

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB Bulletin No. 432



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

## Welcome to the January / February 2014 Edition

### RECENT BIRD REPORTS

The records in this bulletin are unchecked and may be revised at a later date. Where no numbers are given the records relate to single birds. An asterisk after the name of a species indicates that it is necessary to send a description to the County Recorder before the record will be accepted.

There has been a further revision of the order of presentation (explained in Vince Lea's article below), so that falcons now are considered to be correctly placed among the near-passerines (after woodpeckers).

### *January – February Headlines*

**BEAN GOOSE (subspecies 'Taiga' *Anser fabalis fabalis*)\*** Jan: Cambridge Research Park (2 on 11<sup>th</sup> and for the remainder of the month). Feb: same site, several dates throughout the month. *If accepted this will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> county record of this subspecies; the first was in 2010.*

**LONG TAILED DUCK\*** Jan & Feb: Grafham Water (long stay bird both months); presumably the same bird at Paxton Pits (22<sup>nd</sup> Feb).

**RED-THROATED DIVER\*** Feb: Grafham Water (16<sup>th</sup> to end of the month).

**GREAT NORTHERN DIVER\*** Jan & Feb: Grafham Water (long stay bird both months, and 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb), Paxton Pits (long stay bird both months), Maxey Pits (4<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Jan), Maxey Pits (2<sup>nd</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> Feb), Bainton Pits (16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb). *The BTO birdtrack records show this species to be more commonly reported than either of the other diver species this winter.*

**GANNET\*** Feb: Gamlingay (3 flyovers on 3<sup>rd</sup>).

**GREAT WHITE EGRET\*** Jan: Paxton Pits (1<sup>st</sup>).

**GLOSSY IBIS** Jan: Earith (12<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes Eldernell (19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>). Feb: Fen Drayton Lakes (flyover on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Nene Washes (3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>), Huntingdon (15<sup>th</sup>), Hemingford Abbots area (22<sup>nd</sup> to end of the month).

**GOSHAWK\*** Feb: Hinchingsbrooke Park (flyover on 19<sup>th</sup>).

**ICELAND GULL** Jan: Tanholt GP (1<sup>st</sup> winter on 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> and also one on 25<sup>th</sup>), Cambridge Research Park/Milton tip (1<sup>st</sup> winter from 5<sup>th</sup> to the end of the month), Fen Drayton Lakes (1<sup>st</sup> winter on 5<sup>th</sup>).

Feb: Tanholt GP (2c.y. on 17<sup>th</sup>), Peterborough/Oxney Road (15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>), Milton tip area (2<sup>nd</sup> winter on 18<sup>th</sup> and rest of the month), Dogsthorpe Tip (27<sup>th</sup>).

**GLAUCOUS GULL** **Jan:** Cambridge Research Park/Milton tip/Impington (2<sup>nd</sup> c.y. 6<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (an adult on 7<sup>th</sup> and for the rest of the month), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 c.y. on 19<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (a 1<sup>st</sup> winter on 25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Grafham Water (2<sup>nd</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>), Milton Tip and surrounding area (1<sup>st</sup> winter bird all month), Mare Fen (1<sup>st</sup> winter on 16<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (23<sup>rd</sup>).

*For both these gull species, some of the records may refer to the same individual; indeed there were sightings of both Iceland and Glaucous reported from the villages close to Milton tip (Landbeach, Histon and Cottenham), which are not included here.*

**WHITETHROAT** **Jan:** Needingworth/Ouse Fen (Jan 19<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, and **Feb** 2<sup>nd</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>), an extraordinary record for these months.

### **Other records**

#### Wildfowl

**Mute Swan** **Jan:** Ouse Fen (240 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes WeBS (190 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Shropshire's Reservoir (60 on 23<sup>rd</sup>).

**Bewick's Swan** **Jan:** Ouse Washes RSPB (on 25<sup>th</sup>), Maxey GP (11<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes (max Eldernell 200 on 1<sup>st</sup>), March (400 with Whoopers on 5<sup>th</sup>), Ely (14<sup>th</sup>), Littleport (2<sup>nd</sup>), Prickwillow (17<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes/Earith (18<sup>th</sup>), Manea (7 on 21<sup>st</sup>).

**Whooper Swan** **Jan:** Ouse Washes RSPB (310 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Brampton (4 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen/Burwell Fen/Adventurers' Fen (10 over on 31<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes (1327 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes (1000+ on 9<sup>th</sup>), Soham Mere (13 on 6<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (13 on 27<sup>th</sup>), Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen (10 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Ramsey (6 on 28<sup>th</sup>).

**Pink-footed Goose** **Jan:** Cambridge Research Park (11<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>), Over (6 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Witcham GP (21<sup>st</sup>), Ouse Washes (25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Ouse Fen (2 on 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>).

**White-fronted Goose** **Jan:** Wicken Fen/Adventurers' Fen (2 on 31<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** Buckden/River Ouse (6 on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Burwell Fen (2 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (2 on 4<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>).

**Greylag Goose** **Jan:** counts over 200 Stapleford/Dernford Quarry (220+ on 29<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen/Adventurers' Fen (maximum 550 on 31<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** Burwell Fen (max 320 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Ouse Fen (232 on 9<sup>th</sup>), Somersham GP (237 on 18<sup>th</sup>), Hinchingsbrooke CP (207 on 19<sup>th</sup>).

**Canada Goose** **Jan:** Cam Washes (150 on 5<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Cam Washes/Upware (max 172 on 5<sup>th</sup>)

**Barnacle Goose** **Jan:** Cambridge (11, Coton footpath on 24<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Cam Washes/Upware (2<sup>nd</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>).

**Brent Goose** **Feb:** Cam Washes/Upware (5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>).

**Egyptian Goose** **Jan:** Paxton Pits (2 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes/Earith (6 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Isleham Washes (25<sup>th</sup>).

**Feb:** Maxey Pits (3 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (3 on 16<sup>th</sup>), and 1 or 2 at eight other sites.

**Shelduck** **Jan:** Grafham Water (14<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (18<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen/Baker's Fen (a pair on 29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Peterborough/Millennium Bridge (20 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Paxton Pits (2 all month), Cam Washes (max 20 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (3 on 7<sup>th</sup>), Prior's Fen (20 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (14 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (4 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (9 on 27<sup>th</sup>).

