

Magazine Summer 2014 No.177



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Inside:

- Barn Owls recovering
- Birds conserving birds
- Swift actions

Contents

Editorial	1
Barn Owl recovery	Steve Piotrowski 1
Birds conserving birds?	Phil Brown 6
Swift actions	Phil Brown, Judith Wakelam, Matthew Deans..... 9

Field trips

Digiscoping Lackford	Phil Brown, Danny Porter 14
Shingle Street	Steve Fryett 16
BINS Spring	Lee Woods 16
Earliest migrants 2014	Lee Woods 21
Cavenham - Stonie success.....	Mike Taylor..... 22

News

Odin receives Ockelton Trophy	Roy Marsh..... 23
SOG & L&G.....	Phil Brown 23

Announcements

Two bursaries.....	Phil Brown 24
Birding in Arabia.....	Nick Moran 24

Cover photograph:

A Nightingale in full song (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)

Photographer: Bill Baston, 8 May 2014, at Lower Layham near Hadleigh, with a Canon 1DX camera body and a 500m f4 lens + 1.4 converter, 1/250 @ 5.6.

Contact details for articles, notes and observations etc. are:

info@sogonline.co.uk

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Email: info@sogonline.org.uk

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Editorial

Another season is under our belts, and what a good spring we appear to have had. Judging by the numbers of young birds around my feeder it's been an excellent year, with insects and butterfly numbers well up too.

But not everything in our gardens is rosy. Although there's more food around for them, as our SoS (Save our Suffolk) Swifts campaign reveals, Swift numbers are still down by 40% over the last ten years. The main reason for this decline is not a lack of food, but a lack of breeding sites. Modern building and urban practices mean fewer sites are available for this iconic Suffolk summer bird. But, as Edward Jackson pointed out in his recent interview on BBC Radio Suffolk, "it's down to us in our communities to try to make as many new [nesting] opportunities as we

can". Which is why SOG are working with Suffolk Wildlife Trust to urge people to install more Swift boxes. Why not consider a box for your property, or encourage a neighbour or local developer to install boxes in their new developments? Your efforts could make a real difference for returning Swifts.

Also, your efforts to monitor Barn Owl sites would be much appreciated too. The recent spate of nest box attacks and chick removal, as Steve Piotrowski reveals in his review of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project's (SCBOP) progress, is a real cause for concern. Vandalism and theft on any scale is a real threat to our Barn Owl numbers thus, with your added vigilance, our Barn Owl numbers could continue to grow.

So with your help the prospects for this summer should be good too.

Views expressed in The Harrier are not necessarily those of the editor or the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group.



Steve Piotrowski

Signs of a Barn Owl recovery in 2014

The Barn Owl has been voted Britain's favourite bird and the BTO Bird Atlas (Balmer *et al* 2013) shows that our East Coast (South Yorkshire to North Essex) hosts the highest population densities.

Population estimates

Numbers have fluctuated over the past 100 years, but population estimates of

this largely nocturnal species have been rather arbitrary. Blaker made a serious attempt to census barn owl populations in England and Wales in 1932. He received 1000 detailed nest site locations and the data supplemented by more generalised information resulting in 5000 breeding locations. Finally, an estimated population of 12,000 for England and Wales was proposed (Shawyer 1998). However, his study was largely based on records received from newspaper correspondents and lacked the sophistication of modern-day studies.

Suffolk was well featured in the distribution maps with the highest densities then laying in west and central areas. Shawyer (1987) used similar mapping criteria to re-plot distribution and population densities during his own survey carried out between 1982 and 1985. This allowed a direct comparison to be made with Blaker's work. The survey revealed 3777 breeding pairs for England and Wales, a significant decrease from the 1932 figures. The figures for Suffolk were 150 breeding pairs compared with 345 in 1932.

Nest box development

Colin Shawyer pioneered the idea of fixing specially designed boxes that Barn Owls readily took to. There were a number of Barn Owl enthusiasts in Suffolk that embraced this idea too and they should be applauded. The main players of the 1990s included: John Minihane (Southwold area), Roger Buxton (for Upper Waveney Project) and David Wilkin and Peter Ennis (Dedham Vale AONB). Originally, the boxes were of simple design, most constructed from old tea chests and fixed in barns and outbuildings around farms. However, in Suffolk, 70% of Barn Owls nested in hollow trees, which bucked the national trend where 70% nest in buildings. Nevertheless tea chest boxes also worked when fixed in trees and especially those in hedge lines that overlooked grassy fields or meadows. Box design has been modified over the years and nowadays the "A-frame" box has proved to be the most successful (see left below).

The Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (SCBOP)

Since 2006, SCBOP has provided nesting opportunities and advised landowners on grassland management. While SOG set up this project, more recently it has been managed by SWT in partnership with SOG and BTO. Up to spring 2014, the project has been responsible for the monitoring of Barn Owl boxes throughout Suffolk, plus a few over our county borders.

The number of boxes being monitored by SCBOP has increased annually from 567 in 2007 to 1536 in 2013. An additional 180 boxes were installed in autumn/winter of 2013/2014 taking the total number of active boxes available for monitoring this summer to 1696.



The prey problem

The owl's principal prey item is the Short-tailed Vole (also known as the Field Mouse) and it has long been known that the populations of these small mammals are subject to peaks and troughs that run in three or four-year cycles. When the vole populations are high, Barn Owls do well, as there is then a plentiful supply of food. Conversely, when populations are low, then Barn Owls do badly, although they will resort to taking alternative prey items such as shrews, juvenile rats, birds and even moles.

Vole populations can be effected by a number of factors; severe winter weather and flooding will deplete their numbers and there has even been a suggestion that the

grass, on which the voles graze, fights back by producing silica that the voles cannot digest - food for thought?

