

July 2012 Magazine No.169



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Inside:

- RSPB & heathland habitat creation
- BTO's BirdTrack - its value
- Encouraging Tree Sparrows

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Cover photograph – ‘A Little Owllet, with attitude’

Photographer: Bill Baston. Shot taken in August 2006 at Lower Layham, near Hadleigh using a Canon EOS-1D Mark II.
Focal length 500, F# 5 with an exposure of 1/800

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Troubling times

These are troubling times indeed – not only a double-dip recession, with the prospect of yet tougher economic conditions to come, but there are increasingly profound environmental problems too.

For on top of this region suffering drought¹, to be followed by 'floods' in May (both weather events probably impacting negatively on this year's bird breeding season), it is reported that farmland bird numbers have plummeted by 300 million (50%) since 1980 across Europe². Yet, while Rome burns, all³ Defra could think of doing in the way of 'conservation' was proposing spending up to £375,000 on investigating a policy to destroy Buzzard nests to appease the shooting fraternity.

I don't make a habit of getting political, but... No doubt the hunting and shooting pressure group could argue (unfortunately legitimately I might add) that species such as the Pheasant and their ilk do actually indirectly contribute millions⁴ of pounds to this region's rural economy, while the Buzzard merely negatively contributes to this. True, but is the Buzzard's frankly marginal impact on a thriving business sufficient justification for Defra attacking this attractive species and one of the few to be responding well⁵, in spite of the region's intensive farming methods? As a committed ornithologist my answer, like many of you I hope, is a resounding no.

Fortunately, because of the scale of the protest (very reminiscent of the level of reaction to the

Government instigated 2010 assault on the Forestry Commission's public forest estate – now safe-guarded), Defra backed down this time – emphasis on 'this time'. Our job as birders ought to be to see to it that they do so the next time as well, when they come up with a similarly unenlightened proposal – and they probably will. So keep sending those Twitter messages and letters to Ministers, MPs and councillors, or sign the petitions to ensure that the ornithological community's voice continues to be heard – loud and clear!

Sadly these are troubling times for SOG's finances too. They are not as robust as we would wish – which is why the current edition of the Harrier is thinner and less colourful. But needs must, for while membership is slowly recovering, our costs are rising more steeply (both printing cost and postage have risen significantly this year). To offset these rises we have been contemplating just producing PDF copies of this magazine, that would help reduce our printing and postage costs – so, if you'd be happy to view your Harrier on screen only, just drop me a line. But we expect most of you will prefer to stick with having a hard copy – I certainly shall.

We also have a membership drive underway. To this end we have produced a wholly new set of

¹ The drought officially ended with the removal of the hosepipe ban across Suffolk in June. ² Source, the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, cited in The Observer 27 May 2012, which noted that losses of British birds tended to be higher than elsewhere in the EU.

³ Admittedly a harsh verdict (but I got emotional over this issue) given that Defra annually spends over £400m on agri-environment schemes with farmland birds as one priority target. ⁴ The 2010 Woodland Wealth Appraisal estimate suggested this contribution to the regional economy was around £81 million p.a. for shooting and deer stalking. ⁵ Ironically this species was featured as a Bird Atlas success story.

boards for our show panels⁶, plus a flyer and a PowerPoint presentation, all designed to get our message across more powerfully at community events/exhibitions.

We have also begun to offer our services as bird surveyors who can make biodiversity recommendations to environmental waste companies, in return for donations to SOG. Our first project is just coming to an end and we've already managed to save several pairs of Skylarks from the gang mower!

All of this activity requires a great deal of time and effort from an already stretched Council, all of whom are striving to see to it that SOG thrives. So we're very eager to hear from any other members prepared to help us out – manning stands, hosting walks, conducting surveys and, most vital of all, someone volunteering to serve as Treasurer.

As a result of all of this heightened activity we're slowly capturing more membership dues, receiving valuable charity donations and benefitting from a modest survey income. To such an extent that we're hoping at least one of the next two issues will be bigger and will again feature a colour supplement.

So what of this Harrier? In #169, we open with an interesting story revealing how the RSPB have brought, through habitat restoration, the Suffolk coastal population of Stone Curlews back from

the brink. Second up, Nick Moran of the BTO has kindly provided us with the first of a series of articles, which will include three tutorials, introducing the up-rated BirdTrack facility and showing how birders can usefully exploit it for their own purposes. Next is a fascinating article by David Tomlinson detailing his efforts to encourage Tree Sparrows into his garden. Then there are field reports, short articles on a wide range of other topics, the AGM minutes, plus a number of interesting news stories. So you can see, while we might now be a little light on colour, we remain heavy on content!

Because of pagination limitations #170 will be featuring one story carried over from this edition – nevertheless *do* keep your articles rolling, in as this one story won't be enough, but bear with me while I wrestle with the 'fallout' triggered by our present budget constraints.

Have a great summer, and let's catch up again in the autumn.

Roy Marsh asked to add:

I would like to pass on my own personal thanks to all who took part in the Nightingale survey this spring (Mick Wright tells me over 40 members assisted him). This was a very important survey, and one that was well supported – a big thank you to you all.

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

⁶ Sadly these show panels are now reaching their 'use by date', so if anyone can donate some standard-sized panels to us we'd be very happy to receive them.

Editor: In the last issue of the Harrier a small population of Suffolk coast Stone Curlews was mentioned. In this issue Mel Kemp, Heathland Manager at Minsmere explains how the RSPB's 16-year programme of work at this reserve brought this coastal population back from the brink.

Phil Brown & Mel Kemp

How habitat conversion restored the Stone Curlew to the Suffolk coast

Although Stone Curlews had not bred in the Minsmere area since 1969, this habitat conversion story actually begins almost two decades later in the 1980s when two parcels of land, totalling almost 200 hectares adjacent to the RSPB's Minsmere reserve, came onto the market.

The reserve's management appreciated that if it were possible to convert this land (plus several smaller plots subsequently purchased in the early noughties) into Stone Curlew-friendly heathland, Minsmere could be substantially enlarged to become a solid 650 hectares block of valuable habitat (see aerial map below).



The three additional areas expanded Minsmere to 1000ha

The conversion of this added 250 hectares of arable fields into a mixture of heathland and acid grassland is probably the largest single such project yet undertaken in the UK.

First the history, then the science

Creating this beneficial habitat was not just a matter of physical hard graft. First came some mental graft – an examination of the land's history. When the legal records were examined they indicated the land concerned had been farmed since the 1840s, although archaeology suggested that it might not have been heathland since the 1750 programme of land enclosure. This 250-year delay was problematic for the fact is, the longer it had been farmed, the harder it would be to restore the original heathland habitat.

Next came the science. Converting arable into a more nature-friendly habitat required:

- suitable soil conditions
- a source of desired plant species seed
- appropriate vegetation management

In the 1990s scientists and students were commissioned to carefully assess the RSPB's newly acquired fields and determine how appropriate the soil actually was for conversion to heathland, the composition of the seedbank and to offer suggestions as to the type of vegetation that could be established in the fields.

Dry heathland requires nutrient poor, acidic free-draining soils. So agriculturally improved soils are far from an ideal starting point as they often prove to be excessively fertile, tend to have a pH close to neutral and further, through the process of repeatedly deep ploughing, the residual heathland seedbed is steadily depleted so that the growth of undesirable¹ annuals is, in effect, encouraged.

The examination of the new fields found the soil's phosphorous levels to be high, while the heathland seedbed was virtually non-existent. As a consequence the options open to the RSPB team were limited. Topsoil stripping was deemed unlikely to be effective. Deep ploughing was adjudged unlikely to resolve matters either. And growing crops to steadily deplete the soil's fertility, though a possible route (involving adding ammonium sulphate to improve the soil's acidity), research indicated it was likely to take about 80 years before heathland natural regeneration would be possible – which was far too long a timeframe.

In the course of the examination, and as a result of several trials, it also became apparent that the ambition to create solely heather heathland was not only unduly optimistic, but also likely to be expensive, somewhat impractical and, in the meantime, the decline of the coastal Stone Curlews had emerged as a priority issue as well. Accordingly the RSPB adjusted its goals to aim at creating a combination of 80% dry acid grassland and around 20% heather heath – the latter being largely confined to the field's previous margins

¹ Undesirable in so far as such annuals are more vigorous than the slow-growing grasses, 'forbs' and dwarf shrubs that characterise heathland and acidic grasslands.