**Mandarin** **Feb:** Wimpole Park (7<sup>th</sup>), Castor Hanglands (pair flyovers on 16<sup>th</sup>).

**Wigeon** **Jan:** counts over 1000 at Wicken Fen (maximum 2400 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (max 1500 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Needingworth Pits (1300 on 21<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** Huntingdon/Portholme Meadows (1000+ on 1<sup>st</sup>), Burwell Fen (max 1800 on 9<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (3598 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max c2900 on 16<sup>th</sup>).

**Gadwall** **Jan:** counts over 100 at Wicken Fen (maximum 310 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts over 50 at Burwell Fen (max 60 on 9<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (129 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max 160 on 16<sup>th</sup>).

**Teal** **Jan:** Wicken Fen/Baker's Fen (maximum 761 on 29<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (900 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Isleham Washes (350 on 25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Kingfishers Bridge (max 156 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (max 1600 on 9<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max 600 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (436 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Somersham GP (152 on 18<sup>th</sup>).

**Mallard Jan:** Ouse Washes (776 on 20<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes (400 on 20<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (246 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts over 60 from Ouse Washes/Earith to Sutton Gault (60 on 18<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (484 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Cambridge (60 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Wicken Fen (maximum 88 on 25<sup>th</sup>).

**Pintail Jan:** Wicken Fen (maximum 5 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (max 10 on 30<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Paxton Pits (max 31 on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Huntingdon/Portholme Meadow (9+ on 1<sup>st</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (302 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max 6 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Cam Washes (max 3 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (4 on 17<sup>th</sup>).

**Shoveler counts over 100 Jan:** Wicken Fen/Baker's Fen (maximum 219 on 29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Kingfishers Bridge (c150 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen/Baker's Fen (c100 on 1<sup>st</sup>).

**Red-crested Pochard Jan:** Paxton Pits (maximum 5 on 1<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** Fenstanton GP (16<sup>th</sup>), Ferry Meadows (2 on 28<sup>th</sup>).

**Pochard Jan:** highest count Ouse Washes (520 on 20<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes WeBS (1067 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes/Earith (147 on 18<sup>th</sup>).

**Tufted Duck Jan:** Nene Washes (533 on 20<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes (1152 on 17<sup>th</sup>).

**Scaup Jan:** Paxton Pits (1 or 2 on 1<sup>st</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (11<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Paxton Pits (a female 3<sup>rd</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>).

**Goldeneye Jan:** Needingworth Pits (3 on 21<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** Paxton Pits (c45 on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Grafham Water (167 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (9 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (17 on 21<sup>st</sup>).

**Smew Jan:** Paxton Pits (maximum 5 redheads 1<sup>st</sup> and 2 males on 30<sup>th</sup>), Needingworth GP (max 14 on 11<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (redhead on 19<sup>th</sup>), Bainton Pits (2 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (3 redheads on 28<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Barleycraft GP (max 8 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (max 4 on 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (max 3 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (a male on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>), Needingworth Pits (max 8 on 13<sup>th</sup>).

**Red-breasted Merganser Feb:** Soham (6 on 16<sup>th</sup>).

**Goosander Jan:** Paxton Pits (maximum 8 on 30<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (max 9 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Maxey Pits (12 on 18<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (male on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Paxton Pits (max 12 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Maxey Pits (max 19 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (16<sup>th</sup>), Grantchester/Byron's Pool (17<sup>th</sup>).

**Ruddy Duck Jan:** Paxton Pits (1<sup>st</sup>) Ouse Fen (19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Fen Drayton Lakes (21<sup>st</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (25<sup>th</sup>).

### Gamebirds

**Red-legged Partridge Feb:** Knapwell/Grange Farm (26 on 10<sup>th</sup>).

**Grey Partridge Jan:** Gt Shelford/Nine Wells throughout the month (max 30 on 27<sup>th</sup>) and at 8 other South Cambs sites. **Feb:** Burwell Fen (maximum 3 on 7<sup>th</sup>), Knapwell/Grange Farm (6 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Nine Wells (max 26 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits, Soham, Trumpington/Clay Farm (max 5).

### Divers, shearwaters, gannet and cormorants

**Black-throated Diver\* Jan:** Hinchingsbrooke CP (a probable on 22<sup>nd</sup>).

**Cormorant Jan:** Wicken Fen (maximum 19). **Feb:** Wicken Fen (max 20 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (29 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (20 on 21<sup>st</sup>) and Ferry Meadows CP (max 22 on 26<sup>th</sup>).

**Shag Jan:** Paxton Pits (1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (flyover 2<sup>nd</sup>, present on 3<sup>rd</sup>).

### Egrets and herons

**Bittern Jan:** reported from Fowlmere NR, Wicken Fen. **Feb:** at Barleycraft GP, Cambridge/Bolton's Pit, Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen/Trundle Mere, Cam Washes, Kingfishers Bridge, Ouse Fen, Waterbeach GP, and Wicken Fen.

**Little Egret Jan:** Great/Little Shelford (max 18 on 9<sup>th</sup>) and at Paxton Pits (2), Brampton (2), Burwell Fen (2), Great Fen/Home Fen (4). **Feb:** Whittlesford GP (6 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Wicken Fen (maximum 10 on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (8 on 21<sup>st</sup>), and 1 – 4 at nine other sites.

### Grebes

**Little Grebe** **Jan:** Ouse Washes (17 on 20<sup>th</sup>), River Cam Bait's Bite to Clayhithe (18 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Cam Washes (maximum 9 on 8<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (9 on 16<sup>th</sup>), River Cam as above (12 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (12 on 25<sup>th</sup>) and 1 – 5 at five other sites.

**Great Crested Grebe** **Jan:** Grafham Water (maximum c150 on 5<sup>th</sup>) **Feb:** Nene Washes WeBS (7 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Hinchingsbrooke CP (10 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (max 21 on 23<sup>rd</sup>).

**Slavonian Grebe\*** **Jan/Feb:** Grafham Water (31<sup>st</sup> Jan – 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb).

**Black-necked Grebe** **Jan:** Waterbeach River Cam (5<sup>th</sup>).

### Kites, harriers, hawks and buzzards

**Red Kite** **Jan:** Grafham Water (14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>), Aldreth (27<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Great Fen/Trundle Mere (max 4+ on 9<sup>th</sup>), and at six other Hunts/Peterborough sites, plus Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (still present on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Hinxton (6<sup>th</sup>), Chrishall Grange (6<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (16<sup>th</sup>).

