at the end of May. **Common Pochard** were present in very good numbers – 102 in mid-June at Fen Drayton Lakes, 48 at Ouse Fen and 31 at Barleycraft GP in May, along with a few others elsewhere, suggest a much increased breeding population; 5 broods were later noted at Ouse Fen. Double-figure counts of **Tufted Duck** also came from 9 of the 10 locations it was recorded at with an early brood noted at Kingfishers Bridge. There were 2 male **Common Scoter** at Ferry Meadows on May 15th, frequenting Gunwade Lake. The last **Goldeneye** records of the winter came from Paxton Pits, where 2 were seen on May 5th. **Ruddy Ducks** maintain their clandestine presence in the county.

A few **Quail** appeared in the spring, with 1 at Woodwalton Fen on May 5th - 6th, two at Lark Rise Farm (Barton) on Jun 16th, and 1 at Holme Fen on Jun 25th.

There were high double-figure counts of **Cormorants** from Ouse Washes and Paxton Pits, but only one record of a **Shag**, Fen Drayton Lakes, May 6th. **Bitterns** seemed to have a good spring, with 7 locations reporting this former rarity; two sites held 4 birds each and breeding was confirmed from at least 2 sites. **Little Egrets** were abundant – 14 locations, with peak counts of 158 at Nene Washes and 68 at Ouse Washes, while a few **Great White Egrets** around meant that it is still important to have a proper look at any egrets that appear – let's not get blasé about them – one at the Ouse Washes on May 6th and then one at Ouse Fen Jun 3rd - 4th, followed by one at the Ouse Washes Jun 7th-28th and a possible at Nene Washes, Jun 25th. With Great

Whites being such wanderers it's hard to know how many were involved, but the early June sightings were probably of the same bird. Only two **Grey Heron** breeding colonies were reported. A possible **Purple Heron** was seen at Kingfishers Bridge. A **White Stork** was seen at Berry Fen, May 31st, then the next day at nearby Ouse Fen and later over Wicken Fen. Perhaps some of our major wetland sites should think about putting up nesting platforms to tempt the next one to stay? **Spoonbills** had a good showing and may be another potential colonist; 1 stayed at the Ouse Washes May 14th - 17th, while 4 or 5 were at Wicken Fen 15th - 16th, and one (presumably one of the above birds) briefly appeared at Paxton Pits on May 17th. An immature was seen at Nene Washes from Jun 10th-25th.

Our rarer breeding grebes are vulnerable to disturbance or interference, but it is extremely helpful to submit (in confidence) all records in the summer months to the Club so that we can build up a picture of their activities. It seems a single summer-plumaged **Red-necked Grebe** travelled between two sites in May and June, while **Black-necked** went even better – singles at two sites, a pair at a third and a successful pair (seen with chicks) at a fourth. The increasing areas of large wetland habitats continue to prove their worth!

**Black Kite** sightings came from 3 locations in mid-June; Guyhirn, 12th; Peterborough, 16th; and Bar Hill, 19th. Detailed, accurate descriptions of the birds may help establish if these sightings were all the same bird or if different individuals were involved. No large counts were made of **Red Kites**, but sightings of ones and twos came from 53 locations across the county. Breeding was confirmed from 3 locations, suspected at one and courtship seen at a fifth site. Peak counts of **Marsh Harriers** were 8 birds at both Wicken Fen and Nene Washes, with another 17 sites hosting birds and breeding recorded at several sites. A male **Hen Harrier** was seen at Fowlmere RSPB on May 14th, and one was logged at Wicken Fen, though local knowledge suggests it was a mis-identification, as a male **Montagu's** was regularly seen at that location during May and into early June. **Osprey** records came from 6 locations, with the best site being Maxey GP, with records from May 5th, 19th & 25th, plus one on Jun 25th-26th. A pair of **Kestrels** was seen catching Common Lizards at the Froglife reserve, Orton