Applying heather litter – Autumn 2005

where the soils tended to be sandier, stonier and thus drier and thereby constituting perfect conditions for creating a heathland habitat.

The team also decided that, by adding elemental sulphur, the soil's pH could be reduced below a neutral 7 (i.e. rendering it more acidic) whilst, through provision of bracken litter containing heathland seeds and spores, the seedbed could be topped up too. A series of trials was then undertaken to test out different recipes of sulphur, bracken and woodchip. These trials duly indicated that the best application of sulphur would be around 4 tonnes per hectare, accompanied by a mixture of bracken litter and other heather detritus.



Early growth of heather on 'North Arable' (A), 2003

The process of kick-starting the natural regeneration of the heath and grassland was undertaken in three phases, starting in 1996 with the northern arable parcel (A). Next, in 2000, work began to stimulate acidic grassland growth on the southern parcel of land (B), with the smaller Mount Pleasant parcel (C) being tackled from 2004. Through a combination of natural

regeneration and intervention the desired grass and heath plants began to appear soon after the reversion works began.



Acid grassland on 'North Arable' (A), largely through natural regeneration, 2008

Not just chemistry, but animal husbandry too

But it was not to be a matter of chemistry alone. It emerged that a deal of animal husbandry would also be required.



Grazing by a combination of different species is vital

Red Deer were already happily grazing the area – but they alone were not sufficient to create the vital sward conditions. So the RSPB summoned the Suffolk Wildlife Trust's 'flying flock' of sheep – once the poisonous ragwort was under control. But even together these two species were not enough to create the right conditions. It turned out that the key to securing the 2cm grass sward beloved of breeding Stone Curlews was the



Brash piles to encourage Rabbits

Rabbit. But there weren't enough in the area so, unusually, the RSPB had to find a way to lure them back. Mounds of cut gorse ('brash piles'), a by-product of heathland management, were placed in the centre of the various fields to act as cover and to encourage rabbits to occupy the site and burrow beneath it. This in time they did and the sward target height began to be met.

In addition to getting the ground conditions into the right state, the food supply for the 'Stonies' had to be secured as well. Sampling showed there was abundant ground beetle prey for Stone Curlews on the fields, and that soil acidification did not unduly reduce the biomass of soil macroinvertebrates (chiefly earthworms).

Did these changes impact on the Stone Curlews?

So all of the conditions for the Stone Curlews were now in place. They duly re-appeared² during the 2002-breeding season. But it was not until 2003 that



A ringed adult Stonie returns to Minsmere – demonstrating site fidelity

the first nesting attempt took place on the northern parcel (A). In 2004 this same pair made three nesting attempts on this area and managed to fledge two young. Their attempts in 2005 were unsuccessful but, in 2006, two nesting attempts led to four fledged young.

Thereafter more pairs have arrived on both the northern and southern areas (so that by 2011 the total number of pairs was up to nine), with the number of nesting attempts increasing commensurately. In addition to the habitat creation efforts, the RSPB have protected nests from foxes and accidental trampling of deer and sheep by using electric fencing.

By 2011 up to nine young were fledged on the RSPB landholding – i.e. one per pair. This translates into a healthy productivity of 1.0, where a mere 0.7 will ensure population growth. So there is every reason to believe the Suffolk coastal population may now have turned the corner.

Year	Pairs – Non RSPB	Pairs – RSPB	Total pairs – coast	Nesting attempts – coast	Fledged young – coast	Chicks per pair
2003	4	1	5	7	3	0.6
2004	5	1	6	12	2	0.3
2005	5	1	6	10	1	0.2
2006	6	1	7	13	6	0.9
2007	4	2	6	11	12	2.0
2008	5	3	8	11	6	0.8
2009	2	5	7	12	9	1.3
2010	2	8	10	17	10	1.0
2011	5	9	12	23	10	0.8

On the adjacent non-RSPB landholdings there have been additional pairs nesting over the latter stages of this project too (three in 2011 – the other two in the table above also nested on the RSPB landholding), but their breeding success has fluctuated and almost consistently, been much lower than that of the Minsmere nesting birds.



So what of the prospects?

Because of their productivity, "brilliant" was the word used by Mel Kemp in answer to this question, as double-broods are often possible on open habitats such as the arable reversion

² They had previously been recorded during the 1995-breeding season.

project area. However, in and around nature reserves, human disturbance can be a problem, so it is ironic that whilst productivity may be lower on agricultural land (as crop growth often militates against the opportunity for a second brood) they are so much less susceptible to disturbance. Stone Curlew's long-term future, as it is in the Brecks too, probably lies in encouraging them to nest on semi-natural grassland where they have higher productivity, but backed up by funding from Government sources such as Environmental Stewardship.

Meantime, once any of the Minsmere birds oblige by settling in a good spot and appear to be capable of habituating to visitor presence, the Reserve's team is hoping to set up a temporary viewing

point from which a nesting pair can be viewed. So let's hope for a favourable 2012 breeding season and then savour the prospect of this exciting viewing opportunity in 2013.

Editor: I have to admit that the above is a somewhat simplified review of what was in reality a much more complex and thorough scientific investigation into the development of arable fields to secure the natural regeneration of species-rich, acid grassland. For those of you wishing to read about this project in more detail Mel recommends you look at the following paper: M. Ausden, M. Allison, P. Bradley, M. Coates, M. Kemp and N. Phillips 'Increasing the resilience of our lowland dry heaths and acid grasslands', *British Wildlife* #22, pp101 – 109, 2010.

Stop press Mel tells me they again have nine nesting Stone Curlews this year – so perhaps there will be a viewing area by the time this article is published?

Editor: When Roy Marsh and I attended the BTO's regional Birdwatcher's Conference in mid-April we were both impressed by Nick Moran's reveal of their up-rated BirdTrack service. Here, in the first of a series of articles, Nick (who is the BTO's BirdTrack Organiser) brings us up to speed with Bird Track's role and value.

Nick Moran

BirdTrack: What is it and why should I use it?

Although BirdTrack has been on the scene since 2004 (or 2002, if you include its predecessor, Migration Watch), it is continually being developed. Lately it has undergone a makeover that enhances its performance and increases its value to users. Yet, in some quarters at least, it is still something of a best-kept secret.

In this short series of articles for *The Harrier*, I aim to bring BirdTrack to the forefront of the minds of SOG members by covering a selection of the 'best bits' of its functionality, give some 'how to use' guidance in the form of three tutorials and thereby I hope to inspire you to get as hooked on using the system as I am!



This introductory piece outlines the general goals of BirdTrack, provides some specific examples of how the data are used in conservation science, and explains the value of increasing the volume of data submitted to BirdTrack.

BirdTrack background

BirdTrack has the underlying scientific goal of collecting data on migration movements and distributions of birds throughout Britain and Ireland. It thereby supports species conservation at the local, regional, national and international scales. As a free online bird recording system,

the functionality BirdTrack offers birders, local bird recorders and the wider interested public has been developed with the needs of all these groups in mind.

BirdTrack roles

i. Migration

A key role of BirdTrack is to monitor the timing and duration of migration, by analysing the presence or absence of each species on complete lists* over the course of each year. On-going research to compare BirdTrack records with data collected during the Inland Observation Points Survey¹ of the 1960s is already beginning to reveal some marked changes in this area over the last 50 years.

ii. Species status

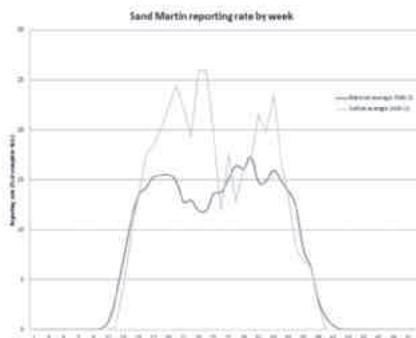
BirdTrack records have also proved valuable to recent status reviews of a number of species. Although the status of our most numerous species are well understood from large-scale monitoring schemes such as the Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and Bird Atlas 2007–11, BirdTrack records can add a great deal of information for the next ‘tier’ of scarcer species.