**Marsh Harrier** **Jan:** Wicken Fen (maximum 9 on 29<sup>th</sup>), Little Wilbraham Fen (12<sup>th</sup>), Woodwalton Fen (4 on 20<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen (max 6 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Ouse Fen (3 on 5<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max 10+ on 16<sup>th</sup>), Little Wilbraham Fen (max 5 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (4 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Hemingford Abbots (24<sup>th</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (2 on 24<sup>th</sup>).

**Hen Harrier** **Jan:** Great Fen (male on several dates), Waterbeach Fen (5<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max 5, 3 females/ringtails and 2 males out of roost at dawn on 30<sup>th</sup>), Little Wilbraham Fen (a ringtail on 12<sup>th</sup>), Witcham GP (male on 15<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (ringtail on 25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Wicken Fen (maximum 6, 2 males and 4 ringtails on 24<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes/Sutton Gault (ringtail on 27<sup>th</sup>). *There are a number of records of both harrier species in the vicinity of the Great Fen and Wicken Fen not included here.*

**Sparrowhawk** **Jan:** reported from 30 sites well spread across the county **Feb:** reported from 23 sites.

**Buzzard** **Jan:** reported from Brampton (4 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (6 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits, Swaffham Bulbeck, Sawston by pass, and Wicken Fen (maximum 4 on 14<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** reported from 25 sites, including Burwell (5), Nene Washes/March Farmers (5), Paxton Pits (maximum 7 on 16<sup>th</sup>).

**Rough-legged Buzzard** **Jan:** reported over Barleycraft GP on 20<sup>th</sup>.

### Rails and crane

**Water Rail** **Jan:** reported from Cambridge Research Park, Teversham Fen, Woodwalton Fen (4 on 20<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen. **Feb:** reported from Barford Pocket Park, Cam Washes, Fowlmere NR, Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen, Nene Washes/Eldernell, Ouse Fen, Wicken Fen (maximum 8 on 25<sup>th</sup>).

**Coot** **Jan:** largest count Paxton Pits (600 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Burwell Fen (c250 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes/March Farmers (316 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Cam Washes (max 190 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (1624 on 17<sup>th</sup>), and counts of 50 – 100 at five other sites.

**Common Crane** **Jan:** Nene Washes Eldernell (8 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Ely (2 flyovers on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>), and possibly same birds over Ouse Washes (25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen (maximum 11 on 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>), Prior's Fen (5 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (maybe two pairs on 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (2 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes/Eldernell (maximum 13 on 17<sup>th</sup>) and Thorney (2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>). *Such distinctive and wide ranging birds bring the possibility of duplication of records, so the population of individuals could be over-estimated; however, it seems reasonable to suggest that around 15 – 20 birds were recorded in the county in February.*

### Waders

**Avocet** **Feb:** Cam Washes (10 on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 18 on 26<sup>th</sup>).

**Oystercatcher** **Jan:** Paxton Pits (26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes WeBS (6 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Ferry Meadows CP (2 on 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>), Hinchingsbrooke CP (2 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Barleycraft GP (2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Berry Fen (2 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Cam Washes (maximum 2 on 26<sup>th</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (max 4 on 25<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (5+ on 28<sup>th</sup>).

**Golden Plover** **Jan:** Trumpington (500+ on 9<sup>th</sup>), Little Wilbraham Fen (350 on 12<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts over 500 at Huntingdon/Portholme Meadows (1500+ on 1<sup>st</sup>), Burwell Fen (maximum 600+ on 6<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (500+ on 6<sup>th</sup>), Little Wilbraham and Teversham Fens (c600 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Burwell (c700 on 26<sup>th</sup>).

**Grey Plover** **Jan:** Paxton Pits (25<sup>th</sup>).

**Lapwing** **Jan:** counts over 1000 at Paxton Pits (maximum c2000 on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Huntingdon/Hartford (c2800 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (3000 on 23<sup>rd</sup>), Ouse Fen (1200 on 28<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen/Swaffham Pior Fen (max 4000 on 29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts over 500 at Fen Drayton Lakes (3000 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Huntingdon/Portholme Meadows (1200 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Burwell Fen (maximum 1000 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (c3000 on 6<sup>th</sup>), Whittlesford (c500 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Stow-cum-Quy (600 over on 16<sup>th</sup>), Teversham Fen (500 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes WeBS (1162 on 17<sup>th</sup>), and Ouse Fen (8000 on 19<sup>th</sup>).

**Ringed Plover** **Feb:** Colne Fen GP (13<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>).

**Curlew** **Jan:** Witcham (3 on 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Ouse Fen (19<sup>th</sup>).

**Black tailed Godwit** **Jan:** Fen Drayton Lakes (c250 over on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 700 on 23<sup>rd</sup>), Paxton Pits (maximum 350+ on 25<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (10<sup>th</sup>), (c450 on 13<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Fen Drayton Lakes (max 700 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Huntingdon/Portholme Meadow (500+ on 1<sup>st</sup>), Nene Washes/Ring's End (6 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (max c1500 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Mare Fen (100 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (26<sup>th</sup>).

**Bar-tailed Godwit** **Jan:** Paxton Pits (a flyover on 31<sup>st</sup>).

**Ruff** **Jan:** Needingworth Pits (46 on 21<sup>st</sup>), Ouse Fen (103 on 28<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Ouse Fen (maximum 95 on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Paxton Pits (max 7 on 9<sup>th</sup>), Needingworth Pits (10 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Barleycraft GP (max 14 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (25<sup>th</sup>).

**Dunlin** **Jan:** Paxton Pits (maximum 4 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Huntingdon/Hartford (c80 on 13<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Overcote (3<sup>rd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>), Barleycraft GP (5 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Paxton Pits (c50 on 18<sup>th</sup>), Huntingdon/Portholme Meadows (5+ on 1<sup>st</sup>), Ouse Fen (max 70 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (25<sup>th</sup>).

**Green Sandpiper** **Jan:** reported from Needingworth Pits, Paxton Pits (maximum 2) and Waterbeach Fen. **Feb:** 1 – 4 reported from Cam Washes, Grafham Water, Ouse Fen and Paxton Pits.

**Redshank** **Jan:** Grafham Water (maximum 10 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Isleham Washes (8 on 25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Peterborough (1<sup>st</sup>), Grafham Water (max 37 on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Histon (15 on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Ouse Fen (70 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Cam Washes (max 14 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Barleycraft GP (16<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (16<sup>th</sup>), Kingfishers Bridge (26<sup>th</sup>).