The effects of the severe weather in winter/spring 2013

There can be little doubt that the early winter period and spring of 2013 was very challenging for Barn Owls. Mortality in March and April was extremely high with the BTO receiving reports of up to nineteen ringed birds found dead each day - overall an increase of around 280% above the norm for the spring period. It should be noted that this figure represents only ringed birds and the true numbers of emaciated Barn Owl found is likely to be at least two or even three times higher.



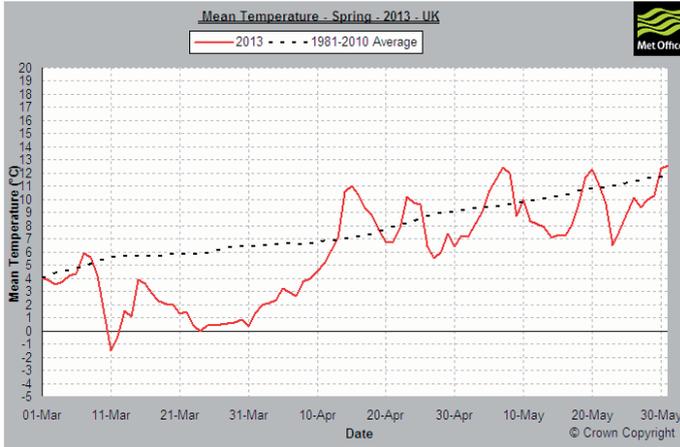


Fig 1: mean temperature for spring (March, April and May) 2013 – Source Met Office

The low temperatures and bitter easterly winds that persisted throughout March into April were the principal cause of a perceived population crash throughout the UK. A Met Office reports for the period March to May 2013 stated *“The mean temperature over the UK for spring was 6.0 °C, which is 1.7 °C below the long-term average. March was 3.3 °C below the long-term average for the month, April was 1.1 °C below, and May was 0.8 °C below. March was colder than any of the winter months and the coldest for the UK since 1962. Any spells of warm weather through the season were very short-lived. Overall this was the coldest spring for the UK since 1962 (marginally colder than spring 1979), and the fifth coldest in a series since 1910”.*

The 2013-breeding season

With such high winter/spring mortality, it came as no surprise to monitors that the 2013 breeding season was to be very poor indeed. Although Figure 2 right shows that Barn Owls were found in 14.2% (281) boxes during 2013, this is significantly down on 31.4% occupancy in 2012. However, the most significant figure is the low number of chicks reared; whereas the summer of 2012

proved exceptionally good for Barn Owls with 590 chicks being ringed compared with only 106 chicks in 2013 - a decline of 82%.

The UK population was reported to be at its lowest ebb for 100 years and it is most likely that the populations perishing were those pioneering range expansion to high altitudes in the north and west of Britain. The Barn Owl Trust reported *“by*

the time temperatures finally rose in mid-April, there were quite possibly fewer Barn Owls alive in the UK than at any time since records began.”

From a Suffolk perspective, the author does not share this view. Evidence of Barn Owls was reported from 281 of the 1200 boxes inspected by SCBOP monitors and it is more likely that most of our adult owls survived the severe weather, but the females failed to gain sufficient weight (340g) to be in good enough condition to breed. Instead, the birds would wait until vole numbers increase and then possibly breed in subsequent years?

The 2014-breeding season

In stark contrast to the winter/spring of 2012/2013, the last winter/spring has been mild, to say the least, with hardly a frost of any significance. This has allowed the vole population to recover and the Barn Owls have taken full advantage. Although still early in the 2014 Barn Owl monitoring season, data from 16.5% of boxes, received by Alec Hillier (SCBOP Recorder) to date, indicates that there are encouraging signs of a significant “recovery”¹. With such a

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Barn Owl Pellet	11	25	53	40	54	36	37
Barn Owl Adult	12	34	57	55	50	76	151
Barn Owl Egg	0	17	3	5	4	12	13
Barn Owl Egg Failed	9	19	23	13	16	19	10
Barn Owl Young	77	102	123	149	201	289	66
Barn Owl Young Failed	4	4	3	4	6	12	4
Barn Owl Total	113	201	262	266	331	444	281
Tawny Owl	8	13	21	25	22	21	11
Little Owl	1	16	18	16	11	12	8
Kestrel	12	23	24	25	17	20	14
Stock Dove	71	112	239	253	317	263	325
Jackdaw	63	83	141	177	189	206	176
Grey Squirrel	6	12	17	8	9	25	28
Empty	90	117	199	239	289	236	340
Not Checked	203	167	117	163	104	187	353
Total Active Boxes	567	744	1038	1172	1289	1414	1536

Fig 2: History of SCBOP boxes based on a single occupancy (source Alec and Felicity Hillier)

perceived high mortality, it wouldn't be too surprising if box occupancy was low, but this doesn't appear to be the case. Many of the adults seen in the boxes are un-ringed, so where have these new recruits come from? Figures released by Alec on 23rd June 2014 show that 334 chicks have been reported to date from a total of 419 boxes checked, in which 129 had Barn Owls in them.

Barn Owl thefts

On a much sadder note, it is with regret that we must report that Barn Owl chicks are being stolen from their nests. In 2013, two chicks were taken from SWT's Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve and this year the door of Haddiscoe Mill was smashed down (see right) to gain access to six chicks, which were also taken.

On the Stour, we also have instances of theft and vandalism of boxes. A nest box was taken from a tree and the two mature chicks killed. The box was smashed and is beyond repair. Dedham Vale AONB Ranger, Neil Catchpole, found a group of eight youths in the vicinity that were acting suspiciously, so they

called the police. The youths tried to make an exit from the area by canoe, but were apprehended by the police.



Does advertising like this result in incidents like these?



¹ Colin Shawyer in his national Barn Owl update states the 2014 breeding season is proving to be exceptionally good and he suspects it may prove more productive for the birds than the high of 2007 (see www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/about/barn-owl-update-july-2014).