For example, BirdTrack records made a significant contribution to a recent paper estimating the number of Bitterns in the UK (Wotton *et al.*, 2011). During the harsh winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11, when Bitterns dispersed more widely than usual, the broad geographical cover of the BirdTrack records proved invaluable. They were also beneficial for a recent update of Waterbird Population Estimates. Normally these are largely based on WeBS data, but here benefitted from BirdTrack data as it allowed the authors to ascertain if WeBS overlooked any key areas for scarce species such as Ruff, Smew and Snow Goose (Musgrove *et al.*, 2011). The Rare Breeding Birds Panel annually reports the populations of a suite of the scarcest breeding species; BirdTrack records are available for this purpose too, via the county bird recorder network. Increasingly, BirdTrack data is also contributing to local-level data requests for conservation and research uses.

The precise way BirdTrack records are used obviously depends on the nature of the question being addressed. Bird Atlas 2007–11 uses BirdTrack records from sites defined at the 10km square resolution (or finer), for example, whilst local atlases require sites to be defined as tetrads or 1km squares. Where BirdTrack data are used to help inform population estimates, the highest total count of a species on a particular date is used, rather than a cumulative total of all counts made on that date.

Increased volume of records improves its value

The real power of BirdTrack data comes from its volume. Thus there are obvious benefits to be derived from more observers ‘BirdTracking’ their records for atlases and local bird reports. Perhaps the best illustration of the value of lots of data can be seen in the reporting rates (the proportion of complete lists featuring a certain species)? For example, compare the reporting rates of Sand Martin from Britain & Ireland with those for the East of England:

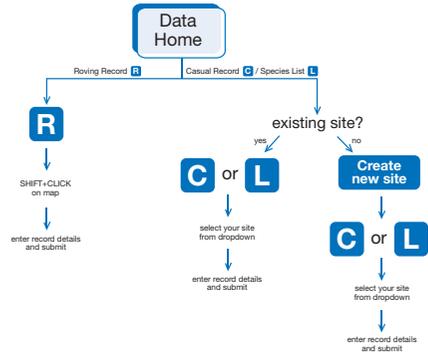


The more acute and frequent peaks and troughs in the data for the East of England (note the light grey line above) highlights the simple fact that more is better when it comes to data quantity! The more observers submitting complete lists to BirdTrack, the greater the number of species – and the smaller the geographic area – for which reliable reporting rates can be produced, which in turn, can only improve our understanding of both bird migration and distributions.

* Complete lists will be explained in ‘What can BirdTrack do for me? [Tutorial #1]’ in the September issue of the Harrier.

¹ Like BirdTrack, this survey collected migration data from around the UK. Should you like to learn more about this pre-computer project then you can refer to this document: <http://www.bto.org/survey/special/iop/index.htm>

So there is real value in you supplying BirdTrack with more data. Next time I'll drill down into BirdTrack and look at adding records (see flow-chart right) and then, subsequently, I'll show you how you can use these records for your own purposes!



BirdTrack is organised by the BTO, on behalf of the BTO, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), BirdWatch Ireland and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club.

The Breeding Bird Survey is run by the BTO and is jointly funded by BTO, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the RSPB. The Wetland Bird Survey is a partnership between the BTO, the RSPB and the JNCC in association with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

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David Tomlinson

Tree Sparrows – encouraging a scarce species

There's something irresistibly charming about the dapper Tree Sparrow. I expect many birdwatchers of my age took Tree Sparrows more or less for granted up until the 1970s, when they were still common and widespread, and were a bird you expected to see on most outings.

Then came the population crash and suddenly a once familiar species became a minor rarity, one you were always pleased to see, and made a note of when you did so.

First sightings

I moved to Suffolk from Kent in October 2004. During the following 12 months not a single member of the genus *Passer* was seen here at Bowbeck (on the edge of the 10,000-acre Euston estate), but then on 21st October 2005 a single Tree Sparrow alighted on one of my garden feeders. I was delighted, and I even managed to



get a couple of reasonable photographs, but the bird only stayed for half an hour and wasn't seen again. It was nearly three years before the next record, on 5th October 2008, but again the single bird only paused briefly.

However, on 20th October 2009 the pair of Tree Sparrows that arrived must have liked what they found, for this time they remained all winter, and I saw them regularly, if not daily. Encouragingly, their numbers increased to four in January, and I continued to record them into March, when they disappeared.

Numbers grow

On 20th October 2010 I was looking out for the Tree Sparrows once again, and sure enough they arrived exactly on cue. This time numbers soon started to build up, with eight individuals in early November. By late February I reckoned that at

least 15 birds were coming to one of my feeding stations – set up in the hedge at the far end of our field, but easily viewable with a telescope from the house. This particular feeding station has proved to be their favourite, and last winter I encouraged them there by feeding a special Tree Sparrow mixture of canary seed and millet, which Joe Reed from Lackford gave me. This was part of a sponsorship project with the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust. Unlike the previous winter, I saw them daily, but wasn't able to note their exact date of departure as I was away in Cyprus at the end of March.

A second trip to Cyprus in October meant I would be away on the 20th, so I was a little worried I wouldn't be able to note the sparrows arrival, if indeed they decided to return. Fortunately there was no need for such concern, as the first sparrow turned up 11 days early, on the 9th. Unlike the previous winter, numbers were slow to build up, and it wasn't until the freeze of late January that double figures were reached. Counting was difficult, as they are active little birds, but numbers peaked at around 25 individuals in late February.

Intriguingly, I covered much of the surrounding farmland for my BTO Atlas survey work, but failed to see a single Tree Sparrow away from my feeders. I'm pretty sure that no one else has seen or reported my birds, which makes me suspect that there must be a number of unreported flocks in this part of West Suffolk.

Feeding

Though I continue to feed a canary seed/millet mix (available from Trevor Kerridge at £15 for a 20 kilo sack), I find my sparrows are equally happy with a cheap, basic wildbird mix I buy from CWG in Bury. A mixture of Wood Pigeons, Pheasants, Yellowhammers and both Red-legged and Grey Partridges eagerly consumes the seed the sparrows spill. The sparrows are also very wasteful with the canary seed, dropping as much as they eat. My feeders closer to the house are filled with a far superior wildbird mixture from

Jacobi Jayne (mainly black Sunflower hearts); though the sparrows make occasional visits for a change of diet, they much prefer the more rural hedgerow feeder, even if the food isn't as good.



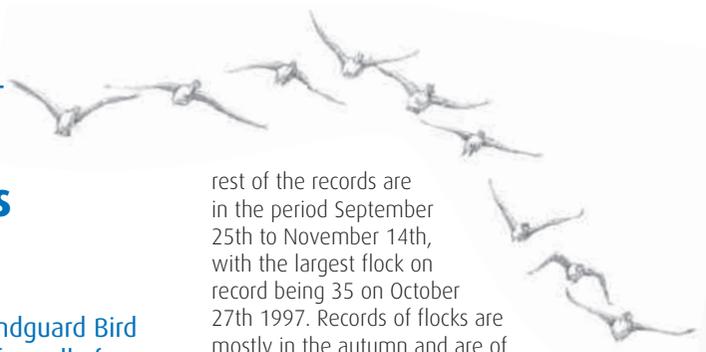
Many Tree Sparrows have been ringed in West Suffolk (most notably at Lackford and Ampton). Patrick Barker made two determined attempts to catch and ring the sparrows here. The first effort, in February, produced a bag of 60 birds of a variety of species, but only one Tree Sparrow was caught and ringed. They are notoriously difficult to net; a second attempt two weeks later also resulted in a single sparrow being ringed.

Nesting

As usual, the wintering flock dispersed at the end of March (where do they go?), but one pair has remained to nest in a Schwegler box in the garden. Intriguingly, the cock carries a ring, so presumably it is one of the two birds ringed here. It would be great to establish a colony at Bowbeck – I now have numerous Schwegler boxes in place – but at least one pair is a start.



Editor: I think David's suspicion that Tree Sparrows are furtive is right. They are easily overlooked, as I too failed to log any while surveying around Dalham for the Bird Atlas. Yet earlier this year, whilst birding the patch with fellow SOG member John Owen, we quickly located a flock of 30+ Tree Sparrows on the edge of the village.



Pink-footed Goose records at Landguard

Whilst recording at Landguard Bird Observatory began formally from its inception in 1982, it had been going on for many years prior to this. Despite all of these observations, the first site record of Pink-footed Goose was not until one was found walking around the beach of the aggregate yard on April 3rd 1995.