**Jack Snipe** **Jan:** Paxton Pits (5<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Orton BP (2<sup>nd</sup>), Sutton (6 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (22<sup>nd</sup>), Maxey Pits (3 on 22<sup>nd</sup>).

**Woodcock** **Jan:** reported from Castor Hanglands, Eaton Ford, Farcet Fen (3 on 28<sup>th</sup>), Fordham Wood (2), Fowlmere NR (2), Milton CP (2), Paxton Pits (maximum 3 on 18<sup>th</sup>) and Wicken Fen.

**Feb:** reported from Eaton Ford, Great Fen/Holme Fen (maximum 2), Cambridge (private city garden on 9<sup>th</sup>) and East Barnwell LNR (22<sup>nd</sup>), Hardwick Wood, Monk's Wood, Whittlesford GP, Wicken Fen.

**Snipe** **Jan:** Wicken Fen/Burwell Fen (14 on 26<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Barford Pocket Park (30 on 8<sup>th</sup>), Sutton (c25 on 12<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (16<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (3 – 4 calling on 19<sup>th</sup>).

### Skuas, Puffin, auks, terns and gulls

**Kittwake** **Feb:** Grafham Water (9<sup>th</sup>).

**Black-headed Gull** **Jan:** largest counts at Waterbeach GP (3000 on 22<sup>nd</sup>) and Eaton Socon (3000 on 27<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts of 500+ at Eaton Socon (max 500 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen/Baker's Fen (c1650 on 23<sup>rd</sup>), Milton tip (3000 on 21<sup>st</sup>).

**Mediterranean Gull** **Jan:** St Ives (an adult on 7<sup>th</sup>), Milton area (25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Milton Tip (19<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (a single on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 3 on 27<sup>th</sup>).

**Common Gull** **Jan:** Eaton Socon (1800 on 27<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Bakers Fen (300 on 17<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Ferry Meadows CP (110 on 20<sup>th</sup>).

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** **Jan:** Milton Tip (1000+ on 10<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Milton Tip (400 on 21<sup>st</sup>).

**Herring Gull** **Jan:** Milton Tip (1500+ on 10<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes (3000 on 17<sup>th</sup>).

**Yellow-legged Gull** **Jan:** Fen Drayton Lakes (7+ on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Milton tip (maximum 7 on 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (several dates), Grafham Water (2 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Milton Tip (maximum 6+ on 27<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (up to 5 on several dates), Mare Fen (3 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Dogsthorpe Tip (27<sup>th</sup>).

**Caspian Gull** **Jan:** Wicken Fen (12<sup>th</sup>), Milton tip (maximum 8 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (max 4 on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Grafham Water (up to 3 on several dates), Cottenham (8<sup>th</sup>), Milton Tip/Landbeach area (max 5 on 18<sup>th</sup>) and Dogsthorpe Tip (27<sup>th</sup>).

**Great Black-backed Gull** **Jan:** Milton Tip (446 on 10<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Nene Washes (500 on 17<sup>th</sup>) and Milton Tip (160 on 21<sup>st</sup>).

#### Doves, cuckoo, owls kingfisher and woodpeckers

**Stock Dove** **Feb:** counts of 20+ at Ouse Fen (c25 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Swaffham Bulbeck (30 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (c20 on 23<sup>rd</sup>).

**Barn Owl** **Jan:** reported from Paxton Pits, Wicken Fen (maximum 2). **Feb:** at 21 sites, 15 in south and east Cambs and 6 in Hunts/Peterborough.

**Little Owl** **Jan:** Needingworth Pits (2 on 21<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** reported from Burwell Fen, Doddington and Hinxton.

**Tawny Owl** **Jan:** Woodwalton Fen (3 on 20<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** reported from Gamlingay Heath, Knapwell, Peterborough, Sawston Hall, Stapleford and Wicken Fen.

**Short-eared Owl** **Jan:** Great Fen (maximum 7 on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Witcham (15<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Great Fen/Holme Fen/Trundle Mere (maximum 4 on 4<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (maximum 5 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes/Eldernell (16<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>).

**Kingfisher** **Jan:** Cambridge Research Park, Grafham Water (2 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits, Wicken Fen. **Feb:** reported from 22 sites well spread across the county.



*Short-eared Owl by Richard Johnson*

#### Falcons

**Kestrel** **Jan:** reported from 20 sites. **Feb:** reported from Knapwell (3), Nene Washes WeBS (8 on 17<sup>th</sup>) and Ouse Fen. *These reports hardly represent the true picture of this species across the county, but perhaps observers might pay particular attention to birds in summer. Figures in the recently published Atlas tell of a 44% national decline since 1970 (less in eastern England); since Kestrels can breed at densities of 10-15 pairs per 10km square, halving the population would not show in the Atlas since there would still be birds in each square.*

**Merlin** **Jan:** Great Fen (2<sup>nd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and a female on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Wicken Fen (11<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>), Fowlmere (2 on 21<sup>st</sup>), St Ives (27<sup>th</sup>), Tubney Fen (29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Fowlmere NR (7<sup>th</sup>), Great Fen/Holme Fen/Trundle Mere (singles on several dates), Winwick (11<sup>th</sup>), Great Eversden (15<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen/Wicken Fen (on several dates).

**Peregrine Jan:** Cambridge (1 or 2 in the customary places), Great Fen/Trundle Mere (12<sup>th</sup>), Witcham GP (2 juveniles on 15<sup>th</sup> and a single on 19<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> and singles on 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Cambridge (1 or 2 as above), Ouse Washes/Earith/RSPB (1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>), Abbotsley (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>), Great Fen/Trundle Mere/Holme Fen (16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes (17<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (22<sup>nd</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (23<sup>rd</sup>).

**Ring-necked Parakeet\* Feb:** Cambridge/Holbrooke Road (26<sup>th</sup>).

#### Shrikes and corvids

**Great Grey Shrike\* Jan:** Great Fen Trundle Mere/Holme Fen (throughout the month). **Feb:** Great Fen/Holme Fen (the over-wintering bird from 1<sup>st</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>), Ely (3<sup>rd</sup>).

**Jackdaw/Rook Jan and Feb:** The Wicken Fen roost continued throughout both months (c2000-3000 birds).

**Rook Feb:** Wicken Fen/Baker's Fen (c300 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Abbots Ripton (450 on 4<sup>th</sup>).