Vigilance required

Kathy Piotrowski is currently liaising with the Suffolk Constabulary, but we are asking you all to be vigilant. If you see anyone acting suspiciously near to a Barn Owl box, please ring PC Mark Bryant on tel: 101. He is the dedicated police officer for the Rural Crime and Wildlife unit of the Constabulary. Please note that all SCBOP monitors hold disturbance licenses, issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and they will produce them on demand.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks are due to Alec and Felicity Hillier for tirelessly working on the data and for providing interpretive charts and graphs that allow detailed accounts such as this to be written. Thanks are due to the BTO for providing data on mortality. And, by no means least, the hard work of the coordinators and monitors is also greatly appreciated.

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Editor: In the last issue we looked at Patrick Barker's wildlife conservation efforts at Westhorpe. While given the extensive nature of his bird ringing, breeding assistance and winter-feeding, Patrick is something of a rarity, he is by no means alone in the Suffolk farming community. There are many other farmers no less dedicated to Suffolk's birds, though most of them make more low-key but no less valuable contributions - one such is Trevor Edwards farming around the small village of Redlingfield, just south east of Diss.

Birds conserving birds?

(but with a little help from a farmer)

What's a photograph of a Turkey doing in the Harrier? Let us explain. It belongs to a farmer called Trevor Edwards. He runs a mixed arable and turkey farm of 300 acres with 10,000 Turkeys on the high Suffolk claylands and these Turkeys make a valuable contribution to the operation of Wash Farm, that in turn benefits the local wildlife.





The Edwards have farmed in and around Redlingfield for around 300 years. Currently Wash Farm's key crops are wheat, barley and oilseed rape grown on a four-year cycle. Since the early noughties the Edwards have also rented land from a further two local farms (adding an additional 350 acres to the operation) and now manage two HLS agreements - one for the family farm and the other for the rented fields.

The farm's first environmental agreement was a Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) signed in 2000 that committed the Edwards to improving their hedges and field margins. This objective was maintained for the farm's first HLS agreement signed in 2007 and the second HLS agreement, with similar requirements, was arranged in 2010 to cover the two rented areas.

Trevor explained that a strong yeoman spirit had survived in this area and, as a result, many small mixed farming units hung on and the hedges were not grubbed out as elsewhere in the East of England to make way for enlarged arable production units. This wide-scale retention of hedges has significantly benefitted the local environment, which has been further enhanced on Wash Farm with Trevor's wildlife friendly hedge maintenance programme.

The field margins have also been expanded and, latterly, floristically enhanced too. As the photographs here indicate, the headlands are very impressive and, on the day the Editor visited, the numbers of Common Whitethroat, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting encountered were impressive. Grassland natural regeneration has also improved substantial areas - which may account for the Turtle Doves continuing to thrive on the farm. In various odd field corners a standard mix of brassicas, including turnip/radish/mustard has been deliberately planted to provide significant winter bird feeding for flocks of Chaffinch (last winter a flock of over 100 was noted), Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. Several



ponds have also been restored for the benefit of amphibians. All told about 5% of the farm is dedicated to wildlife.

As the Edwards are co-ordinating improvement works across three units of fields, they have been able to synchronise their restoration/regeneration activities to establish a linked network of buffer strips across the farms that undoubtedly supports the movement of wildlife.

In addition Trevor has had several bird boxes installed to encourage breeding. There are two Barn Owl boxes, one of which has been successful this year, producing three hatched for the second year running. A Little Owl box was recently installed too, along with one for Spotted Flycatchers, though as yet the latter has not been successful, plus some bat boxes too.



So what is the significance of these Turkeys? They are an integral part of this mixed farm's straw/bedding/manure cycle to provide soil fertility. In total 200 acres of wheat and barley straw provide bedding for the 10,000 turkeys and 140 fat cattle. In turn the farmyard manure from the livestock (of which around 1000 tonnes is Turkey bedding) is returned to the fields to provide sufficient phosphate and potash to wholly meet the crop nutrient requirements of 500 acres of wheat, barley and oilseed rape. The application of this fertiliser benefits the field margins and winter-feeding areas too, so that, indirectly, Trevor's Turkeys are helping to support Suffolk's farmland birds.

Screamers!



Phil Brown, Judith Wakelam, Matthew Deans

Swift actions

Two stories about Swifts
with excellent outcomes:

1. *Man on Swift*

On the same day as the digiscoping event at Lackford, late in the afternoon in nearby Dalham, one of my neighbours tried to contact me about a “black bird in my garden”. Unfortunately I was out but, luckily, another SOG member was in the village, although knackered, having just returned from a long drive from Scotland.

Despite his fatigue this SOG member duly responded and quickly located the ‘black hawk down’ - a Swift with prominent brood patches (i.e. a female) so he was most concerned for her eggs/chicks and nest mate.

He’d encountered ‘downed’ Swifts before but had previously always been able to re-launch them immediately. Sadly this one

had been on the ground too long and, after being launched, immediately flopped back to earth. He concluded it was dehydrated and hungry so took it home, stored it in a suitable box and got it to take some water.



Next he located a Swifts expert, courtesy of Swift First Aid and Carers, this can be found at www.swift-conservation.org/SwiftFirstAid.htm². He then phoned the local expert, Judith Wakelam at Mildenhall, who covers the East of England. Judith, who was trained by the late Chris Mead of the BTO, supports Swift welfare and recovery and has an incredible 80% success rate, including nestling Swifts fallen from the nest and successfully reared!

Judith Wakelam writes:

"I half knew what to expect as that morning we had had quite a fierce storm with torrential rain. These sorts of conditions can catch Swifts out, they become soaked and exhausted and are eventually brought to the ground. This sometimes happens when they first arrive in the country and are tired after their mammoth journey from Southern Africa. A grounded Swift is extremely vulnerable at any time as they are unable to take off due to their short legs and very long wings; add cold and wet to the equation and it can mean almost certain death.