Due to its tameness this was suspected of being an escapee. Not an auspicious start, though a flock of 12 on October 20th of the same year was a much more acceptable addition to the Landguard list. Since then the number of annual sightings has ranged from zero to three until a sharper rise in 2011 (see table below).

Table 1: Number of records & the total number of Pink-footed Geese recorded annually at Landguard Bird Observatory

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Records	2	0	3	0	0	2	0	2	0
Total	13	0	61	0	0	19	0	4	0
Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	
Records	2	1	2	2	3	2	3	7	
Total	27	3	16	8	48	42	15	52	

Now a Landguard regular

Sightings have become annual in the past ten years. There are two January records of 36 on January 22nd 2008 and two north followed about an hour later by two south (which may, or may not have been the same birds) on January 26th of the same year. Four spring records are in the period March 7th to April 9th in 2000 and 2002 plus another spring one on May 3rd 2004. This last had missing flight feathers and was presumably a bird injured by a wildfowler. The

rest of the records are in the period September 25th to November 14th, with the largest flock on record being 35 on October 27th 1997. Records of flocks are mostly in the autumn and are of birds going in a northerly direction. These are presumed to be part of the vast numbers now wintering in Norfolk that have overshot their wintering grounds and are relocating back to their intended destination. Smaller numbers of birds can be seen to be going either in a northerly or southerly direction, with singletons normally mixed in with flocks of Brent Geese or other wildfowl; these were presumably lost waifs tagging onto others for company.

Increasing records

This mirrors the general increase in records in Suffolk in recent years. Just using the Suffolk Bird Reports covering the years 1980 (Moore 1981), 1990 (Piotrowski 1991), 2000 (Lowe 2002) and 2010 (Mason 2011) as examples to illustrate this increase produces the following approximate totals (Table 2):

Table 2: Approximate numbers of Pink-footed Geese recorded in Suffolk

Year	1980	1990	2000	2010
Total	c.35	c.35	c.36	c.4000

Steve Piotrowski in *“The Birds of Suffolk”* summarises the history of this species and gives it a status at the time of writing as *“An uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant”*. This was clearly the case at that time. The Suffolk Bird Report covering the year 2000 also gives the same status. The more recent increase in numbers has yet to be reflected in the status given in the most recent reports.

Two populations

The British wintering population has trebled in size over the last thirty years and originates

largely in Greenland and Iceland. A much smaller population wintering in the low-countries originates in Svalbard (Holt, C.A. *et al* 2011). Due to Landguard's position, while it is possible that some records may originate from the Svalbard population, the bulk of birds are presumed to

have come from the Icelandic and Greenland populations. It is predicted that Landguard will receive more records over time if the population of Pink-footed Geese continues to increase at its current rate, or if population pressure in Norfolk forces flocks further south to winter in Suffolk.

Acknowledgement:

Many thanks to Steve Goddard for comments on drafts of this note.

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David Cawdron

Unusual Pochard breeding behaviour

The moment I knew that I had found something very unusual was when I viewed the nest from a different position and saw that it had been lined with feathers.



I first found the nest on 11th May 2009 when two Great Crested Grebe at a Breckland site in Suffolk occupied it. It was a typical Great Crested Grebe's nest built of vegetation and attached to the base of a tree standing in water. On my next visit on 19th May, both adults were away from the nest and one of the adults had two small young sitting on its back. However, when I checked the nest site that I'd previously found to see whether these birds had used that nest, I found a female Pochard¹ sitting very low in it,

only just visible above the top of the nest. On four subsequent visits, the female remained sitting on the nest, until 20th June when a female and two small young were found near the nest, which was now unoccupied.

Unusual nesting behaviour

Pochards are rare breeding birds². I viewed the nest from a distance during the nesting period and subsequently completed a partial BTO nest record. The nest contents were not examined and so it is not possible to say how many eggs were present at any given time or precisely what the overall productivity of the nest was. That said, after leaving the nest, the young continued to grow and were found to be fully grown on 29th July. The female and two juveniles were last seen at this site in early August.

In 2011, I found a female Pochard making a breeding attempt at the same site in similar circumstances. This time a recently vacated Coot's nest was used. This nest had originally been made in the branches of a tree at water level on a small island and was partially hidden. A female Pochard was seen sitting on the nest on 1st June and, as in the previous case, was sitting very low in it and was only just visible above the nest's top. However, on 9th June the nest appeared to be unoccupied and by 15th June had been destroyed. As in 2009, the nest

¹ Pochards have bred in Breckland sites in Suffolk since the 1950's but have declined in recent years. In 2009 broods were located at three Breckland sites, while in 2010 at just one. ² The BB's 2010 Rare Breeding Bird report states that the UK five-year mean was 632 pairs.

was viewed from a distance and so the nest contents on the first two visits remain unknown.

According to BWP, Pochard nest in dense reeds and vegetation either very close to water or on platforms built up in water. In high breeding densities, there have been instances where nest sites have been found on small pools as well as man made water bodies such as reservoirs, ornamental ponds and fishponds. The nest is made of reed stems, leaves and other vegetation, and the shallow cup made in it is then lined with down. The female uses material within reach of the nest to make it and the movement of the female's body moulds the cup.

One-off, or a new trend?

There is no mention in BWP of nests of other species being used by Pochard. I have contacted Carl Barimore at the Nest Record Scheme at the BTO, to see if this breeding behaviour has been noted before. He in turn has made contact with the country's most prolific Pochard nest recorder who records about ten nests annually and also

posted a request on the Nest Record Scheme Yahoo forum for more information about Pochard using nests of other species, but no information concerning any other such breeding attempts has been forthcoming.

The Pochard is a secretive breeder. The breeding information in BWP is sparse in comparison with other species and so presumably much remains unknown.

Given my experience it would be worthwhile keeping an eye on the nests of species such as Great Crested Grebes and Coots, after their nesting attempt has finished, at sites which are frequented by Pochard to see if they become occupied by this species, in case this behaviour is replicated elsewhere.

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Cramp & Perrins 'The Birds of the Western Palearctic' Vol. 1, 1977
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Suffolk Birds reports 2009 and 2010

Roy Marsh

Suffolk BINS – 'With a Spring in our step?'

Now the cold winter period is seemingly forgotten, it's time to reflect upon the spring. But was it a 'Hot Spell' or more of a 'Damp Squib'?

One thing was for sure, as we moved through mid/late March, temperatures were soaring to the dizzy heights of twenty degrees, and with a few early migrants on the move all of us hoped the scene was set for a cracking period. But how was it in reality?

Suffolk, still delivering?...

March – We ended my last report with a Glossy Ibis remaining at Minsmere. This visitor continued to please at Eastbridge and, at times, provided

some cracking views, as did the second Greenland White-front at Boyton (both remaining throughout the month), whilst the Red-breasted Goose stayed until the 9th on Kirton Marsh. A Hoopoe was discovered on the 14th and was again present on the 15th at Brooke Industrial Estate, Lowestoft, probably the overwintering individual from 1st January with it or another seen along the Gorleston Road on the 28th. A Hooded Crow was found at Boyton on the 11th, giving many a chance to connect through until the 20th, a couple of Ravens were noted throughout the month, with a drake Green-winged Teal discovered at Minsmere on the 25th, and seen again on the levels on the 28th making up the month's highlights.

Other March Highlights: The Great Grey Shrike continues to perform at Layham, Rough-legged Buzzard over Stutton Mill, Black Brant on Orwell estuary and Great White Egret at Minsmere on 6th. A Yellow-browed Warbler was reported from the ravine, Lowestoft on the 12th, two Common

Crane over Covehithe 21st, good numbers of Crossbills remained at Hollesley, providing stunning views, with a smattering of early common migrants and three additional Great Grey Shrikes concluding the month's recap.

(No) Surprise surprises then?...

April – A Penduline Tit was heard briefly by Island Mere, Minsmere on the 6th, with the highlight of the month being the 28th and 29th with the two White Storks noted on marshes at Dagmate Lane, near Acle, and an Alpine Swift around the grain silo near ASDA. The 24th provided a day of possibles – with a possible Alpine Swift noted at Minsmere, and a possible Little Bunting seen very briefly at Landguard Bird Observatory (LBO) before flying south. LBO did come up trumps on the 10th, with a male Serin singing and seen in the Holm Oaks, then on the 30th a female Serin was found on the common and remained until early June at least, while a male Serin was also noted at the Denes Oval on the 11th – 12th.