**Carrion Crow Feb:** counts over 20 at Great Fen/Holme Fen (28 on 21<sup>st</sup>) and Knapwell (29 on 10<sup>th</sup>).

**Hooded Crow\* Jan and Feb:** Great Fen/Holme Fen (throughout both months).

**Raven Jan:** Castor Hanglands (2 flyovers on 1<sup>st</sup>), Paxton Pits (flyover on 11<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (17<sup>th</sup>), Dry Drayton (29<sup>th</sup>), Milton Estate (29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Grafham Water (2<sup>nd</sup>), Kimbolton (2<sup>nd</sup>), Gamlingay (2 on 9<sup>th</sup>), Bretton (10<sup>th</sup>), Peterborough/Milton Estate (10<sup>th</sup>), Knapwell (22<sup>nd</sup>), Paxton Pits (22<sup>nd</sup>), Stirtloe (22<sup>nd</sup>), King's Dyke NR (one heard on 23<sup>rd</sup>). *The spread of this species continues apace. The Cambridgeshire Atlas (2007-11) stated winter records of 1-5 per annum; recently there have been 5-10 records per month from a fairly widespread number of locations. Will this be the year for a very long time when Ravens breed in Cambridgeshire?*

#### Crests, tits and larks

**Goldcrest Jan:** Bedford Purlieus (10 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan).

**Marsh Tit Jan:** reported from 5 sites. **Feb:** reported from Chippenham Fen, Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen, Hardwick Wood, and Monk's Wood. *This appears to be a seriously under-recorded species.*

**Bearded Tit Jan:** reported from Needingworth Pits, Ouse Fen, Teversham Fen, Woodwalton Fen and Wicken Fen. **Feb:** Wicken Fen (3 parties heard on 10<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (5 on 21<sup>st</sup>).

#### Hirundines, long-tailed tit and warblers

**Cetti's Warbler Jan:** reported from Wicken Fen (maximum 4 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water and Brampton. **Feb:** reported from Barford Pocket Park, Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 3), Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen, Hampton Lakes, Kingfishers Bridge, Ouse Fen, Paxton Pits, Wicken Fen (maximum 5 on 25<sup>th</sup>).

**Chiffchaff Jan:** Grafham Water (17<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (18<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Paxton Pits (several dates), Hinxton (10<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes/Earith (10<sup>th</sup>), Godmanchester GP (17<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (22<sup>nd</sup>), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 26<sup>th</sup>) and Fowlmere NR (26<sup>th</sup>).

**Blackcap Jan:** Cambridge (6 reports in different parts of the city, 3<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Cambridge (several sites on 5<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>), Barleycraft GP on 16<sup>th</sup>, Great Shelford (16<sup>th</sup>) Knapwell (21<sup>st</sup>).

#### Waxwing, nuthatch, treecreeper, wren, starling and thrushes

**Waxwing Jan:** Cambridge (10 near the Science Park on 3<sup>rd</sup>).

**Nuthatch Jan:** at 5 sites including Sawston (20<sup>th</sup>) and Wicken Fen (21<sup>st</sup>). **Feb:** reported from Paxton Pits and Waresley.

**Treecreeper Jan:** Bedford Purlieus (5 on 3<sup>rd</sup>).

**Starling Jan:** Godmanchester GP (roost of 5000 on 13<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** roosts at Cottenham (1000 on 2<sup>nd</sup>) and Wicken Fen (500 on 10<sup>th</sup>).

**Fieldfare Jan:** counts over 50 at Burwell Fen (60 on 26<sup>th</sup>), Tubney Fen (c150 on 27<sup>th</sup>), Whittlesford GP 50+ on 28<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts of 100+ at Peterborough (500 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Chrishall Grange (c250 on 6<sup>th</sup>),

Fowlmere NR (200 on 7<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (c100 on 13<sup>th</sup>), Granta Park (c100 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Lolworth (240 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Clayhithe (200 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Teversham Fen (100 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes/Ring's End (130 on 17<sup>th</sup>), Thorney Dyke (850 on 19<sup>th</sup>) and Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (300-400 on 19<sup>th</sup>).

**Song Thrush Feb:** Knapwell/Grange Farm (22 on 10<sup>th</sup>).

**Redwing Jan:** Croyden (85 on 6<sup>th</sup>), Woodwalton Fen (60+ on 19<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Abbots Ripton (162 on 8<sup>th</sup>), Wimpole Park (80 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (71 flyovers on 28<sup>th</sup>).

**Robin Feb:** Knapwell/Grange Farm (35 on 10<sup>th</sup>).

#### Starts and chats

**Stonechat Jan:** Burwell Fen/ Wicken Fen (1-3 throughout the month), Ouse Washes (10 on 20<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (29<sup>th</sup>), Chrishall Grange (29<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Wicken Fen (pair on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Chrishall Grange (6<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Washes (2 on 10<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>), Nene Washes/Stanground (17<sup>th</sup>), Earith (18<sup>th</sup>), Grafham (18<sup>th</sup>), Burwell Fen (1-2 all month).

#### Sparrows, waqtails and pipits

**Tree Sparrow Jan:** Needingworth GP (3 on 11<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (11<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Woodhurst (21 on 16<sup>th</sup>), Ramsey (23<sup>rd</sup>), Ouse Washes RSPB (25<sup>th</sup>).

**Grey Wagtail Jan:** Reported from Paxton Pits, Hinxtton, Peterborough, Cam Washes, Maxey GP and Ouse valley sites. **Feb:** at these sites plus Ouse Fen/Mare Fen (2), Sutton Gault, Wicken Fen (flyover).

**Pied Wagtail Feb:** roost counts at Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen (150-200 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Granta Park 26 on 11<sup>th</sup>, Brampton Hut (c100 on 13<sup>th</sup>).

**Water Pipit Jan:** Ouse Washes/Earith (2 on 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>), Mare Fen (5 on 26<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Ouse Washes/Earith (1 – 2 all month), Ouse Washes/Sutton Gault (*a county record of 24 into a roost on 27<sup>th</sup>*), Mare Fen/Ouse Fen (8 on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 6 on 23<sup>rd</sup>).

#### Finches and buntings

**Brambling Jan:** reported from Paxton Pits and Ferry Meadows CP. **Feb:** Conington airfield (several on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Ferry Meadows CP (with Chaffinches on 3<sup>rd</sup>), Wicken Fen (16<sup>th</sup>), Paxton Pits (max 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>).