Brickpits, in May, where habitat management work has created ideal conditions for the range of amphibians and reptiles present and the birds have clearly learnt to exploit the abundance of this less than usual prey. **Red-footed Falcons** had a pretty good run, with one on May 6th, at March, a popular long-stayer at Ouse Fen from Jun 2nd-10th and a peak of 3 birds at the Ouse Washes between May 2nd-3rd. Perhaps the extended long winter explains why **Merlins** continued to be seen during the period, with one at Upware on May 17th and, perhaps the same individual at nearby Wicken Fen on the 20th, while one at Fowlmere was seen on the unusual date of Jun 17th. The Club records suggest the 'latest departure' date for this species is May 24th, while the 'earliest arrival' is Jul 5th, although the records do exclude occasional summer individuals. What was a bird doing here in mid June? No such questions relate to the presence of **Hobbies**, of course, which were reported from 26 sites, with the peak of 16 birds at Fen Drayton Lakes on May 13th. **Peregrines** were seen breeding at 2 locations and sightings came from several other sites during the period.

**Water Rails** were noted at most of their usual sites, with 5 at Wicken Fen the highest count. **Spotted Crakes** were only heard at the Nene Washes, with 3 calling on the 11th May the best tally. There were also 7+ **Corncrakes** there on May 26th, but more surprisingly one was heard at the Ouse Washes, on May 16th. Our growing **Crane** population had a busy spring, with sightings of 2 or 3 birds coming from the Wicken Fen/Kingfishers Bridge area, both the Ouse and Nene Washes, and from Woodwalton Fen. To what extent these were birds moving around the area (and probably including visits to other sites outside the county) is hard to judge, but two successful breeding pairs at the Nene Washes were certainly recorded.

**Oystercatchers** were noted as breeding at four sites, with Four Gotes the main location. A **Black-winged Stilt** stayed for a short while at Wicken Fen, May 14th-18th, visiting various parts of the reserve – Bakers, Burwell and Adventurer's Fen compartments. **Avocets** were at 8 locations, with breeding at 3.

There were no mentions of breeding involving any of the **Little Ringed Plover** records, though sightings came in from around 15 sites and there was a peak count of 8 at the Ouse

Washes on May 30th. **Ringed Plovers** in spring include a mixture of local birds, short-distance nominate and long-distance *tundrae* migrants, the latter race dropping in on their way north. It's not always possible to separate these birds, depending on the circumstances and observer skill, but mention of certain *tundrae* birds only concerned the period May 22nd-29th, with some good counts during this brief passage period. There were peaks of 57 at the Ouse Washes and 30 at the Nene Washes. The only other location was Paxton Pits with a peak of 4. Other counts of Ringed Plovers included 50 on the Nene Washes on May 7th, 28 at Wicken Fen on May 16th and 1-3 at numerous other sites. There was no mention of breeding activity. Just 2 **Dotterel** were recorded in the period, at Holme Wood on May 3rd. An adult **American Golden Plover** was seen in flight on Jun 18th at Brownhill Stauch (Barleycraft GP). Almost as unlikely, a **European Golden Plover** was seen at the Nene Washes on Jun 9th and 15th. **Grey Plovers** were seen at Ouse Washes (3 on May 27th, 1 on 30th), Nene Washes (1-2 around early May, and one again on Jun 15th), and Maxey GP, 1 on May 8th. There were good breeding numbers of **Lapwings** at Ouse Fen, Ouse Washes, Berry Fen, Fen Drayton Lakes, Nene Washes and Wicken Fen and a few elsewhere including some farmland sites with small numbers.

Wader passage periods always add a nice element to our wetland reserves, you can never know what will turn up where and the diversity of species which call in to our county on their migrations is impressive. One **Knot** was seen at the Ouse Washes, May 4th, **Sanderlings** peaked at 5 birds both at Grafham Water (May 15th) and Nene Washes (May 27th) with 3 at the Ouse Washes on the 27th. These three sites held 1-3 birds on several other dates, and singles were also seen at Wicken Fen and Paxton Pits; records spanned the period May 12th – Jun 6th. Single **Little Stints** were seen at the Ouse Washes, May 29th and Nene Washes on the 31st. **Temminck's Stints** visited us on May 16th at Maxey GP (2) and Nene Washes (1). There were a couple of long-staying **Pectoral Sandpipers** – one at Berry Fen, May 27th-Jun 1st, another on the Ouse Washes, 17th-25th May, while the Nene Washes hosted one on the May 31st, but the influx started at Wicken Fen where there were 3 together on May 14th! People calling in to Wicken the next day hoping to see these birds were perhaps disappointed,

but a **Curlew Sandpiper** was present as compensation; other records of this attractive little wader were from Ouse Washes, on May 6th, 22nd-29th and Jun 5th-8th when 3 were present. **Dunlin** were rather more numerous of course, with birds at ten locations, including 53 at the Ouse Washes and 40+ at the Nene Washes during May. While three other sites held single **Ruff**, the Ouse Washes held an impressive 35 by the Pymore Railway bridge, on May 3rd.