As we were only just into June it had to be an adult and probably a breeding one at that. We agreed to meet at Kentford Station about halfway between us. I drive many miles sometimes to pick-up injured or more often young Swifts that have left the nest too early and plummeted to the ground. The SOG man's Swift needed no more than rehydrating and a good rest. The following day I took it out to a large open area with a friend; my second pair of eyes, and held it up on the flat of my hand, after a good look around it made a text book take-off. Hopefully it will go on to rear young this year and return again in 2015."

This Dalham Swift rescue was a success. Judith re-launched the downed bird the following morning at 07:00 in Mildenhall and the SOG member reported a welcome addition to the sky over Dalham "within twenty minutes the local population was again back up to ten individuals". It made this member, who studies this colony of Swifts closely, feel very good to see the ten (not nine) back in the air again over his cottage.

When handling Swifts watch out for their extremely sharp claws



Ed: On the morning I started to edit this issue a flock of 20+ 'screamers' flew over me as I walked our dogs along the Street in Dalham - while the additional ten or so are probably yearlings (i.e. the colony's last year hatched birds) rejoining the colony, it looks like 2013 was a successful breeding season here and possibly 2014 may be too.

Also note another good website to seek out is Action for Swifts.

Swifts are notoriously wary about exploiting new nesting opportunities. However an innovative nest box may be changing this behaviour - read on...

²This is an excellent and informative site chock full of useful information about all aspects of caring for Swifts, including detailed instructions as to how and what to feed them - so the site is well worth visiting.

Still from the Bawdsey Hall nest cam - showing the 'quick' result



2. Swift on man

Common Swifts at Bawdsey Hall

During April Matthew Deans suggested to David Hermon at Bawdsey Hall that they make and erect a Swift box to be positioned on the north face of the Hall.

A wooden Swift box was duly constructed with completion on 27 April using dimensions downloaded from the Internet³ - in eager anticipation of the return of the first Swifts! But this was no ordinary box as David, a light and sound engineer, also installed a CCTV camera and a speaker to be used as an attractant, playing out Swift calls all day.

Shortly after installation, on 20 May, a Swift was observed flying around the nest box and nearly landing by the entrance hole. Then on the following day two were noted performing this same behaviour. Even more encouraging was the sight of a Swift actually entering one of the holes at 6.30am on 10 June.

Subsequently two Swifts have been roosting nightly in the box and, up until the time of writing on 30 June, flying out during the day. To date no nesting has actually taken place, although the birds have gathered feathers and been observed to preen one another. If no breeding takes place in this year it is anticipated the birds will return and breed in 2015.

Ed: Quick action indeed by these Swift workers!

Note: SOG are now actively engaged with Suffolk Wildlife Trust developing a Swift conservation project under the banner SOS Swifts ('Save our Suffolk Swifts') and we will have more to report on the inaugural July Stowmarket event in the next issue.

³ The 'Action for Swifts' website has templates for nesting boxes - go to: <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/>



Mating Great Crested Grebe



Photographer: Julia Barrionuevo Censoni using a Canon Power Shot SX1 10 1S 1/400 sec @ f/4.3, ISO 80



The 'Masters' at work at Lackford - Kingfisher and

Field Trip Reports

Phil Brown & Danny Porter

A master class in digiscoping

April 2nd 2014

**Tutors: Danny Porter, Barry Woodhouse
and Scott Mayson**

This was an unusual field trip to Lackford Lakes in that it dealt with the art of digiscoping rather than the pursuit of birding.

Four SOG members joined our three 'tutors' at a rain-soaked Lackford. While the weather was not brilliant (a series of thunderstorms that no doubt partly accounted for the low turnout), nevertheless the digiscope master class we four received very much was.

The digiscoping 'debutantes' received truly excellent instruction from the highly experienced tutors about photography in

general as well as digiscoping in particular to make it a very valuable experience for the participants, as these quotes indicate:

"The SOG digiscoping event was time very well spent. In a couple of hours I had been taught some fantastic new skills that, with a bit of practice, should put me more firmly in control and obtaining much more reliable digiscoped bird photos in the future."

"As a beginner, it was great for me to learn how the equipment went together and to be shown how to work through the camera settings to get the exposure correct. I now need a lot of practice - my Grey Heron pics are laughably dire!!...[but] I thoroughly enjoyed the day "

"Sukey [Eddie's daughter] thought it was great to be shown how to fix her camera onto the binoculars and she can now photograph birds much better, and also thought it was a fun day out."

The range of kit the debutantes brought with them was no barrier to our tutors either:

-Swarovski ATS 65 with an iPhone 5C



Pochard by Barry Woodhouse on a previous brighter day and Danny Porter's Sedgie and Heron on the day

-Zeiss Victory Diascope 85 with 20 - 75x zoom eyepiece + Nikon Coolpix 6400 compact camera

-Canon 500d through a Kowa scope.

-Fujifilm Compact on Swarovski binoculars, as used by Sukey

Whilst some had their own equipment, Danny and Scott provided the necessary adaptors for all the scopes, bins and the phone. The only real barrier seemed to be the members' readily acknowledged low level of competence - but our tutors really knew their stuff, so they easily overcame that.

Self-confessed 'Luddite' photographer, a.k.a. the Editor, got enormous benefits out of this event. Speaking personally I learnt more about photography in the course of this morning than I'd learnt from years of dealing with commercial photographers in a professional capacity.

The 'Luddite's' two shots to the right show, embarrassment of embarrassments, what a difference a dirty scope's lens makes:

Lackford's hides (Bill's and Jason's Pool) proved ideal 'classrooms', not only in providing vital shelter from the weather but also good subjects for our cameras/phone. During the practice sessions that followed in them, not surprisingly to begin with, the results were mixed. However by the end of the morning we all had a better idea of what to do under different light conditions and how to go about improving our photography - practice, practice, practice.





By the end of the morning two of the debutantes were proud of their efforts.

Although the debutantes shots don't compare all that well with the masterful shots at the head of this article from two of the tutors, we 'Digiscoping Debutantes' (DD's) were all very pleased with them. So, as one of our number said: "All in all a really useful morning, despite the rain and thunder...cheers guys!"