**Chaffinch Jan:** Wicken Fen/Priory Farm (flock of 50-60 mixed with Goldfinches).

**Bullfinch Jan:** Castor Hanglands (22 on 1<sup>st</sup>).

**Linnet Jan:** Burwell Fen (27 on 26<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts of 50+ at Knapwell/Grange Farm (105 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Eversden (c100 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Ouse Fen (c130 on 15<sup>th</sup>), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (80-100 on 19<sup>th</sup>).

**Twite\* Jan:** Ouse Fen (with a flock of Linnets on 25<sup>th</sup>).

**Lesser Redpoll Jan:** reported from Great Fen, Paxton Pits and Wicken Fen. **Feb:** Ferry Meadows CP (20 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Great Fen/Holme Fen/Woodwalton Fen (maximum 50 + on 27<sup>th</sup>), Wicken Fen (max 30 on 17<sup>th</sup>), 1 – 10 reported from Bretton, Cambridge Lakes GC, Histon, Paxton Pits.

**Mealy Redpoll Jan:** Ferry Meadows (maximum 7+ on 6<sup>th</sup>), Great Fen/Holme Fen (max 4 on 13<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Great Fen/Woodwalton Fen (max 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup>), Histon (19<sup>th</sup>).

**Goldfinch Jan:** Burwell Fen (50+ on 26<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Burwell Fen (maximum c300 in three flocks on 10<sup>th</sup>).

**Siskin Jan:** Milton CP (7 on 2<sup>nd</sup>), Cambridge Botanic Gardens (4 on 10<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** reported from Bretton, Chippenham Fen, Fen Drayton Lakes, Ferry Meadows CP, Great Fen/Holme Fen/Woodwalton Fen, Lode, Paxton Pits (maximum c20 on 14<sup>th</sup>), Grafham Water (2 on 16<sup>th</sup>).

**Yellowhammer Jan:** Barton (25 on 6<sup>th</sup>), Waterbeach Fen (20 on 5<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** counts of 20+ at Knapwell/Grange Farm (85 on 10<sup>th</sup>), Longstowe (40 on 13<sup>th</sup>), and Hinxtton (26 on 20<sup>th</sup>).

**Reed Bunting Feb:** counts of 40+ at Granta Park (47 roosting on 11<sup>th</sup>) and Knapwell (67 on 10<sup>th</sup>).

**Corn Bunting Jan:** Melbourne (110 on 19<sup>th</sup>), Abbotsley (30 on 1<sup>st</sup>), Waterbeach Fen (10 on 5<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** max count 16 (Ouse Fen 16<sup>th</sup>).

#### Exotica/escapes

**Ross's Goose Jan:** Cam Washes Upware and Wicken Fen (the long stay bird throughout the month).



**Lesser Canada Goose *Branta canadensis parvipes*** (a subspecies not currently on the British List). **Feb:** Sutton Gault (1<sup>st</sup>).

**Red-breasted Goose** **Jan:** Fen Drayton Lakes-Fenstanton (in a field on 25<sup>th</sup>). **Feb:** Ouse Washes RSPB, (probable escape with Greylags on 21<sup>st</sup>).

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## **New taxonomic arrangement for 2014**

In what seems to be a far too regular happening these days, the arrangement of birds in the systematic list has changed again, and the Cambridgeshire Bird Club is adopting this new order from now on. Please bear with us while everyone gets used to it! The biggest and most surprising change is the placing of the falcons; they are no longer considered to be related to the other diurnal raptors (hawks, buzzards, eagles, harriers, vultures etc). Instead, it has been discovered that they are most closely related to the parrots, which, in turn, are thought to be the most closely related group to the passerines.

I have been trying to adjust to this concept by thinking about the hole-nesting habits of Kestrels, and in particular, casting my mind back to noisy flocks of Lesser Kestrels wheeling around breeding colonies. These can, if you don't think about their diet, be reminiscent of parrots. These relationships have been uncovered at the genetic level, by the study of DNA, which is actually more reliable at telling us how species and genera are related than any outward features like talons and hooked beaks. I think most people would accept that auks are more closely related to gulls than penguins, despite the fact that they look superficially like penguins. It is the ecological niche of swimming out to sea to catch fish which has resulted in the physical similarities of auks and penguins, but they have evolved from different starting points; this is called convergent evolution – different ways of getting to the same end point. Think bats and birds – they have very different but equally effective solutions to the challenge of getting vertebrates airborne.

Scientific studies on taxonomic relationships increasingly use genetic material that is evolutionarily neutral. Mutations accumulate in this DNA over time, at a constant rate, described as a molecular clock. These changes preserve the evolutionary processes and tell us how close or distant two taxa may be. Things which diverged relatively recently will share a lot of the same DNA markers, while those that separated a long time ago will have a lot of differences. Compiling the sequences of more sections of DNA from ever larger numbers of species allows the production of more accurate family trees, showing the most likely ways in which things are related. The problem at the moment is the pace of change, with scientific advances driven largely by technology developed for human genetics plus ever increasing computer power allowing bigger data sets to be processed. This means, for the average birder, that the arrangement seems to have changed every time they get a new book or bird report!

Finding the species you want to know about means going to the index rather than the position in the book where you expected to find them. It's difficult to predict how much longer this refinement of taxonomy will continue at the present pace, but I think it is best if we accept the latest findings and follow the consensus. The current list was published on the BOU website in January 2014 and has been adopted by British Birds, so who are we to argue?

The BOU website has a full checklist which was published last June, which is not in this most recent order, but the 'simple' list, published in January this year, shows the new order with Falcons towards the end of the non-Passerines. Peter Bircham contacted the BOU about the disruption this frequent rearrangement causes to clubs like ours, and Martin Collinson, Chair of BOURC and convener of the Taxonomic Subcommittee, responded, acknowledging that they could have handled the timing of the publication of these lists rather better.

Vince Lea

## **2014 Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire corn bunting survey: Background and methodology**

### **Background**

Corn buntings underwent a steep 90% breeding population decline in Britain during the period 1970 – 2010, accompanied by contractions of 27% in winter range since the 1981 – 1984 *Winter Atlas* and 56% in breeding range since the 1968 – 1972 *Breeding Atlas*. This species occupies the Red List of birds of the highest conservation concern in the UK.