A few records of **Snipe** came from Wicken Fen, Cam Washes, Kingfishers Bridge (where breeding was confirmed) and Paxton Pits, but the usual hotspots of the Nene and Ouse Washes each had only records of 8 or 9 birds submitted to date. In spite of the ongoing BTO **Woodcock** Survey, no summer sightings came in from any pure woodland sites – the wooded fenland reserves of Chippenham, Wicken, Holme & Woodwalton were the primary locations. One from Lode village on June 19th was less typical. The peak **Black-tailed Godwit** count of 36 came from the Ouse Washes on Jun 28th, and included both *limosa* and *islandica* birds. Breeding was only reported from the Nene Washes. Between May 4th-10th, 1-3 **Bar-tailed Godwits** were seen at 6 sites. **Whimbrels** had a more protracted passage, from May 1st-26th, with up to 4 birds at 9 sites. **Curlews** were fewer in number but birds were seen well into June, perhaps their presence indicates the possibility of breeding in the future – they do so in counties to our east and west.

One or two **Common Sandpipers** were seen at around 8 sites in May. **Green Sandpiper** records, however, were mainly from late June, implying return migrants. One at Wicken Fen on May 5th was the exception, and 5 at Sutton North Fen Jun 29th was the peak. **Spotted Redshanks** also showed migration in both directions, presumably: 1-2 at Ouse Washes May 10th-13th and another there on Jun 28th show the range of dates; which way was the Maxey GP bird going after it was seen on Jun 7th though? About 40 **Greenshanks** were seen in the period, again north-bound birds in early May and returning birds at the end of June were included. **Wood Sandpipers** were seen at 6 locations, with 1-2 at a time throughout the period. **Redshanks** were in double figures at the Ouse and Nene Washes and Berry Fen, but the only breeding confirmation came from

Kingfishers Bridge. **Turnstones** were at Grafham Water, Ouse Washes and Paxton Pits on and off throughout May, with 1-4 birds present. The final cherries on the icing on the wader cake were a couple of **Red-necked Phalaropes** – a female at Berry Fen on Jun 18th and a male at the Ouse Washes on the 28th.

One **Kittiwake** occurred on May 17th at Fen Drayton Lakes and a single **Common Gull** on May 20th at Ferry Meadows were the least numerous gulls seen in the period. The biggest count of **Black-headed Gulls** was an impressively precise 697 at Barleycraft GP on May 7th. By Jun 1st there, a count of 190+ was logged with comment that they were becoming difficult to count due to growing vegetation on the islands. Three-figure counts came from four other sites. Numbers at Kingfishers Bridge deserted before breeding got underway, going down to 68+ compared with several hundred in previous years, and birds started to appear at other sites such as Wicken Fen. **Little Gulls** pulsed through in early May, between the 4th and 6th, with 1-5 at four Ouse valley locations, the highest count coming from Grafham Water. One **Mediterranean Gull** held territory at the Barleycraft GP gull colony, while it or others were seen at Paxton Pits, Ouse Fen, Berry Fen Kingfishers Bridge and Earith in the first half of May. Two were seen together in Cambridge on Jun 23rd. **Lesser Black-backed** and **Herring Gulls** were seen in the period, including breeding birds, particularly at Wisbech around the port – the former species was rather more widespread as a breeding species. Single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were noted at Paxton Pits on May 2nd and 7th, Grafham Water on 6th, Godmanchester GP on 13th and finally two at Waterbeach GP on Jun 16th. **Great Black-backed Gulls** were seen at Ouse Washes (4) and Wicken Fen (1) in early May.