Other April Highlights: Four Common Cranes were noted over Orfordness and then Lowestoft on the 1st, Great Grey Shrikes remained at Carlton & Hollesley, with the Glossy Ibis continuing to perform well at Eastbridge till 13th. A Hooded Crow was noted displaying over Town Marshes, Southwold on the 3rd, then one at Ness Point on the 8th. A Rough-legged Buzzard was seen over Benacre on the 16th. The 25th saw a report of a Roseate Tern from Minsmere concluding what was, in the main, a very quiet month for the County. Surely things would improve?

May-be or May-be not?...

May – May proved to be a bit more like it! Bird of the spring for many, and a possible contender for bird of the year, was the cracking summer plumage Long-billed Dowitcher – a fifth for the county, found at Great Livermere on the evening of the 4th, but only remained until the 5th. A Tawny Pipit was present mid pm – evening only on the 6th at LBO, two Black-winged Stilts were heard over Minsmere on the 7th before being located on the levels where they showed distantly for the day. A White Stork was on roof tops in Sudbury on the 10th only; a Savi's

Warbler was heard singing at Dingle on the 12th; an aberrant Common Swift initially causing a panic as it distantly displayed a white rump; two Red-rumped Swallows were seen over pools just south of the Abbey at Minsmere mid-morning, and a single bird noted early morning at East Lane on the 13th. Female Serin on the Icky ridge at LBO was noted on the 14th, possibly the same bird remaining into June?

The 26th was the purple day of May, with LBO producing a Greenish and Marsh Warbler, both trapped and ringed, a further Marsh Warbler was on Orfordness, and a singing Icterine Warbler was found along the disused railway track, Corton, plus a male Pied Flycatcher. A Marsh Warbler was noted at Boyton on 27th, plus Honey Buzzard through Sizewell, while a further Marsh Warbler, was singing and showing well at Great Livermere from 28th to 29th. The 28th also saw five Bee-eaters north over Minsmere at 05:30 with the first-ever Dutch re-trap of a Marsh Warbler, discovered in the nets at LBO that day too. The 28th also saw Purple Heron over Lakenheath and four White Storks that evening. A Red-footed Falcon was reported from Elmwell on 28th, and seen again on the 29th. Also on the 29th two Glossy Ibis were noted at North Warren in the afternoon then, presumably the same birds, roosting at Minsmere in the evening, while LBO trapped its 3rd Marsh Warbler in four days! A Red-footed Falcon was found at Minsmere on the 30th and remained through to 31st at least, as did the two Glossy Ibis on the levels, making up the May highlights.

Other May Highlights: A Hoopoe was at Shingle Street in the evening of the 2nd, Serin heard only early morning at the Customs House, Felixstowe on the 5th, with a ring-tailed Monty's noted north at LBO on the 10th, and one over Orfordness on the 7th. A cracking singing Wood Warbler was found on Sutton Heath on the 10th and continued to sing and show well through to June at least. The 11th proved a good day, with LBO producing Red-rumped Swallow, Wood Warbler, singing Serin, plus 11 Spotted Flycatchers on site, with Montagu's Harrier and

Honey Buzzard through Minsmere and Stone Curlew noted in cliff top fields at Corton. Three Temminck's Stints showed very well at Tinkers on the 20th, with Red-backed Shrike noted at Dunwich on 22nd. A probable 1st summer Rosy Starling was seen briefly at LBO on 25th and a Great White Egret noted at Burgh Castle on 29th.

So as we look forward to a sultry summer period (if only I hear you cry), and the exciting autumn period just around the corner – let us hope for an oddity or two! Please also let me remind you to submit those all-important records via your area

recorders, including the completion of any SORC forms for the county rarities, and BBRC forms for any national rarities.

Editor: And don't forget BirdTrack!

As always, I want to pass on my thanks to our BINS members for their tremendous 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/>

Field Trip Reports

Gi Grieco

Deben Boat Trip

February 15th

Leader: Gi Grieco

After successfully completing this boat trip three years previously, and then being asked if it could be done again, I contacted Richard, the skipper of the Will Laud, to organise a repeat winter trip. He normally runs trips in the summer, but we wanted to optimise the river trip for when it is most productive with its wintering waders and wildfowl.

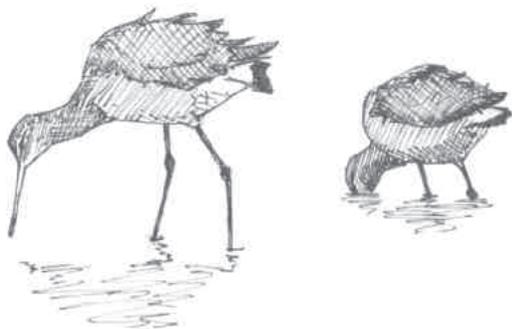
Down river disturbed by wildfowlers

The 11 members met at Ramsholt quay, where we first boarded a skiff to take us out to the boat moored mid-channel. The plan was to head down river as the tide was low, before retracing our route and continuing up to Woodbridge as the tide rose.

Initially lots of waders were noted along the shore including Avocet, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew, a few Black-tailed Godwit and a good number of Bar-tailed Godwit, including a flock of 30. Duck numbers seemed lower than the previous trip with some Teal, Mallard and Wigeon seen, the reason became clear when, opposite Falkenham Creek, a punt boat was seen and two wildfowlers were noted on the saltmarsh. We carried onto Felixstowe Ferry noting a large flock of Brent Geese fly up from the adjacent farmland along with a group of Lapwings plus accompanying Golden Plover and we saw the first of at least three Grey Seals. At the Ferry we went out to the mouth of the river noting a few different gull species, Cormorant and Turnstone.

Then back up river

We then headed back up river, this time seeing a Marsh Harrier and Buzzard just before reaching Ramsholt and, on the next stretch up to Kirton Creek, a couple of ducks were found ahead which turned out to be two female Common Scoter. We were surprised to see these more maritime ducks, which flew up river as we approached. Similar duck and wader species as



before were seen along the shore as we passed Shottisham Creek and we started to see our first Little and Great Crested Grebes. The Common Scoter could be seen flying ahead and, having my patch on the Deben that goes down to Waldringfield, I was hoping they would reach there.

Time for a break, Richard offered us either a cup of tea, coffee or cup of soup, which was welcome as the temperature was low and the forecast sun never materialised! As a treat I had brought a couple of packs of hot cross buns to go with the drinks, and it was remarked that it would set a precedent for all leaders in the future to follow suit!

We had noted the two wildfowlers again also heading up river on the far shore and were worried they would shoot or scare any of the birds. At Waldringfield we saw the Scoter again, a nice patch tick for me – honestly we did not flush them there! We also saw eight Goldeneye including three males. Earlier in the winter some Twite had been present on the island off Waldringfield but unfortunately we could not find any.

Carrying on up to Methersgate we spotted lots of wildfowl, including several Pintail and Shelduck and a further Buzzard. Opposite Kyson Point we could go no further as the tide was not high

enough and the boat would be grounded – it was getting close! The on-board sonar could gauge the depth and pinpoint fish, which Richard pointed out in this case were Grey Mullet and Herring. Some further Golden Plover were noted here and so we headed back down to Ramsholt again seeing small groups of Little Grebe. The Common Scoter were again seen, this time off Kirton Creek. As Richard ferried us ashore we thanked him for an enjoyable trip and the hot drinks.

On to East Lane

We decided to end the day by heading to East Lane, stopping en route to have a look at a finch flock I'd seen earlier in the morning. We noted a flock of Linnet and Chaffinch and saw several Red-legged Partridge. On the opposite side of the road a quartering female Marsh Harrier was seen and I was lucky to briefly see a ring-tail Hen Harrier before it disappeared below a rise. At East Lane several ducks could be seen on the sea that turned out to be a mixture of Wigeon, Tufted Duck and Mallard. Along the shore beyond the lagoons our quarry of Snow Bunting was found, with a nice flock of nine showing well. Returning along the footpath a good count of 50 Mute Swans in the adjacent field ended a pleasant day. My thanks to all the members who attended and to Richard and, maybe next time, I will have to do two trips, as there were a few members on a waiting list.