Danny Porter: All pupils were willing and ready to learn and it gave me great satisfaction to see people improve their skills so quickly. Tutoring is only a small part of learning anything; the best experience comes from practising. If our pupils for the day work hard at their skill-set then they will succeed. Oh, and thanks for braving the elements!

Steve Fryett

Shingle Street and Upper Hollesley Common

April 26th 2014

Leader: Steve Fryett

It had been a fine week leading up to this field meeting, even at 8.45am as I left for the short journey from Melton to Shingle the sun was shining however, by the time I crossed Wilford Bridge, the first spit of rain hit the windscreen.

Arriving at Shingle Street the rain was now driving in, backed by a southerly wind. It was not looking good as the ten members set off heading south to the tennis courts,

noting a good number of Linnets, a single quick glimpse of a Wheatear and a brief fly past of a Swallow. The allotments held just one singing Blackcap then, as we continued south, we noted a singing Common Whitethroat and two distant Common Buzzard. More notable were 21 Barnacle Geese flying south over the beach. We headed back to the cars with little to lift our dampened spirits.

Onward to Upper Hollesley Common, where it briefly stopped raining, to enable a pristine Yellowhammer to deliver its song from a large conifer. Alas the rain resumed and the temperature dipped, but we could hear Woodlark out on the Common and eventually found one singing, plus another close by. Further along we found at least another four on the ground actively looking for food. Finally we ended with a pair of Stonechats close to the car park.

Suffolk BINS - a successful spring

March 2014

The month started off with a drake **Garganey** being seen at Bucklesham 1st, thereafter at Brightwell. An adult **Black Brant** was seen in Kirton Creek 2nd.



A juvenile **Iceland Gull** was seen throughout the month commuting between Thorpeness, Sizewell and Minsmere, other sightings of **Iceland Gull** included a 2nd winter bird that was seen on and off at Botany Marsh, Snape RSPB, north over Bawdsey Hall 15th, two juveniles at Livermere Lake 15th and 23rd and finally an adult in the dock complex at Felixstowe 21st-23rd. An adult **Glaucous Gull** was seen at the river mouth of the Deben 16th then spent six days 17th-23rd in the dock complex.

Spoonbills were seen at several sites throughout the month with single birds at Minsmere 2nd and 11th, with three birds present 13th, Aldeburgh 5th and North Warren 8-9th. The wintering adult **Black Brants** were seen off Collimer Point, Orwell Estuary 4th.

Twelve **Slavonian Grebes** remained at their wintering stronghold of the Stour Estuary (Holbrook Bay) 4th. Two **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were noted at Santon Downham, Breckland 4th, while a single bird was seen at Pipp's Ford, Needham Market 4-5th.

A **Glossy Ibis** spent three days at Carlton Marsh SWT 9-11th then briefly at Leathes Ham 12th. The long-staying female **Long-tailed Duck** was last reported on Covehithe Broad 17th. Up to four **Firecrests** were seen



around the Bawdsey picnic site throughout the month.

Two **Common Crane** were seen over the Stour Estuary at Flatford 11th and what were presumably the same birds seen over Haverhill a few days later? On the 16th there were up to seventeen reports of **Red Kite** in the county.

A **Dusky Warbler** was discovered at Oulton Marsh 19th and remained until the month's end, though often elusive. Last month's **Olive-backed Pipit** from Leiston was again seen 19th, 20th and 27th though never gave itself up fully during this period. A **Serin** was heard over Landguard 21st and a male was briefly seen north on the 30th.

Ravens sightings are becoming more frequent in the county, one was seen over Mount Pleasant Farm, Westleton 23rd then nearby over Scotts Hall, Minsmere 27th.

A **White-tailed Eagle** was seen north over Hollesley village early morning 24th.

A **Cattle Egret** was seen briefly on Southwold Town Marsh on the evening of 24th before flying inland. A drake **Ferruginous Duck** was discovered on Island Mere, Minsmere 26th until the month's end.

Finally, during the month, a good number of **Caspian Gull** of various ages were noted around the county, notably from known sites such as Minsmere RSPB, Hollesley Marsh RSPB, Felixstowe, Micklemere and Great Livermere.

April 2014

The **Dusky Warbler** continued to show at Oulton Marsh, though was often elusive during its stay, the bird was last seen on 17th. The drake **Ferruginous Duck** was seen on Island Mere, Minsmere 1st and a **Great White Egret** was briefly seen from this wonderful reserve on the 4th.

Ospreys were noted over Cavenham Heath 4th, Kirton Creek 5th and Orwell Bridge 16th. **Iceland Gulls** continued to be seen throughout the month, with the juvenile again at Thorpeness 6th and a third-summer gull on the scrape at Minsmere both 12th and 17th.

The adult **Black Brant** was seen on the Orwell Estuary, mainly from Levington on 6th, 9th, 21st and 28th. **Raven** sightings were again in the news, single birds being seen over Minsmere 8th, Easton Broad 9th, Minsmere 9th and 17th, Hollesley 17th and south over North Denes 17th.

A **Glossy Ibis** was noted on Town Marsh, Southwold 10th. A **White-tailed Eagle** was seen over Gillingham near Beccles 13th, then later from several sites in Norfolk. A Single **Spoonbill** was seen north off Southwold 17th, then on the flash at Southwold 24-25th then Tinkers Marsh, Walberswick 26th.

Mid-month and things began to heat up a little. **Red-rumped Swallows** were seen

over the old car park at Minsmere 17th and Felixstowe Dock 20th. Four **Dotterel** were briefly seen on the beach at Kessingland 19th before alighting and returning the following day with one bird remaining until dusk, also good numbers of **Ring Ouzel** were seen along the coast.

Five **Black Tern** were seen at Livermere Lake 21st, the same day also saw a **Common Crane** West over Boyton Marsh. A confiding **Wryneck** was found at Beach Farm, Benacre 22nd and remained until 25th; another **Wryneck** was seen nearby at Kessingland Sluice 23rd.