Single **Little Terns** were, unusually, seen in June at the Ouse and Nene Washes (5th) and Paxton Pits (9th) while a more typical date was one at Grafham Water on May 6th when there was also a major passage of **Black Terns** in the county – 14 at Grafham and 26 at Paxton Pits. The following day saw just 2 at Fen Drayton Lakes and 3 at Wicken Fen with one more record at Paxton – a single on May 15th – and two at Brampton on the 18th were the last of the period. On May 20th a **White-winged Black Tern** graced Ferry Meadows CP. A single **Sandwich**

**Tern** was recorded during this period, on 12th May at the Nene Washes, two months after the first of the year. **Common Terns** continued to build up with some good counts – 80+ at Paxton Pits, 50+ at Fen Drayton and 39 at Ferry Meadows for example, and quite a few sites had breeding colonies underway. An impressive 78 **Arctic Terns** were at Grafham Water on May 2nd, with several other flocks there up to the 16th; away from Grafham's impressive counts, 1 – 4 were at Ferry meadows, Maxey GP and Paxton Pits.

Clearly the rarest columbid is the **Turtle Dove**, but its rarity and our collective concern for this much declined species, means it also receives the greatest attention from birders – well over 100 records were submitted, but over half of these related to singletons. A total of 51 locations were involved, a fairly good spread, but the highest count was just 5+ from the Wisbech area. Comparatively, **Feral Pigeon** had 5 records, **Stock Dove** 13, **Woodpigeon** 10 and **Collared Dove** 6 but maximum counts were 60+, 35, 200+ and 20+ respectively. A single **Ringed-necked Parakeet** was seen at Abbots Ripton. The thoroughly studied Wicken Fen had the best count of **Cuckoos**, with an estimated 7 birds, 4 male and 3 female, of which 2 had laid by the end of June. Elsewhere 6 were at Fulbourn Fen, 4 at each of Paxton Pits, Woodwalton Fen and the Ouse Washes, and 1 – 3 at around 25 other localities.

**Barn Owls** were seen as ones and twos at 25 locations, with many records coming from occupied nest boxes. There were fewer records of the other owls; 12 locations had **Little Owls**, 8 held **Tawnies** and 2 had **Long-eared Owls**, with a dead individual found at Wicken Fen being the sad end to the species' presence at that site this summer. **Short-eared Owls** were seen well into May at five sites, most regularly Wicken Fen up to the 25th.

**Swift** passage continued through May – while some people were reporting birds back on territories from the 3rd, flocks of 1000+ were seen at Fen Drayton in mid-May while other breeding colonies were restocked later than this, and nest site prospecting was observed even at the end of June. Around 10 localities had **Kingfishers**, with breeding noted at several sites. A single fly-over **Hoopoe** record came from the outskirts of Cambridge on Jun 10th but

news did not get out. **Lesser-spotted Woodpecker** records came from 5 locations, with 3 birds seen or heard at Castor Hanglands on May 18th the most impressive.

A 'vague report in Visitors Book' suggested a **Red-backed Shrike** at Wicken Fen at the end of May, though this may not be considered reliable! There were four reports of single fly-over **Ravens**, two each in May and June, all from widely separated locations. Three sites had **Firecrests** during the period, one at Paxton Pits early in May, then at the end of the month a bird spent at least 3 days at a location, and one was heard singing at another location in June – both indicative of possible breeding. **Bearded Tit** is another rare breeder, though it may be easier for readers to guess some of the locations involved – three sites had confirmed breeding for this species.

Worryingly large concentrations of **Sand Martins** were seen well into June, suggesting they were struggling with their migration – for example, 120 were counted at Kingfisher Bridge on Jun 27th but only 6 pairs were thought to be potentially breeding. On May 17th there were 100+ **Swallows** and **House Martins** at Ferry Meadows, as difficult migration conditions briefly unblocked.

**Cetti's Warbler's** stronghold remains Wicken Fen with some impressive counts of this difficult to study species, but there were 9 other locations with them, including some less expected sites such as Castor Hanglands, Cambridge Research Park and Waterbeach GP. There was just one scarce passage warbler, a **Wood Warbler** at Woodwalton Fen on May 5th. Good counts of our regular species came from Castor Hanglands and included 31 singing **Chiffchaffs** and 41 singing **Willow Warblers**, 36 **Blackcap** territories, 31 singing **Garden Warblers**, 18 **Whitethroats**, 15 **Grasshopper Warblers** but just one **Lesser Whitethroat**. Of the *Acrocephalus* warblers, peaks came from Wicken Fen with 16 **Sedge** and Kingfishers Bridge with 64 **Reed**.