Steve Fryett

Shingle Street & Upper Hollesley Common

April 21st

Leader: Steve Fryett

Predictably the weather remained entrenched in a cold south-easterly, which had set in during the previous week, but none the less we expected to see some migrants.

We kicked off with a flurry of raptors, with at least five or more Common Buzzards seen over Hollesley. A pair of Meadow Pipits was noted with food for an early brood. Always worth a note, although still common here, are Linnets with the males in splendid plumage and song.



William Wordsworth argued that the song of the Linnet provides more wisdom than books in the third verse of *The Tables Turned*...

**“Books! tis a dull and endless strife.
Come, hear the woodland Linnet.
How sweet his music! on my life.
There’s more of wisdom in it.”**

The raptors continued with an excellent showing from a male Hen Harrier hunting at ground level before rising up high in the sky to be joined by two Common Buzzards. Not long after this we encountered a female Hen Harrier hunting the south end of Oxley Marsh. Two individuals had been overwintering in the area and must have been due to leave any day. A single Northern Wheatear was located in the garden of Shingle Street's most southerly house to provide the first migrant passerine of the day.

Following a good skua passage during the week we only located a single Great Crested Grebe on the sea. As we returned to the car park a lone Swallow added some excitement, as did the day's first butterfly, a male Orange Tip. At the Coastguard cottages we saw five Common Seals on the spit at the mouth of the river with another Great Crested Grebe nearby.

Then onto Hollesley

We then headed for Upper Hollesley Common where we took a lunch break with much warmer conditions. The first warbler noted was a singing Chiffchaff in the car park. One often encounters Robins having territorial fights, but to see two male Chaffinches having a right old scrap was

intriguing. A long distance sighting of a bird perched at the top of a dead tree was finally accepted as a Woodlark, but we really would have preferred better views. Reaching the centre area, where there remains a good stand of pines, we noted considerable avian activity both on the ground and in the trees. Eventually we managed to pick out several Redpoll, Siskin, and Goldfinch with a 70 strong flock of Linnets. Just how many were not Linnets was difficult to assess and we could not be sure of having overlooked Crossbill.

Moving off, and skirting the cleared area, we had a brief glimpse of Firecrest that had also been heard calling, but unfortunately it could not be relocated. The cleared area not only provides excellent habitat for Woodlark, but the Common Lizard also like it. We noted one out for a sunbath before finding a pair of Woodlarks close by affording fine views, we also noted a further two singing. Willow Warbler was a typical find with another singing close by. Treecreeper, Yellowhammer, Stonechat and Mistle Thrush made up the rest of the species here. Once again, as we ended the meeting we did not record Dartford Warbler, however I am sure they continue to thrive in other parts of this excellent area.

Gi Grieco

Lackford & Lakenheath

May 20th

Leaders: Gi Grieco and Dave Pearson

Arriving at Lakenheath, despite it being blustery and cold, it was hoped that the viewing would be better than last year, when the very windy conditions had made birding difficult and the birds scarce.

We welcomed new member Stef and a group of 11 of us headed to the wash where a couple of

Common Terns were hunting with Great Crested Grebe noted amongst the vegetation. An excited shout from one of the leaders of an Otter in the water was a bit too keen, as it turned out to be spawning fish!

Crane care

One of the wardens came up to us and spoke about one of the pairs of crane present this year that are visible from the footpath. Due to being distracted as people walk past and making the young vulnerable from predators like fox, we were asked to minimise viewing times, with which we completely agreed.

We started along the footpath adjacent to the railway line and it was noticeable that the weather conditions were keeping small birds down with Whitethroat and Garden, Reed and Sedge Warblers present in low numbers. We heard our first Cuckoo, which we got good views

of later when a couple kept flying back and forth between plantations. In the same area we heard our first Golden Oriole but could not locate it. We carried on to the next plantation where a second Golden Oriole could be heard and, with patience, especially as there were many people present, we all eventually had excellent views. With the swaying branches and their surprisingly cryptic plumage it did take 'Camo' Chris quite a while to view it, even when the bird was lined up in a scope – hopefully he learned some tips on camouflage!



Also in the area Hobby was seen, one of only four we saw, when normally good numbers are viewable at this time of year. Not surprising considering we did not see a single damselfly/dragon/butterfly so we did wonder what the ones we did see were feeding on. In the reed beds nearby Bearded Tit were heard by a few but all got great views of a Bittern that flew by. At

the far point at Joist Fen good numbers of Marsh Harrier were in the air and a Water Rail was heard. Heading back along the river path amongst a group of Mute Swans was a single Whooper Swan. It turns out it had a damaged wing and so was unable to migrate north for the summer.

Cranes glimpsed

We came to the point where the Cranes were visible so we had a quick look at these wonderful birds before moving off, with some of the group having good views of another Bittern as it flew by. Back to the wash and two male Garganey were now viewable, although they had somehow disappeared as we went further along and, by now, there were five Common Terns present. We had lunch in the car park before moving on to Lackford.

And then on to Lackford

Near the car park we heard a Nightingale singing and a Bullfinch was seen briefly. Over the sailing lake large numbers of hirundines and Swifts and, along one edge, a couple of hunting Hobbies. At Bill's Hide there were a selection of ducks and geese including Pochard, Gadwall and Tufted Duck along with Canada Geese with goslings, and a Muntjac was noted on the far shore. An interesting sight was a big patch of a bracket fungus on the trunk of Willow. This was identified as 'Chicken of the wood'.

The group agreed that it was an excellent day with great views of some of Suffolk's special birds.

Editor: Now, back to the River Deben with an interesting view from the bank.

Nick Sibbett

Feeding the swans may enhance wader foraging

The Deben Estuary is a European-designated Special Protection Area for the vast numbers of waterbirds it supports, especially in winter. At

Woodbridge, the estuary is adjacent to a popular and busy estuary-side walk, which offers easy views of waders.

The public, whilst not always appreciating the special nature of the estuary, enjoy the birds and it is not unusual to see small children and accompanying adults feeding bread to them. Approaching these waterbirds can be tricky; Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) tolerate a distance down to 2 metres separation, whereas Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) rarely venture within 5m – 10m of humans.

Mute swans impact on feeding

The most common species to eat the bread are Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) and Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*). Mute Swans walk from the water's edge across intertidal mud to be fed, leaving a trail of footprints in this mud. Whereas Black-headed Gulls eat bread from the mud, water or, when it is airborne, after being thrown. While Turnstones are regularly seen eating bread and foraging close to the concrete estuary wall, where they normally seek invertebrates – especially when the larger birds are temporarily not present in abundance. On 19th December 2011, a Redshank appeared to be benefitting from members of the public earlier feeding Mute Swans. This Redshank, out of a group of six, was clearly using the Mute Swans' footprints in the mud leading to and from the water's edge. It walked along one track of

footprints, probing with its long bill into each individual footprint and not into the adjacent mud. This behaviour continued for several minutes.

Redshank – reaching the parts others could not

It was not clear if foraging in swan footprints benefitted the Redshank with a greater rate of prey intake than other Redshanks foraging close by. It is tempting to speculate that the 2 – 3mm depression of each swan footprint meant that this Redshank could probe just that little bit deeper to reach the worms that other birds could not reach¹.

Although some birdwatchers may feel uncomfortable with the Deben Estuary being used for the rather urban activity of 'feeding the birds', it appears that at least part of the internationally important bird populations also benefit from this activity – admittedly to a very minor extent.

¹ Proof-reader observation: Or, as occurs with Little Egrets' paddling, had the pressure encouraged worms higher?

Clive Collins

What's in a name?

i. Place names:

More on Suffolk place names

Adam Gretton's suggestion re Yarn Hill in Harrier #167 prompted me to go back to consult the 'Bible' – "The Place-names of Suffolk" by Professor Walter Skeat, published posthumously in 1913, for a further look.