A probable **Dotterel** was heard over Landguard 22nd, the same day saw a good arrival of common migrants. A **Hoopoe** was found early morning 26th and remained until 29th proving popular with all-comers, and two **Hoopoes** were seen together in fields just south of Kessingland church 30th.

An adult **Whiskered Tern** was seen north over North Marsh 26th then out to sea; on the same day a dark-rumped **Whimbrel** (probable Hudsonian) was seen over Minsmere scrape! The 29th saw a **Black Kite** over the A12 at Wangford, two **Great White Egret** north over Tinkers Marsh, Walberswick and **Temminck's Stint** on Hollesley Marsh RSPB.



May 2014

The recent work carried out by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) appears to be paying off at Carlton Marsh as a **Great White Egret** took a liking to the newly formed scrape 3rd-8th. The adult **Whiskered Tern** seen late last month was again reported from the shore pools at Dunwich for 15 minutes before flying out to sea 3rd.

The third-summer **Iceland Gull** continued to show on the scrape at Minsmere 3rd. **Black Kite** seen over Carlton Marsh SWT 4th, the same day also saw **Hoopoe** at Eastbridge and **White Stork** over Woodbridge.

Spoonbill sightings throughout the month were forthcoming from Minsmere 5th, 9-11th and 18th, Carlton Marsh 6th, Benacre Broad 7th, Easton Broad (south) 9th, Hollesley Marsh 11th and finally two on Tinkers Marsh 14th.



A singing **Icterine Warbler** was reported from Bradfield Woods NNR near Felsham 5th, **Great Reed Warbler** from Lackford 5th, though very elusive and **Hoopoe** seen along Harling Road, Breckland before flying off north also 5th. Six **Common Crane** were seen south over Southwold 6th also noted over Dunwich, Minsmere and Eastbridge.

A single **Bee-eater** was heard over Landguard 6th, nearby a **Temminck's Stint** was present on the winter at Trimley Marsh SWT 6-7th with two birds seen briefly there

on 10th. **Honey Buzzards** were noted north over Christchurch Park, Ipswich 6th and west over Martlesham Heath 8th. Two **Temminck's Stint** were seen briefly on Benacre Broad 8th.

Two **Dotterel** in fields just south of Easton Broad from 8th-10th proved popular, a third bird joining them on 11th. **Montagu's Harriers** were noted offshore from Pakefield 9th, ringtail over Carlton Marshes 12th, and on the same day a male at Pipp's Ford, Needham Market, as well as an adult male at Lakenheath Fen RSPB.

Red-rumped Swallows were seen south over Easton Broad 9th and over Hollesley Marsh 12th. An **Osprey** was initially seen over Minsmere 10th then shortly after over the Blyth Estuary. The adult **Black Brant** continued to show from Levington Creek 10th, 15-17th.

A **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was reported from Shingle Street 11th, also good numbers of common migrants notably **Spotted Flycatchers**, **Whinchat** and **Willow Warbler** were recorded 13th. A **Great Reed Warbler** was heard singing from within the reedbed at Westwood Marsh, Walberswick 16th only.

A single **Bee-eater** flew south over Felixstowe on the morning 17th, further **Bee-eater** sightings included a single bird north over Corton new sewage works 22nd and a flock of four birds south over the cliffs at Bawdsey 23rd and presumably seen later that day in North Kent, then at Dungeness before finally settling down on Portland, Dorset 25th.

A female **Red-footed Falcon** was seen north over Goose Hill, Sizewell 17th. Two **Temminck's Stint** on Hollesley Marsh 19th and a male **Red-backed Shrike** seen on the river at Lakenheath Fen RSPB the same day.

Three **Spoonbill** at Micklemere, which is a very noteworthy location for this species

18th; other **Spoonbills** were seen at Trimley 20th and two east along the Stour Estuary 22nd. A **Purple Heron** was seen from the Bittern and Island Mere hides, Minsmere 21st and again the next morning on North Marsh.

A **Red-rumped Swallow** was seen from Undercliffe, Felixstowe 23rd. The 26th saw a male **Grey-headed Wagtail** briefly on the common at Landguard and an **Osprey** over Fritton Lake. Heavy rain during 27th resulted in a singing **Greenish Warbler** dropping in at Landguard, also a first-summer male **Common Rosefinch** was present on site.

A male **Golden Oriole** was singing from the canopy in South Belt, Minsmere 27th. A female **Red-backed Shrike** spent two days in bushes south of Minsmere sluice 28th-30th. There was a **Marsh Warbler** at Minsmere Sluice 30th, a first-summer male **Montagu's Harrier** took up temporary residence at Kingsfleet, Deben Estuary 28th-30th and finally **Honey Buzzards** were noted at Corton and Shingle Street 30th.

June 2014

A singing **Quail** was heard just west of Westleton village on 1st, two adult **Spoonbills** were also present on the scrape at Hollesley Marsh RSPB 1st, further **Spoonbills** were seen on Hollesley Marsh 7th, south over Walberswick, three in off at Southwold and one on the scrape at Minsmere, all 8th.

A smart **Pectoral Sandpiper** was present for four days on the winter at Trimley Marsh SWT 3rd-6th. Two **Common Cranes** were seen from Whin Hill, Minsmere for several days early in the month that may have indicated that something was going on! (Ed.: Other than Springwatch?)

A **Black Stork** roaming the UK finally entered Suffolk airspace on the 5th, initially being seen south over Lowestoft, then Kessingland and finally Covehithe, before drifting off north-west and disappearing. Yet another

Raven was seen, this time north over Woodbridge 7th, the same day also saw a first-year summer **Montagu's Harrier** over Island Mere, Minsmere.

A singing **Savi's Warbler** took up residence at Westwood Marsh, Walberswick from 8-11th at least, plus both **Great White Egret** over 9th and **Spoonbill** 10th were noted.