**Nuthatches** seldom leave the comfort of their favoured woods, so one on a bird feeder in Fowlmere village Jun 27th-29th was a good garden tick. Big flocks of **Starlings** appeared in June, with the largest group of 800 on a farm at Lolworth where other groups of 50 or so were

also present, and at least 50% of birds were seen to be juveniles. The cold wet spring was pretty poor for most breeding passerines, but these hole-nesters would have been protected from the elements and the high water tables and damp soil surface would have brought their favoured leatherjacket food close to the surface and easily available, so perhaps they have had a better year than most common birds.

A very late **Fieldfare** record came from Ferry Meadows on May 18th, but none of our resident thrushes showed any significant counts – 17 singing **Song Thrushes** at Castor Hanglands the most noteworthy. We had quite a wait after the single **Spotted Flycatcher** reported in the last bulletin, with the next record coming on May 16th at Hildersham. Sightings greatly increased in June, which may well reflect the lateness of their arrival – an estimated 1000 birds came in through Portland Bill in Dorset on Jun 1st! Once here, singles and pairs were seen at around 20 localities. **Nightingales** were perhaps more numerous, with 23 - 26 estimated at Paxton Pits on May 5th, and 23 singing on May 10th at Castor Hanglands – the final estimate for this site was of 35 territorial males by the end of June, with some proof of breeding noted. Another good site was Grafham Water, with 5, but 1-4 were at a dozen other locations. Just one **Black Redstart** was reported in this period, a singing first-summer male at a private farm location north of Cambridge on Jun 13th, a date when breeding activity could be underway although a later visit failed to relocate the bird. Single **Common Redstarts** were seen at three sites in early May, while 7 **Whinchats** passed through in the same period, with most of them being seen at Maxey GP. Good news from Wicken Fen concerned breeding **Stonechats**, where a pair fledged young; after a couple of years' gap it's good to have this species back as a breeding bird again. The big numbers of **Wheatears** on passage just continued into May, with 37 still at Sugley Wood (Gamlingay) on the 1st and 11 on the 5th. Greenland types were detected on May 6th and 8th while the last records (race not specified) were on the 16th.

There were just 5 locations where **Tree Sparrows** were reported, the high count being 4 pairs at Chatteris. The best count of **Yellow Wagtails** came from migrants roosting in a reed bed at Wicken Fen; between 20:34 and 21:00 approx 133 birds were counted on May 1st.

There were 80 roosting there on May 11th and still 20 by Jun 2nd, showing how slow migration was this spring. **Blue-headed Wagtails** were seen at Blackbush, Ouse Washes, Nene Washes and Grafham Water in early May, but the male at Fowlmere on Jun 6th was a less typical date. **Grey Wagtails** were at about 10 sites through the period. There were a few records of **Pied Wagtail**, and two of **White Wagtail** – May 5th & 6th at two locations. There was a **Tree Pipit** at Grafham Water on May 6th.

A few **Siskins** were seen in May, including a record of 2 fledglings suggesting local breeding, while the 15 at the end of June at Ouse Fen may have bred outside the county? **Lesser Redpolls**

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had no proven breeding (again) but birds were present in May and June, in gardens, a wetland and a woodland site. The final notable species counted in the excellent scrub habitat at Castor Hanglands is **Bullfinch**, which top scored with 12 pairs/calling birds. A single **Hawfinch** was seen at Wandlebury on Jun 19th. There were few decent counts of common buntings – peaks of 11 **Yellowhammers**, 29 **Reed Buntings** and 10 **Corn Buntings**.

Exotica included **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Snow & Bar-headed Goose**.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Vince Lea assisted by Mike Foley.

Monica Marks, Owen Marks, Paul Mason, Duncan McNiven, Matthew Mellor, Andy Merryweather, Mark Missin, Dick Newell, M. J. O'Leary, Dave Palmer, Richard Palmer, John Parslow, Rob Partridge, Gavin Paterson, Garth Peacock, Mark Peck, Ben Phalan, Rob Pople, Doug Radford, Graeme Reed, Gareth Rees, Tony Roberts, RSPB Reserves, Jo Sinclair, Brian Stone, Jonathan Taylor, Kevin Taylor, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne, Andrew Tongue, Hugh Venables, Alan Wadsworth, Mark Ward, Matt Webb, John Wells, Peter Wells, Chris Went, Kevin Wilson, Christoph Zöckler. Records were also taken from BirdTrack, the CBC website and Cambirds with special thanks to Tony Roberts. Many thanks to all who contributed their records.