He makes no mention of Yarn Hill, but I suspect that Adam is probably correct. A couple of additional bird-related place names also emerged from this foray. Skeat identifies Spexhall as "corner of land frequented by woodpeckers" from the Old English "speight" for woodpecker (the modern German is "Specht") and also suggests Falkenham as an "enclosure for falcons" (presumably used to train them to return to the lure) and Ramsholt as a derivation from the Old English "hraem'sholt" – raven's wood. This last

would be significant, as it represents another species that has disappeared from our county as a breeding bird¹. Hawkedon is from "hawk", he says, but as a personal name, which apparently was quite common among Norse settlers. And, finally, he dismisses Finborough as a derivation from the Old English "fina", meaning woodpecker, as I had claimed, and says its origin is "fin" – a heap, or burial mound, a hypothesis supported by the nearby prehistoric tumulus known locally as "Devil's Hill". "Fina" for woodpecker is found in Old English, so remains a possibility.

And Mark Cocker might like to know that Cockfield is named after an Anglo-Saxon called "Cocca"!

ii. Birds' names:

Puzzling translations

The problem with English-language bird names extends beyond the English-speaking world, as anyone who has birded on the Continent has possibly discovered. Don't try just translating the English name into another European language, or confusion can arise.

For example, in France a Bee-eater doesn't eat bees; it is a "Guêpier" – a wasper. And a Honey-buzzard doesn't eat honey; it too eats wasps, in Dutch, German, Danish, Norwegian, Hungarian and Russian; but in French, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, Icelandic, Finnish, Czech and Greek it eats bees.

With gulls it is even worse, because the translated English name often refers to a completely different species. The Mediterranean Gull in most European languages is the Black-headed Gull: Mouette mélanocéphale; Zwartkopmeeuw; Schwarzkopfmöwe; Gaviota cabacinegra, Svarthuvad mås – as is the scientific

name *Larus melanocephalus*. But the Black-headed Gull in French is the Laughing Gull – Mouette rieuse – as it is in German – Lachmöwe. Moreover a German Heringsmöwe is not a Herring Gull, but a Lesser Black-backed Gull. For Herring Gull think silver: Goéland argenté, Silbermöwe, Zilvermeeuw, Gaviota argentea. "Gull", incidentally, is the only English bird-name that has entered modern English from the old Cornish Gaelic language, displacing the Anglo-Saxon (and common Germanic) "mew"² sometime in the Middle Ages, which survives now only as an element of "Fulmar" – the foul mew, so-called from its charming habit of regurgitating the contents of its stomach at anything that disturbs it on the nest.

¹ Though it does appear recently to be returning to this region, albeit slowly. ² Proof-reader observation: This dialect variation is still preserved in the US species name Mew Gull (*Larus canus*, i.e. what we call the Common Gull).

Philip Murphy

Looking back – April to June 1962 and 1987

Selectd highlights from the 1962 and 1987 Suffolk Bird reports for the period April to June.

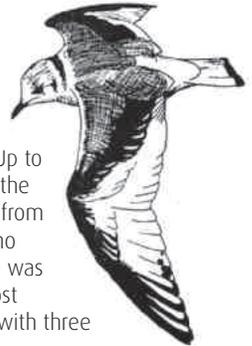
50 years ago

The 1962 breeding season produced some fascinating observations. Minsmere, perhaps not surprisingly, hosted several notable species; particularly noteworthy were the county's only breeding Marsh Harriers with three nests producing up to ten young, one, possibly two, pairs of Garganey, a pair of Stone Curlews which failed to breed because of disturbance by birdwatchers, two pairs of Common Terns which bred on an artificial island on the Scrape (the first recorded instance of such behaviour at Minsmere), and a pair of Montagu's Harriers on site, 10th to 22nd June which raised expectations but failed to breed, and as many as 35 Cuckoos, 30th May.

Havergate specialities

Elsewhere, Havergate remained the sole British breeding site for Avocets with 77 pairs, although

only 25 young fledged; the island also hosted as many as 800 pairs of Sandwich Terns, the highest total since the species first colonised the site in 1951. Up to four Stone Curlews were in the Havergate/Orfordness area from late April to June, but with no proven breeding. Havergate was also Suffolk's only site to host breeding Short-eared Owls with three pairs being located.



It was the fifth consecutive year that Kittiwakes had bred on the South Pier Pavilion at Lowestoft. However, inclement weather in the summer of 1962 and "the inadequacy of the nesting-ledge" resulted in only three juveniles being fledged.

An early Red-backed Shrike was at Minsmere, 1st May – an overall total of 35 pairs were located at four coastal sites, with 12 – 20 pairs "known on Breck".

Coypu problem

The presence of Coypu in our coastal reedbeds was having a detrimental effect on at least two species; we read of Little Grebe that "breeding numbers at Minsmere were down from 12 pairs

to three, probably due to destruction of nests by *Coypu*". Further up the coast at Walberswick, the Marsh Harrier was described as being a recently lost breeding species "presumably as a result of the *coypu* invasion".

How times change!

Also on the breeding scene we read of the Collared Dove that it "*continues to spread and increase along the coast but there is very little evidence that it is spreading inland*". As a result of dry, cold and sunless conditions during May and June, breeding results of most insectivorous species were very poor – "*many observers reported broods of thrushes and blackbirds, tits, robins, wrens, swallows, hedge-sparrows and larks being found dead in the nest apparently from lack of food*".

Laggard winter birds at Minsmere included Whooper Swan, 4th April, Bewick's Swan, 8th April, Rough-legged Buzzard, 22nd April and Hen Harrier, 19th May. What was possibly the same Hooded Crow was noted on 2nd June at Havergate and 10th June at Minsmere where it remained until 4th July "*when bird was shot by keeper*".

Lord Tollemache recorded a Hoopoe at Helmingham "*for a few days in April*", and another was on Orfordness in early June. A Wryneck at Minsmere, 22nd April was, remarkably, the year's only record – just six years before, in 1956, up to ten pairs had bred in Suffolk. A male Red-spotted Bluethroat was seen and heard singing in an Aldeburgh garden, 5th May. The period's only national rarity was a Caspian Tern on 6th June at Minsmere, the second site record following one there in July 1961. As many as five Roseate Terns were at Minsmere, 21st and 24th June.

Spring wader passage was mediocre. The most unexpected sighting was of about 120 Bar-tailed Godwits heading ENE over Risby, Bury St. Edmunds, 29th April on which date 116 (the same birds?) were on Breydon Water. Single Kentish Plovers were on Havergate, 22nd April and 1st June, and up to two at Walberswick, 26th to 28th April. Whimbrel passage peaked on 14th May when 100 were on Havergate, where also up to four Little Stints were present, 14th to 28th

May. The year's only Temminck's Stint was seen at Minsmere, 9th and 10th May. As many as six Wood Sandpipers at Walberswick, 26th June were probably early autumn birds.

Sea-watchers at Minsmere, 7th April, must have been somewhat surprised to observe a Bittern flying north at least a kilometre offshore.

A strong southerly passage of Linnets is a feature of spring in Suffolk; in 1962 it peaked spectacularly on 20th April when it was estimated that at least 12,000, still the county's record day-total, flew south over Minsmere.

But some things don't change

Some aspects of ornithology have not changed in 50 years; single Red-headed Buntings were at Lakenheath, 13th April and Walberswick, 29th May but we read that "*All examples of this species are of course suspect as possible 'escapes'*" – this situation remains unchanged half a century later.

25 years ago

Birding in Suffolk stepped up a gear in 1987 with increased effort, particularly at Landguard and the county's principal seawatching sites, resulting in a wealth of outstanding observations. In his editorial, Steve Piotrowski wrote, "*ornithologists were treated to a spectacular avian display, which almost spanned the year.*"

A long-overdue addition to the Suffolk list occurred during this period when a Red-rumped Swallow was found perched on telephone wires at the Eel's Foot Inn, Eastbridge on 21st April – four more were to be located in late autumn. Additional outstanding sightings in April included Alpine Swift, Minsmere, 18th (at the time, the earliest-ever in Suffolk), Bluethroats on 5th at Minsmere (male White-spotted) and Havergate, Suffolk's earliest-ever Golden Oriole, Badley, 19th and two male Ortolan Buntings, Lowestoft, 30th April to 9th May.

May's principal reports were of a Broad-billed Sandpiper, Walberswick, 29th to 1st June, and a Caspian Tern, 8th to 11th at Minsmere, while in June birders were treated to a third-year Night Heron, Holbrook, 14th to 21st, Gull-billed Tern

north off Benacre, 24th and a Bee-eater over Covehithe Cliffs, 14th.

