

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

CHAIR'S REPORT 2016

Presented to the Annual General Meeting on March 10th 2017

Reporting on my fourth year in the Chair, I remind myself that I took on the role of Chair as an emergency replacement following Peter Herkenrath's move to Germany, and that I had hoped it would be a temporary arrangement until someone more suitable could be found. I'm now in the position of facing my fifth and final year and the search for the next Chair becomes even more pressing! Anyone who thinks this might be for them, or who has a suggestion for a nominee, please get in touch.

Council activities

After five years as Production Editor for the Annual Report, Ali Cooper stood down in 2016 but continued to offer much support to the production team and helped greatly in the handover with a detailed proof-read. Her time in this role brought a new standard of professionalism to the report and has left a great legacy in process and quality. Louise Bacon stepped in to the role once again as an interim measure. Robert Brown joins Council as Research Officer, taking over the role from Rob Pople who remains on Council in order to integrate his position as BTO rep for VC29 'Old Cambridgeshire' with club activities. Thanks go to Mike Foley and Chris Quy in particular for completing the online report archive, which means all back issues of the Annual Report are now available as pdfs from the Club website. Council was able to provide financial support to the publication of Jonathan Taylor's excellent book on the Birds of the Nene Washes. As he has now moved to work at the Ouse Washes, we keenly anticipate vol. 2 from Jonathan!

2015 Bird Report No.89

In an attempt to speed up the production of the Report, we encouraged members to submit their bird records for 2015 by the end of January, and many thanks to all who helped in this regard. Nonetheless the editing phase took longer than hoped and it finally landed in early January. The bulk of this delay lay with me during the first compilation phase with our team of writers and proof readers all providing a great service; many thanks to all the team. Special thanks to a big effort with Louise Bacon acting as production editor over the Christmas week to get the report finished.

Bulletins

Monthly and bi-monthly bulletins continue to be produced by Peter Bircham and Chris Brown working together, and keeping members informed about our birds and activities as the year progresses. The rate of uptake of electronic subscriptions has slowed somewhat so I guess we have converted most of those members who want to switch from paper copies now.

Spotted Flycatcher survey.

Michael Holdsworth continued and expanded the county-wide pioneering survey of the breeding activity of one of our most concerning species, the Spotted Flycatcher. By gaining access to the gardens of people who are not normally bird recorders, but who happen to have these characterful little birds nesting, the team has greatly increased our recording of this bird, and increased information available for assessing nesting success rates. With 58 confirmed pairs and a further 28 possible or probables, this is likely to be a considerable proportion of the county population. 2017 will be particularly exciting in Spotted Flycatcher world, as we await the return of colour-ringed birds and, trepidatiously, whether any of the geo-tagged birds will make it back and be recaptured. The miniaturisation of technology means that 19 Spotted Flycatchers were fitted with 0.3g tags that will provide information on the wintering locations and migration strategies for these birds in detail in a way we could not have dreamt of a decade ago. Please keep a careful eye and ear out for these birds and report any sightings of Spotted Flycatchers to Michael as quickly as possible.

Membership and Subscriptions

Club membership is currently around 340 members and the system of monitoring subscriptions and address changes etc. which Clive Sinclair has set up ensures a smooth operation between him and our Treasurer, Roger Swain. We are always open to suggestions from members for any additional activities that could be taken on by the club, especially if accompanied by an offer to help run them! Indeed, greater participation by members in club activities in general would be greatly welcomed, whether that be an offer to help proof-read a section of the Report or deal with tea-making at indoor meetings. There is a core of members who shoulder the burden of running the club and I'm sure they would welcome additional support.

Club meetings

Attendance at meetings remained strong and enthusiastic, with the usual varied and stimulating range of subjects selected by Vicki Harley, we roamed the world of birds from choosing the right places and times to go, through identification to monitoring, conservation and artistic appreciation. Our last meeting of the year ended in a sing-along rendition of Rosemary Setchfield's Corn Bunting-inspired reworking of a festive favourite: Jangle Birds!

Conference: Rare Breeding Birds

Once again the club held a full day conference, this time on the subject of Rare Breeding Birds. This topic was a personal preference of mine, and I thoroughly enjoyed the day despite the stress of organising speakers and events; fortunately the experience of Vicki Harley who has organised the previous conferences meant that things went well and much was learnt. New technologies featured in many of the talks, with drone photography to reveal Little Egret nests and satellite tags to tell us about the fate and migrations of Montagu's Harriers particularly memorable moments, but good old fashioned field work was also demonstrated on local specialists from Cranes to Muscovy Ducks. We recruited 2 new members of the group set up by the club to monitor and, where necessary, help protect, our rarest breeding species from the conference attendees, and hopefully the importance of sensitively recording this group of birds has been raised as a result.

John Clark

With great sadness, the end of 2016 was marked by the death of John Clark. John's lasting legacy to the club lies with the look and style of the Report in its current format, having brought it through from a merger of the old counties of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire starting in 1998 when the two counties had separate entries which he merged into one in 1999 and standardised the presentation format, to an award-winning standard when the BTO challenged clubs with their Report competition. He continued to edit the Report till 2010 when he had to give up to focus on caring for his wife.