## From the County Recorder

A large thank you to everyone who sends their records in to the club, through the website, through cambirds or directly. Most people have switched smoothly to the new spreadsheet, making the job for Howard Slatter, who manages the data, and myself, much smoother. We really do appreciate all of the records which get submitted. If you use bird track, we also access that data. I have noticed that a few odd grid references or site names creep in through Birdtrack, so do please be careful when you name a site, and try and check with the club's Gazetteer as well, as most of the main locations have well established names.

I have a couple of requests. Firstly, please endeavour to send your records in as promptly as possible – either by the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month following, or every two months by the 7<sup>th</sup> of the next month. This means that more records are available for the bulletins. Secondly, do remember that if you are lucky enough to find or see a description species (a full list is available from the website and we hope to mark them in bold on the spreadsheet soon) please complete a description form – again these can be found in the records section of the clubs website. Many people are supplying these promptly, and it really does help us assess the rare bird records if descriptions are supplied in a timely manner. Certain difficult species can take a long time to work their way through the Records Committee system, and the sooner they receive the records the sooner they can start the process, with the aim of getting all birds seen in a year into the relevant annual report 'for the record'.

Autumn passage has started, and as we do not appear to have had the rain inundation of last year, hopefully it will be a fruitful season – good birding.

*Louise Bacon*

## From the Chair



Some good news on the Sand Martins of St Ives. I mentioned last time discovering that their breeding site on the causeway had been wired off by contractors. My letter to them resulted in the wires being removed as soon as they could, and plans are in place to come up with a more permanent solution, if we can reconcile the design with the grade II listed status of the causeway. More next time, hopefully. Meanwhile, if anyone is in the area this summer it would be great to get an update on whether the now-available pipes are being used. Many years ago, John Le Gassick took this slide photo of a brood of Sand Martins about to fledge from one of the pipes – a new image from 2013 would be great. The reason the works were allowed to go ahead without any objection was that the contractors did the required data search on breeding records for the area to check if any protected species were present, but Sand Martin is not a protected species. Elsewhere in the country it is still relatively common, but locally this is not the case and each colony is highly prized. The contractors were fully understanding on this point, and quickly remedied the situation as best they could.

As for the other issue raised last time, the destruction of Buzzard nests under licence from Natural England, I was surprised not to receive any correspondence from members at all. Nonetheless, it has been discussed at Council and a proposal has been agreed. I shall be writing to Natural England and requesting a statement from them with information on the number and species of any bird destruction licences issued in the county on an annual basis. While this may not make pleasant reading, I feel it is something which should feature in the annual report, as it concerns our bird populations and informs our members on activities within the county. I doubt very much that any Buzzard nests were destroyed in Cambridgeshire this year, but we simply do not know where the licences were issued for, and cannot predict how this type of action may develop in the future. I think we have a right to know, and after all, Natural England get data from us on our rare breeding birds.

Anyway, on to happier things. I was pleased to get an email from an American visitor to Cambridge, asking for a chance to be shown some of the local birds. For once, I had a chance to do a bit of birding purely for pleasure (I spend most of my time in the field doing surveys for one thing or another, still pleasurable but with more pressure to get an area covered and on sites that wouldn't at first glance be the most desirable places to go birding!) As the lady was happy to see whatever we could see, and wasn't looking for a massive list of species, I thought the best idea would be to go to three habitats – wetland, farmland and woodland – that would give a spread of typical species, and to choose sites where you can get quite close to the birds and really study them. We visited Fowlmere RSPB reserve and then Wimpole Park, both within easy striking distance of Cambridge and – given that it was in late June – both with a reasonable mix of birds. It really opens your eyes to the great birds we have when you go with someone new to the area. Quite rightly, she was far more impressed with singing male Greenfinch and Yellowhammer than the first-summer Black



Redstart which was the highlight in county bird terms! Our main difficulty on the day was trying to see a Blue Tit! We heard loads of family parties, and occasionally had a glimpse of a pale juvenile, but of course the adults were in moult and kept themselves well out of view. There was a late breeding attempt by a pair of Great Tits at Fowlmere, and they were much more obliging, visiting a nest hole with food deliveries. I am not sure how often visiting birdwatchers are likely to contact the club, but it seems like a good way of making links and learning a bit more about the ways of birdwatching around the world. Our visitor came from Albuquerque and kindly gave us framed photos of a couple of garden birds from home – a hummingbird and a roadrunner!