So, as we look forward to the long summer days, let's hope for an oddity or two! A **Red-necked Stint** on the scrape at Minsmere would be welcomed and might prove rather popular!

May I also remind you to submit those all-important records via your area county recorders, including the completion of any SORC forms for the county rarities, and BBRC forms for any national rarities.

Finally, my thanks go out again to our BINS members for their ongoing efforts, and helping to provide Suffolk with a fantastic service. For SOG members wanting to enjoy daily updates, superb photography and much more, visit Suffolk BINS at: <http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding/>

Cuckoo - 10th April arrival



EARLIEST MIGRANTS – SPRING 2014

<i>Species</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Earliest Date</i>
Purple Heron	Minsmere RSPB	22nd May
Garganey	Brightwell	1st March
Osprey	Lakenheath Fen RSPB	4th April
Montagu's Harrier	Pakefield (offshore)	9th May
Honey Buzzard	Ipswich	6th May
Hobby	Sutton Heath	31st March
Stone Curlew	Cavenham Heath	9th March
Wood Sandpiper	North Warren RSPB	12th May
Little Ringed Plover	Pipps Ford (Needham Market)	23rd March
Temminck's Stint	Hollesley Marsh RSPB	29th April
Common Tern	Kessingland (offshore)	2nd April
Arctic Tern	Great Livermere	23rd April
Little Tern	Landguard	22nd April
Black Tern	Great Livermere	21st April
Sandwich Tern	Minsmere RSPB	22nd March
Turtle Dove	Bredfield	22nd April
Cuckoo	Minsmere RSPB	10th April
Common Swift	Corton	17th April
Hoopoe	Kessingland	26th April
Wryneck	Benacre (Beach Farm)	22nd April
Sand Martin	Cavenham Heath	19th March
Swallow	Landguard	3rd April
House Martin	Melton	25th March
Tree Pipit	Kings Forest (Breckland)	6th April
Yellow Wagtail	Walberswick	16th March
Nightingale	Trimley	10th April
Whinchat	Easton Bavents	2nd May
Common Redstart	Landguard	5th April
Wheatear	Cavenham Heath	11th March
Ring Ouzel	Cavenham Heath	19th March
Grasshopper Warbler	Castle Marsh, North Cove	4th April
Sedge Warbler	Ipswich (Yarmouth Rd.)	26th March
Marsh Warbler	Minsmere RSPB	30th May
Reed Warbler	Lakenheath Fen RSPB	16th April
Icterine Warbler	Bradfield Wood NR, Felsham	5th May
Lesser Whitethroat	Thurston	9th April
Common Whitethroat	Landguard	10th April
Garden Warbler	Lackford Lakes SWT	19th April
Willow Warbler	Cavenham Heath	30th March
Spotted Flycatcher	Landguard	8th May
Pied Flycatcher	Several sites	22nd April
Golden Oriole	Minsmere RSPB	27th May
Red-backed Shrike	Lakenheath Fen RSPB	19th May

Photo credits:

Bill Baston (front cover, pages 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, 24 & back cover); Patrick Barker (page 5); courtesy BBC News (page 5); Valerie Brookes (page 22); Phil Brown (pages 7, 8, 15, 16 & 23); Julia Barrionuevo Censoni (page 12-13); Chris Courtney (page 16); Matthew Deans (page 11); Trevor Edwards (pages 6, 7 & 8); Isabella Grieco (back cover); courtesy of the Met Office (page 3); Nick Moran (page 24); Roy Marsh (page 23); Danny Porter (pages 14 & 15); Andrew Smiley (page 2); John Richardson (pages 17, 18, 19 & 20); Mike Taylor (page 22); Barry Woodhouse (pages 14 & 15); Mick Wright (page 9)

Cavenham Heath Stone Curlews Success

This year the first returning birds were reported on 11 March, while the first nest was found on 7 April.

The ensuing three months have been very eventful, but the tall heather and grass (which grew quickly during a rather damp May) made it difficult to read the rings on nesting birds and therefore it was not easy to keep track of exactly what was going on. At the moment it appears that four of five pairs have made six or seven nesting attempts.



A couple of nests failed at the egg stage: one pair of un-ringed birds deserted their two eggs less

than two days after the nest was found. This is quite unusual as it is the first desertion that I have known in fourteen years at Cavenham. But this nest was quite close to the main track and therefore it is possible that disturbance was a factor. The other egg-stage failure came at the point of hatching and, from the appearance of the eggshell remains, it seems possible that the predator may have been a hedgehog.

Four nests hatched successfully, but in one of these only one egg hatched with the other proving to be infertile. The young in another nest disappeared soon after hatching and may have been predated. Four chicks from three nests survived the first few days after hatching – two of these were ringed on 29 May, and one at least was seen to fly on 18 June.



At the time of writing therefore there are three pairs with chicks at various stages of development and one pair incubating – this nest was found on 17 June and is quite possibly a re-nest by the un-ringed pair that deserted earlier in the season.

Normally predation takes a heavy toll at Cavenham, but so far it appears that 2014 may be one of our most successful breeding seasons of recent years. Some nests have been protected by fencing and this has proven beneficial. Also heartening has been the positive response of the birds to our land management; several pairs have chosen to lay on areas of heath cut and/or rotovated in the last couple of winters and, after hatching, adults and young have been observed to frequent this rotovated ground.



Anti-predator electric fencing

Roy Marsh

Denis Ockelton Trophy finally presented

As many of you will recall the Denis Ockelton Trophy was presented (in his absence) to Nigel Odin at our AGM. A mere four months later I finally caught up with Nigel at the Observatory and was delighted to complete the official handover - the delay being a testimony to just how busy we both are!

Nigel is a very worthy winner, having worked tirelessly for Landguard Bird Observatory for 25 years and SOG Council voted for him unanimously. Keep up the good work Nigel!



Nigel eventually receiving his 'just desserts' at Landguard

Phil Brown

SOG attend charity fair

Once again our stalwart 'exhibitionists', Phil's Brown and Whittaker manned a stand at one of Legal & General's offices in central Ipswich.