A farmland specialist, the primary stronghold of corn buntings in England is eastern arable areas.

This novel three-county survey aims to harness the abundance of skills and enthusiasm of birders across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire to derive a population estimate of corn buntings for each of three counties and establish any basic patterns. It is hoped that data from this survey may be used to identify local corn bunting population hotspots that could be targeted to provide agri-environment advice.

### **Methodology**

This survey will be based upon randomly-selected stratified tetrads for each county. For each county, tetrad selection will be based on the random selection of 20% of tetrads which held territorial corn buntings during the 2007 – 2011 Atlas plus the random selection of 10% of tetrads which held corn buntings during the 1988 – 1991 *Breeding Atlas* but have not subsequently held corn buntings. This procedure will particularly help us to obtain adequate coverage of the larger Cambridgeshire population.

Birders in each of the respective three counties should contact the following individuals to arrange allocation of their tetrads:

**Bedfordshire:** Steve Blain - [recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk)

**Cambridgeshire:** Andrew Tongue - [andrew.tongue@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.tongue@gmail.com)

**Hertfordshire:** Murray Orchard - [murray.orchard@live.co.uk](mailto:murray.orchard@live.co.uk)

A website for the survey, <http://cornbunting.birdsurvey.org.uk/>, will contain tetrad maps for each of the three counties. By clicking on a tetrad you will be able to access a printable map / recording form.

Each tetrad must be visited twice. Please print off a new map / form for each individual tetrad visit. The first visit must be in the first three weeks of June. The second must be in the first three weeks of July. We would strongly encourage people to undertake surveys during the early morning, if possible (6am – 11am) as this is when males are singing most actively. Otherwise, please survey at times when you are able to. If the first visit is later in the day, please try to make the second one earlier and vice-versa. It is likely that evening counts will underestimate true male abundance.

Please check the weather forecast before heading out. Surveys should be undertaken in dry, calm conditions. If a tetrad visit is only partially-completed (e.g., due to the onset of heavy rain and / or strong winds), the observer should return and complete that visit as soon as possible, ideally within that week, if this is possible.

We would ideally like observers to walk a fixed route through the tetrad, preferably reversing the direction walked between either visit, and to map every singing corn bunting and, preferably, any other corn bunting activity in the tetrad, using basic BTO symbols and abbreviations. Observers can record data on the printable tetrad maps, accessible on this website. All areas not covered by the survey should be indicated on survey maps (i.e., by shading or hatching). These could be areas containing unsuitable habitat (e.g., mature woodland, expanses of open water or intensive residential or commercial land-use or else areas within the tetrad which they are unable to adequately cover, for example, due to land access issues or time constraints).

Completed survey forms can either be scanned and emailed to [andrew.tongue@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.tongue@gmail.com) or can be sent to Andrew Tongue at RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. We will need all survey forms to be returned by 31<sup>st</sup> August please. We would be grateful if observers submit their records of all species recorded during these surveys to the Birdtrack online recording system ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)), though, particularly, turtle dove, spotted flycatcher, tree sparrow, cuckoo, yellow wagtail and grey partridge.

At all times observers must follow public rights of way only, unless with explicit agreement from the landowner. We have a responsibility to promote farmland bird conservation in a positive light and interested members of the public should be given an understanding of the purposes of this survey. Finally, please take care and be sensible when in the field. Please read the health and safety guide on the website. Thank you for your help with this survey, it is greatly appreciated.

*Louise Bacon, Steve Blain, Chris Dee, Graham Goodall, Vince Lea, Murray Orchard, Rosemary Setchfield and Andrew Tongue. March 2014*

### **Aldreth Windfarm proposal**

Paul Mason has alerted us to a potentially threatening wind farm proposal, in which 4 turbines 130m high are planned for Berry Fen, Aldreth, an area frequented by wintering waders and on a regular commuting route for all three species of swan, as well as host to various breeding raptors. While the club itself is a non-campaigning organisation (a condition of our charitable status), we would encourage members to contact Paul for more details and to consider getting on board with the very important campaign that he is undertaking.

Paul can be contacted on [pmlindenbury@hotmail.com](mailto:pmlindenbury@hotmail.com)

### **Where do Seabirds go when they head out to sea? Insights from new technology.**

*Dr Mark Bolton talked on this subject at the club's meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> November. He gave some fascinating insights and demonstrated the link between research and wildlife protection policy; I took some notes which are summarised here; any inaccuracies are wholly mine.*

*Chris Brown*

The UK holds internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds, yet numbers have declined dramatically in recent decades, linked in some cases, to poor food supply. Development of offshore

wind energy represents a further potential threat to foraging seabirds. It is important not to overlook the global status of the seabird species on our shores: the UK has 75% of the world's Manx Shearwater nests, 65% of Lesser Black-backed Gull nests, 60% of Gannet and about 50% of Shag nests, and most of the world's 16,000 Great Skua pairs.

Seabirds did well until the late 1990s benefitting from wasteful fishing, but there have been big changes since then, and in particular breeding success has declined. Possible causes might include oceanographic changes (temperature, plankton abundance), fishery practice (more industrial fishing of smaller species), and the impact of marine renewable energy. The latter has a cost to the marine environment, and is a current priority for the RSPB in its dealings with the Government.

Though the EU does have an 'Integrated Maritime Policy' which has led to the establishment of 31 Marine Conservation Zones, mobile species particularly seabirds were not considered in the designation of these zones; consequently, MC Zones do not cover huge areas of the sea bed which are leased to the energy companies. There are six Special Protection Areas (also based in EU legislation) but these cover certain seabird colonies, not their feeding areas.

However, a €3.4 M EU funded research project began in 2009. The RSPB research team was doubled to two (!) and a simple £40 GPS tracker discovered, the cheapness of which enabled the tagging and tracking of a much greater number of birds. These tags fall off after two weeks if the carrying bird is not re-captured on its return to the nest; later versions also record the frequency and depth of diving for relevant species.

Initially the project set out to monitor Fulmars, Razorbills, Shags, Kittiwakes and Guillemots in the Atlantic, and over 1000 seabirds of five species from 19 colonies have been tracked. Further funding has enabled an extension to cover Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Black Guillemots and east coast colonies.