Finally, the atlas has landed. Our launch day was a very happy occasion (if only you knew how close to a disaster it was!) and I'm glad to say that copies are flying off the shelves. I think it is a wonderful achievement and will prove itself incredibly useful for years to come. Many thanks to all who contributed, whether you submitted a single record for a tetrad or, like Ali Cooper, spent hundreds of hours wrangling with the text – revisions, re-writes, corrections, alterations and fitting in the artwork. It's a great piece of teamwork.

*Vince Lea*

## **Club officers**

As you may know, we have had a number of vacancies in the club for a while now, but I'm glad to say some of these are finally being filled.

Andrew Tongue is building up to take over the Research Officer role, and is hoping to get things underway with a Corn Bunting survey in the new year. This is one of the species for which the national Atlas will show that Cambridgeshire has a particular importance. The embryonic idea at the moment is that we co-ordinate a survey across Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, a core area for the species. Details will be worked out as Andrew gets into the role.

Peter Bircham and Chris Brown have come forward to produce the bulletin. Peter, a long standing stalwart of the club with a bit more time now that he has retired, is particularly keen to see the bulletin develop into a more dynamic publication, making fuller use of the possibilities which electronic publishing allow. A 2-monthly paper copy will still be available of course, but those who are able and willing to adopt electronic bulletins will – we hope – get more frequent and better illustrated issues. Members' views on this will of course be taken into consideration, so please tell us how you feel the bulletin should develop – or if you are happy for it to stay the same! Contact [cbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk](mailto:cbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk) or phone or write to me – address on the back page.

Kevin Harris continues to act as our Treasurer, but we really do need to find a permanent replacement for him. I am even pondering whether we should make an exception for this role and offer a small honorarium to incentivise a new person to step into the role.

The Records Committee is also down by one – there is a change of members with Richard Grimmet coming on to the committee and Mark Hawkes standing down, but Richard Patient has also decided to stand down, leaving a vacancy. Many thanks to both Richards and Mark for services rendered and offered. The committee provide a vital role in assessing those species below national rarity status but which are rare within the county.

In general, the club could do with more volunteers offering even relatively small amounts of help – a deputy treasurer would help Kevin for example, if you don't think you can do the whole job of treasurer; we particularly need offers of help with tea-making and door duties for the indoor meetings at St Johns in the winter; contributing articles for the bulletin (instead of the editor having to chase after them), taking on a section for writing the annual report and so on. Please don't wait to

be asked but, don't be surprised if you are... the council will be looking to pressgang 'volunteers' soon!

*Vince Lea*

## County Atlas

All of you who placed a pre-order have, hopefully, now received your copy. Let us know if not. We do have a CD available, which is a set of scanned pdfs of the pages from the two previous atlases from old Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. Whilst we realise not everyone will want that to go with their new atlas, if you do please let us know – hopefully we will distribute any requested copies with your annual report in the winter, to save on extra postage. The new atlas is selling well, nearly 200 copies had been distributed at the time of writing. If you go somewhere such as a reserve with a hide or visitor centre where an advertising poster could usefully be displayed, let us know and we will send one. We have got posters into most of the major bird reserves but if you notice an obvious omission let us know!

For those of you who have not purchased a copy yet – it looks great! It is for sale at various outlets, online and directly from the club for £15 plus £2.50 p&p (or pick one up at an indoor meeting to save on postage!) Please send cheques payable to Cambridgeshire Bird Club to Michael Holdsworth or Louise Bacon.

## Nene Washes colour-ringed Godwit

Regular visitors to our website will have seen the photo of the month for June was a cracking shot of a colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit, taken by Peter Beesley at the Nene Washes on 1<sup>st</sup> June. Reproduced here (printed in black-and white, sadly) for those who haven't seen the website lately.