The usual SOG display was erected and the day was spent happily chatting to a wide variety of staff, ranging from those with mystery garden birds they wanted to identify, to one avid bird watcher. Oh, and the free cakes were good too!

This is an excellent occasion for SOG to register in the public's mind and we are very grateful to L&G for presenting us with this annual opportunity - as well as the cheque!

A substantial cheque was presented



STOP PRESS

Peregrines have bred at Bury?

Just as we went to press the Editor learnt that patient observation at a Bury St Edmunds site had revealed a juvenile Peregrine - so it seems this site's elusive nesters had bred this year after all.

Announcement

Phil Brown

Two bursaries awarded

The Bursary Committee is delighted to announce that there was sufficient in our budget to permit us to award two £250.00 bursaries this year.

The first was for Simon Evans' Marsh Harrier project at RSPB Lakenheath Fen. This is of course a species close to SOG's heart as it also, over the last forty years (from a solitary female at Minsmere), has shifted from being a rarity to a robust Suffolk species. As part of the Re-trap Adults for Survival programme (RAS) and following a successful pilot in 2013, Simon is wing-tagging juvenile Marsh Harriers in the nest and then subsequently monitoring them in order to shed light on what our Harriers are really up to.

While the second awarded bursary is to support the fieldwork expenses likely to be incurred on Steve Piotrowski's groundbreaking study monitoring breeding and over-wintering Woodlark in the Sandlings.

Reports from both will be published in next year's Spring Harrier. Meantime the Bursary Committee is being expanded and is reviewing its procedures. The results of these considerations will be published in a future Harrier.



Forthcoming talk

Nick Moran

'Five years in the desert: Birds and birding in Arabia'

Sun, sand...and scarce migrants! Nick spent five years living and birding in southern Arabia and will take us on a season-by-season virtual tour of this fascinating region, a rich oasis for migrants and specialist breeding birds alike.

Don't miss this unique insight into the birds and birding opportunities in the UAE, the Yemen and Oman - a corner of the world so under-watched that it recently yielded an entirely new species of owl to science!



Moran of Arabia



Council for 2014:

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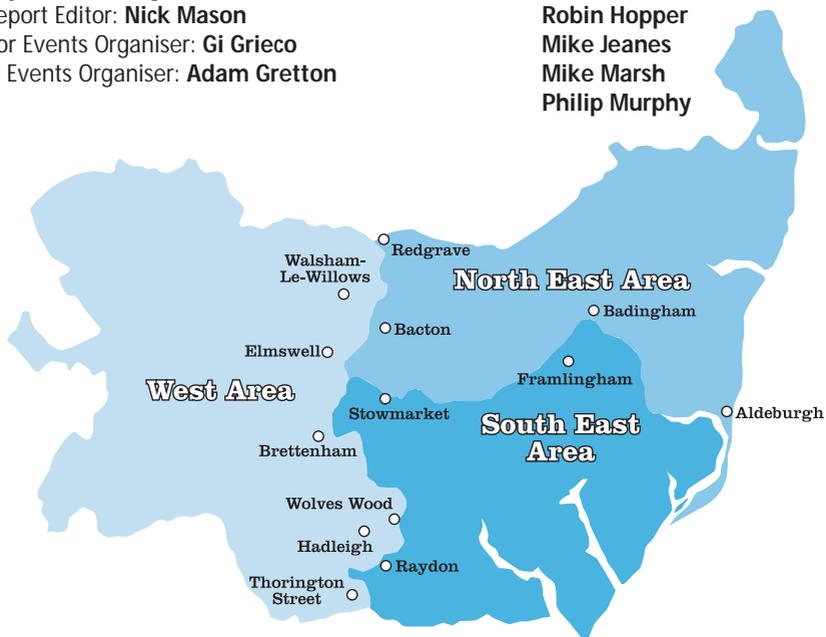
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Philip Murphy



Bird Recorders

North-east Area Recorder:

Andrew Green, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: andrew@waveney1.fsnet.co.uk

South-east Area Recorder:

Scott Mayson, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY
Tel: 01394 385595 Email: smsuffolkbirder@gmail.com

West Area Recorder:

Colin Jakes, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN
Tel: 01284 702215 Email: colin@jakes.myzen.co.uk

Treasurer/Membership Secretary

Matthew Deans, c/o 49c Oak Hill, Holllesley, Suffolk IP12 3JY



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Who we are

- Founded in 1973 by a group of Suffolk birdwatchers
- Associated with the Suffolk Naturalists' Society
- SOG remains an independent birding group and is a registered charity

What we do

Networking

- A voice for Suffolk birdwatchers
- With established links to many naturalist and conservation organisations

Media

- Strong web presence - www.sogonline.org.uk
- Active Twitter feed - [@suffolkbirds1](https://twitter.com/suffolkbirds1)
- Quarterly magazine - *The Harrier*
- Annual review - *Suffolk Birds* report

Trips and talks

- Annually (20+) field trips - ideal for novices or experts and young or old alike
- Opportunities to visit hot spots and receive practical ID tips in the field
- Programme of talks and presentations - variety of topics (county, national, or international) with quality speakers



Protecting birds

- Actively lobbies to protect habitats and birding amenities
- Provides a county-wide field force of bird surveyors (50+)
- Organises and promotes bird surveys
- Inspires and undertakes conservation projects
- Bursaries available
- Numerous conservation achievements:
 - Contributed to several species breeding successes (Barn Owls, Peregrines, etc.)
 - Undertakes monitoring and ringing
 - Involvement on community and education projects
 - Organises and hosts dawn chorus walks
 - Assists with fund-raising for bird hides
 - On-going participation in key bird surveys for the BTO, such as BBS, the Bird Atlas, various species surveys and WeBS
 - Provides surveys for commercial organisations, such as environmental waste companies etc.



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

For birds & for birders

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

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