

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

CHAIR'S REPORT 2017

Presented to the Annual General Meeting on March 9th 2018

I have failed in my main task for the fifth year of chairing the Cambridgeshire Bird Club: to find a replacement chair. I have to confess that I have not put a lot of effort into this task beyond one or two appeals in Bulletins. Perhaps someone who thinks this might be for them would like to spend the current year as deputy chair and we can phase in a transition. If this might be you, please get in touch.

Council activities

Vicki Harley had planned to take on the role of Report Editor, but a wrist injury at the critical time prevented this and Louise Bacon stepped into the breach once again, for which we are truly indebted. Robert Brown has taken on the role of Research Officer, with a project on Sand Martins in 2017 to dip his toe in the water, and has been making plans for further surveys in 2018. Other Council Members have stayed on in their various roles for which I am extremely grateful.

2016 Bird Report No.90

The Annual Report continues to evolve as bird recording changes. We added one or two new features and a new simplified font format for the 2016 report which, based on the lack of complaints, seems to have gone down reasonably well. Due to the volume of records from BirdTrack we have added lines on total records and sites in the breeding and wintering season. The records processing by Louise and Howard Slatter has speeded up giving us a bit more time to fit the task into the year after the records were accumulated, such that the 2016 Report was available by the end of 2017.

Bulletins

Peter Bircham has continued to produce a speedy monthly bulletin, which is distributed solely by email, and which Chris Brown uses alongside later additional records to act as the basis of the traditional bimonthly Bulletin, available electronically or by post. It would be valuable to know how people use these bulletins, as Chris is hoping to stand down and a new editor is being sought. Thoughts on the pros and cons of fast news versus more comprehensive news would be useful, and how much people value the Systematic Report section which is the main time-consuming element of the job.

Sand Martin survey.

Reports were received from all the known colonies, giving us reasonable coverage of the breeding population in the county, but no new colonies were discovered despite requests to seek these out. Maybe we have found them all, maybe not; more effort searching for this species in the breeding season and reporting back on sites checked and empty would be appreciated.

Spotted Flycatcher survey.

It turns out that WI appeals and letters in Parish Magazines are a better way to find breeding Spotted Flycatchers than asking CBC members; they are all in leafy gardens in the villages. Michael Holdsworth has been heavily involved in some fascinating work tagging some of these birds with Geolocators, which has revealed a fascinating story. Once formally published by the BTO this research will of course be shared with the Club.

Wiff-waffs

Plenty of members have been able to report mixed-singing *Phylloscopus* warblers which Tony Fulford has been keen to follow up and record. His studies have shown some evolutionary blind allies which will be further studied in 2018.

Raptor counts

There was good participation in the autumn Raptor count, showing the continued strength of our recovering populations of Common Buzzards, Red Kites and so on.

Photo pages on Website

Garth Peacock and Chris Quy continue to do a great job on perhaps the most popular part of the Club's Website, the Photo section. The volume of submissions has grown exponentially as digital equipment has become widely adopted, so Garth has had to apply stricter quality criteria to avoid overloading the pages but the high standard is much admired. In terms of selecting the Photo of the Month, we have attempted to maintain this quality by using regular photographers to make the selection in 2017, but it would be useful to know if other members would appreciate being more involved in this aspect.

Facebook and Twitter

Many thanks go to Kevin Harris for maintaining our Facebook page and Mark Peck for taking on the Twitter feed.

Membership and Subscriptions

The club had a healthy 347 members in 2017 and many were now paying the correct revised Subscription rate by standing order, which makes our life a lot easier.

Club meetings

Once again a very varied programme was arranged by Vicki Harley, featuring topics from the very local Fenland Drains by Cliff Carson, to the remote South Georgia work by Tony Martin, both eminent club members doing sterling work on wildlife conservation. We also had a global perspective of threatened species from BirdLife and a long-term study of Pied Flycatchers in the south-west from Malcolm Burgess. There were two visits to Africa, with Ann Scott reporting on the legacy of Bob Scott's work on securing bird reserves where farmland is swallowing up forest, and Claire Spottiswoode took us on a tour of the extraordinary behaviour of some African Cuckoo species. Conor Jameson delved into the shadowy world of the Goshawk, and Viola Ross-Smith didn't need to work too hard on the audience to persuade us there are many reasons to love gulls!

Rare Breeding Birds

No misdemeanours came to light in terms of revealing the location of sensitive species, to which a great debt of thanks goes to all. Increasing numbers of species which would be desirable 'collectors items' for the die-hard egg collectors still out there are high on our list of responsibilities. A small support group has formed but in 2017 we had very little to do. Recording and reporting on breeding activity for this element of our avifauna could still be improved though.

Behind the Scenes

Much appreciation goes to people who help keep the club running without being on the council, such as tea making and door duties at meetings, distributing reports and bulletins - something which Bruce Martin has been masterminding for many years and would like to retire from if anyone can help take this on - and keeping the What's About information up to date on the website.