The photo went to Sabine Schmitt at the RSPB, who conducts the colour ringing scheme there. Despite detailed scrutiny of the original full size file, it was not possible to distinguish the colours accurately enough to give a final decision, but this bird was probably ringed ten or eleven years ago as a chick. The obscured ring colours made reading tricky. It is either left: Orange/Green, right: Limegreen/darkBlue (OGLB), or rather OG Pale blueB (OGPB). The digits on the metal ring couldn't be made out, so that doesn't help to narrow it down.

OGLB was ringed as a chick at the Nene Washes on 22/05/2002. It was seen on 29/4/03 at Cley and during the breeding season of 2003 at the Nene Washes and between 29/6 and 14/7 at Cley again.

OGPB was ringed on 11/05/2003 as a chick at the Nene Washes. Between 14 June and 30 July 2004 and again on 15/16 June 2005 either OGLB or OGPB was seen at Cley.

## Forthcoming Events

**Wednesday 14th August** at 7.30pm Topping Books, Ely, are holding an evening talk with Mark Cocker for his new book 'Birds & People'. <http://www.toppingbooks.co.uk/events/ely/birds-and-people-with-mark-cocker/> Tickets for the event are £6 if collecting from the bookshop and £7 on the door. If you would like more information please contact Stuart Havis, Email: [ely@toppingbooks.co.uk](mailto:ely@toppingbooks.co.uk)

### **Indoor Meetings resume in September, at Cottenham Village College**

Evening meetings at Cottenham Village College take place in the Tony Cooper Suite on the first floor of the new 6<sup>th</sup> form block at the back of the college. A plan of the college is available on the meetings page of the Club website. Doors open at 7.30pm for 8pm.

Please note the change to our published programme for October – John Mallord has received a promotion at the RSPB and his new job means he is no longer based in the country, so he is unable to give the planned talk on Wood Warblers. Doug Radford has been on standby for as long as we can remember, for just such an eventuality, so we offer many thanks to him for offering to give us a talk on his Spoon-billed Sandpiper adventures.

### **Friday 13th September** Cottenham Village College **Birds in a Cage: the POW birdwatchers by Derek Niemann**

At Warburg, Germany, in 1941, four British Prisoners of War found an unexpected means of escape from the horrors of internment when they formed a birdwatching society, and embarked on an obsessive quest behind barbed wire. Through their shared love of birds, they overcame hunger, hardship, fear and stultifying boredom. Their quest drew in not only their fellow prisoners, but also some of the German guards, at great risk to them all...

Derek Niemann draws on original diaries, letters and drawings, to tell of how the four – Conder, Barrett, Waterston and Buxton – were forged by their experiences as POWs into the giants of post war wildlife conservation. Their legacy lives on, in institutions such as the RSPB and the British Wildlife Trust. Their story will be of special interest to anyone who knew Peter Conder, Chairman of the Cambridge Bird Club (now the Cambridgeshire Bird Club) from 1975 to 1979, Vice President from 1981 to 1986 and President from 1987 until his death in 1993.

Derek Niemann is the editor of the RSPB's children's magazines and has written several books on nature and conservation for young readers.

### **Friday 11th October** Cottenham Village College **Spoonies on Sakhalin by Doug Radford**

Searching for one of the world's rarest birds on Russia's largest island.

Doug Radford is Site Manager of Fowlmere Nature Reserve (RSPB).

## **NEW MEMBERS**

We welcome the following new members – Richard Grimmett of Over, Dr Derek Langslow of Orton Longueville and Prof Tony Martin of Dunkirk.

## Club Contacts

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Vacant

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### **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](http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk)

## Bird Records, Sightings and News

We want to speed up and increase the flow of news and records to enhance future bulletins and the content of the Club database. Records can be submitted formally to the County Recorder, Louise Bacon, by 5th of the following month if possible, or every two months, preferably on the club [spreadsheet](#). Sightings supplied to [Cambirds](#) yahoogroup, or to the Club's '[What's about](#)' page also reach the recorder on a monthly basis. If you are a birdtrack user we also access your records on the 5th of the following month. Any major rarities can be phoned in to Birdline East Anglia on 07941 333970.

# GOOD BIRDING!