The lessons learned are firstly that birds fly much further to feed than had previously been described (including in recent publications). Kittiwakes, thought to travel 120 km are now known to fly up to 228 km on a feeding foray; for Gannets the figure is 339 km (formerly 135 km), and Razorbills 313 km (95 km). But there is great variation amongst species according to the proximity of feeding grounds; for example Razorbills on Colonsay only needed to travel 34 km to a site where local currents provided rich feeding areas, whereas birds of the same species travelled 300 km from their Fair Isle colonies.

Secondly, information has also been gained on what birds do *en route* i.e. how much time is spent feeding, roosting and flying, and on the density of birds in foraging areas. Hot spots for several species have been identified off Fraserburgh and Peterhead.

A key to the potential protection of seabird species lies in the concept of connectivity between the currently protected colonies and their feeding areas. Developers are required to show that their proposals will have no adverse impact on protected species; so if the feeding areas of protected species are known, and negative impacts predicted, then potentially these areas can be protected from development. With the information now becoming available, protection becomes a possibility.

However, current knowledge is based on a small percentage of birds tracked for just two weeks, so an important next step will be to develop predictive modelling. Teaming up with oceanographers, the project will use knowledge of plankton, sediments, and the thermal characteristics of the sea to predict feeding areas. Comparison of predicted and actual feeding patterns will enable these models to be refined. Other future objectives will be to discover the foraging patterns of colonies not yet studied, and to understand changes in feeding areas over time. The full impact of wind turbine arrays is also not fully understood yet; whilst there is some information on blade impacts, and the damaging noise / vibration effects during construction, fish stocks might in the longer term benefit from the 'reef effect' of undersea structures and from the ban on fishing within wind farms.

Much more information on this project can be found at [www.FAMEproject.eu](http://www.FAMEproject.eu)

## **Book Review - Bird Atlas 2007-2011 by Balmer, Gillings, Caffrey, Swan, Downie and Fuller.**

There can be no question that Bird Atlas 2007-11 is indeed "the most important British bird book for two decades". It is said to be the culmination of probably the largest volunteer 'citizen-science' project ever undertaken, on any subject, anywhere in the world. Over 40,000 birders contributed over 19 million records. Timed-tetrad visits walked around the Equator twenty times. The Atlas is not surprisingly, a big book, its 718 large-format pages and 1300 maps weighing in at over 4kg, so it's not something to be read in bed or in the bath (it almost needs its own health and safety warning). In fact it probably needs its own lectern, partly because of its biblical (and sadly, often apocalyptic) scope, and partly because maybe we should just leave it open and available for a daily read, species account by species account. These accounts, the meat of the book, only start on page 158, after seven heavyweight chapters on methodology, coverage and interpretation. The overall design of the book is outstanding – at the same time clear and beautiful. Each species has at least one stunning photograph; and Dave Daly's opening chapter paintings are superb.

Almost every species has a story to tell. We've all notice the headline species: Little Egrets with their twenty-year 16,350% range expansion; or Green Woodpeckers on our lawns; and we hardly now lift our binoculars for Avocets, Red Kites or Cetti's. But the Atlas tells of 74 species with significant range increases since the first Atlas, and almost equalled by the 72 range contractions. As a Yorkshireman living in East Anglia, I'm struck by how many species are declining in the south and east, while flourishing, even expanding in the north and west, and particularly in Ireland. We maybe knew that Willow Warbler was the most striking example of this, but Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin? We knew about the steady easterly march of Ravens, but who knew of the northern range-expansions of Magpies, Jays, and strikingly, Goldfinches? Or of Beardies to Wales and Scotland, Parakeets to Liverpool and Newcastle, and Dartford Warblers to Wales? And why does Firecrest distribution now overlay Woodlark so precisely?

There is something here for everyone: for the twitchers, maps of Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warblers, American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal, *michahellis* and *cachinnans*. For the Big Garden Birdwatchers there are astonishing range-changes and winter distribution maps for Siskin, Lesser Redpoll and the unstoppable Nuthatch. Eagle-Owl (with hyphen) is for the archaeologist.

And for those 'glass-half-empty' people (like me) there's our first British/Irish extinction – Corn Bunting in Ireland; and the agonising documentation of the next probable two – Turtle Dove and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Buy it; and if you contributed, look for your name among the tens of thousands listed out on pages 652-665!

*Michael Holdsworth*

## **Forthcoming meetings**

**Friday 11th April, Cottenham Village College.** Doors 7.30 for 8 pm start

### **Thirty Years of Bird Photography by Tim Loseby**

Tim Loseby has been birdwatching for over 50 years. The first 'exotic' place he went to was Minsmere in 1964! He has been a photographer for 30 years, and became a familiar face on the birding scene in the 1980s as a photographer of rarities. He is a founder member of the Oriental Bird Club and has travelled extensively in Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia and Middle East. He is Director of Fair Isle Bird Observatory a place he first visited in 1970. He comes from Yorkshire originally but, following 35 years in Kent, now lives in north Norfolk.

**Friday 9th May, Cottenham Village College.** Doors 7.30 for 8 pm start

**The Lodge – Past and Future by Peter Bradley.** This talk is about The Lodge – its history, how the RSPB became involved in the site, what has been done to re-create the largest area of heathland in Bedfordshire, and plans for the future. Peter Bradley has worked for The RSPB since 1990, at sites including Nagshead, Fore Wood, Rye House Marshes, Mid Yare, Titchwell (warden 1997–2000), Rye Meads (site manager 2000–2004), The Lodge (from 2004). He is now Senior Sites manager for Beds & Herts, managing The Lodge and overseeing Fowlmere and Rye Meads.

## New Members

We welcome the following new members – Peter Bateup of Rothwell, Northants and John Waine of Hartford.

### **Club Contacts**

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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)

The editors would welcome contributions to the E-Bulletin and print edition, on topics such as identification problems, behaviour, summaries of club talks, and book reviews. Contact us at [cbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk](mailto:cbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk), and use this address to let us know if you would like to receive your bulletin in e-mail format rather than paper.

### **Bird Records, sightings and news**

If you have seen a scarce or local bird, please submit the news to the '[What's about](#)' page on the Club website via [Pete and Paul](#) who maintain an up-to-date selection of recent highlights. You can also report interesting sightings on the [Cambirds](#) email group (not run by the Club, but we access the records). Any major rarities can be phoned in to Birdline East Anglia on 07941 333970.

Full lists of your records should continue to be submitted monthly to **Louise Bacon** the County Recorder, preferably using the [spreadsheet](#) available on the Records section of the website, **by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the following month.**

# GOOD BIRDING!