Warblers were the star attraction at Landguard in late spring with Suffolk's second record of Marsh Warbler, 9th and 10th June, second Subalpine Warbler, 8th to 10th June and second spring record of Barred Warbler, 30th May to 1st June – Suffolk's first spring record of Barred Warbler occurred at Minsmere on 22nd May 1960.

Winter laggards

There were several unexpected sightings of species more typically associated with the winter months. These included Bewick's Swan, Benacre, 2nd to 11th May, "redhead" Smew, Flatford, to 28th May, Purple Sandpiper, Landguard, 5th June, Rough-legged Buzzard, Ashby/Fritton, 22nd to 26th June and, perhaps most remarkably, a Shore Lark at Lowestoft, 4th June – not surprisingly, this remains as Suffolk's sole June record of Shore Lark. In addition, a Fieldfare was trapped at Sizewell, 28th June and single Redwings were at Minsmere, 13th June and "an inland site" (singing male), 14th June.

It was also an excellent breeding season. Fulmars increased to ten pairs at Bawdsey Cliffs, although only five young were reared, but the Bittern population declined further to only ten "boomers". A pair of Pintail almost certainly bred at one site and 35 Marsh Harrier juveniles fledged from 13 nests. Two pairs of Goshawks bred – one nest was robbed by falconers/egg-collectors but three young were reared from the second nest.

It was the best year for Quail since 1964 with reports of 35 calling birds and at least six singing Spotted Crakes were located.

Waders

Breeding waders included four pairs of Oystercatchers in the Breck, the first-ever breeding records in west Suffolk. There were 50 pairs of Stone Curlews in the Breck but only one on the coast, 25 pairs of Little Ringed Plovers at nine sites, an overall total of 40 "roding" Woodcock, "lekking" Ruff at one site and up to five pairs of Black-tailed Godwits on the coast. Up to 20 pairs of Common Snipe were recorded and



Stone Curlew numbers up, yet "only one on the coast"

we read that "if this is anything like a true assessment there is serious cause for concern."

Gulls and terns also had an excellent season with as many as 350 pairs of Little Terns that reared at least 162 young (133 pairs and 15 young in 2010), 200 pairs of Sandwich Terns on Havergate (none in 2010) and a record total, at the time, of 142 juvenile Kittiwakes reared at Lowestoft.

Chats and redstarts are struggling in the 21st century but fared well in 1987. Impressive totals of breeding pairs included 15 Black Redstarts, 43 Common Redstarts, 20 Whinchats (two on coast) and 18 Wheatears (six on coast). The first-ever instance of over-summering by Ring Ouzels in Suffolk involved one at Minsmere from 18th June onwards into the autumn – a second bird joined it on 19th June, but there was no evidence of a nesting attempt.



Warblers' mixed fortunes

January's severe weather was presumably responsible for there being no breeding season records of Cetti's Warbler at any of the species' former breeding sites. However, in the summer months the coastal reedbeds hosted four reeling Savi's Warblers and across the county there were reports of 49 reeling Grasshopper Warblers.

The Lakenheath poplars attracted six singing male Golden Orioles but only two pairs bred successfully at this site; however, a pair bred successfully at a second site rearing three juveniles. A pair of Red-backed Shrikes bred unsuccessfully at an undisclosed site, but many of Suffolk's birders were attracted to a well-publicised pair just across the county boundary from Santon Downham at St.Helen's Well. An unprecedented discovery involved a pair of Serin at a potential breeding site in Mildenhall but there was no known nesting attempt. Willow Tits were present at 20 potential breeding sites of

which at least five were on the coast, whereas in 2010 none was located.

Waders' passage

In amongst all of the above highlights there was also a wader passage, of which the principal features were as many as 71 Ruff, Walberswick, 16th April, two early Dotterels, Benacre, 21st April and a trip of 12 Dotterels inland at Icklingham, 11th May – this latter gathering was the largest in Suffolk since August 1967 when 14 were found on Orfordness.

Two of the most unexpected sightings involved a Manx Shearwater and a Bittern. The shearwater was found "wrecked" on 22nd June inland at Haverhill where it subsequently died. The Bittern was found on the Esbjerg to Harwich ferry on 30th June, about 250 kilometres north-east of Felixstowe; it was an aggressive individual and upon leaving the ship flew off in the general direction of Orfordness.

Paul Gowen

SOG AGM

Minutes of the AGM for the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

16 February 2012 held at Ipswich Holiday Inn

Welcome from the AGM Chairman

The President (Steve Piotrowski) offered a very warm welcome to the 40 members attending the AGM.

Apologies

These were received from Jean Garrod, Ken Garrod and Phil Whittaker.

Minutes of the 2011 AGM

The President explained the 2011 AGM Minutes had not been published in The Harrier during 2011, however, SOG Council had certified their accuracy and a copy was available for members'

inspection if desired. There were no matters arising from the Minutes and those present approved these.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman [Roy Marsh] reported that Council had met four times during 2011; there had been a full programme of indoor and outdoor events with a new joint meeting with Waveney Bird Club arranged for 2012. Four editions of the new-style Harrier had been published; the new Editor [Phil Brown] was thanked for his efforts. The website continued to be maintained and enhanced by Gi Grieco. The Suffolk Bird report had been produced again on time and the Editor [Nick Mason] was congratulated on the high standard of the publication. The Chairman reported that The Harrier had again been used as a communications tool for SORC and that BINS continued to have strong links with SOG. The Treasurer [Bill Stone] was to be congratulated on the recovery of monies from the Gift Aid Scheme; this had involved much hard work but was most important to the Group's finances. Jean Garrod was thanked for her continued efforts in organising the outdoor events and the field trip

leaders were also thanked. Thanks were also given to Jean & Richard Attenborrow for their smooth handling of the enveloping and posting of The Harrier each quarter. SOG had recently requested funds from SNS for display equipment and a laptop & projector. Thanks were given to Bill Baston for the kind loan of his projector at the indoor meetings.

Roy finally thanked all Council Members for enduring some late meeting finishes as the Council had tackled a significant number of tasks during his first year in office.

Officers Reports

Projects Officer [Mick Wright] thanked all those members who had participated in the surveys during 2011. All 1100 tetrads had been covered for the BTO Atlas, which was a wonderful achievement for the county. A plea was made for new volunteers for the estuary counts as many of the current surveyors had completed more than 20 years each and were “dying on their feet”. The Nightingale survey in 2012 will cover 300 tetrads [the largest of all counties] and would involve nighttimes visits, again volunteers were sought.

Presentation of Accounts

The Treasurer [Bill Stone] presented the SOG Accounts for 2011 that had been audited as usual by Jean Attenborrow. A copy of the Accounts was distributed to all present and showed a balance of £1449 at the year’s-end; this was similar to the previous year. The significant figures on the expenditure included monies spent on [a] printing The Harrier, [b] printing the members’ questionnaire, [c] printing of Gift Aid forms and [d] printing new car stickers. To balance out the additional expenditure, in addition to the increase in subscription rates for 2011 a sum of £1343 had been claimed in respect of Gift Aid monies for 2011 and previous years for which SOG were entitled to. The Treasurer had worked closely with SNS to ensure that SOG received their fair share of monies jointly claimed, 2012 would see an amended system of claiming Gift Aid which would amount to approximately £500 for the year.

The members present unanimously adopted the accounts.

The members present unanimously agreed with the Treasurer’s recommendation that no increase in the subscription rates be made in 2013.

The members present unanimously agreed to Jean Attenborrow auditing the 2012 Accounts.

The President gave special thanks to Bill for his unstinting efforts in recovering the Gift Aid monies that are so important to an organisation such as SOG. It was also noted that the Treasurer [Bill Stone] would not be seeking re-election in 2013 and a new Treasurer would need to be recruited as soon as possible.

Election of Council Officers and Members for 2012

Steve explained that, in accordance with the SOG Constitution, Adam Gretton and Roger Walsh were required to stand down from Council having completed their three-year terms of office. Adam and Roger were thanked for their contributions to Council. Two nominations [Scott Mayson and Craig Fulcher] had been received to fill the two vacancies. With no other nominations received members present were asked to elect “en bloc” the following Council Members for 2012.

Council Officers

Honorary President	Steve Piotrowski
Chairman	Roy Marsh
Vice Chairman	Steve Abbott
Secretary	Phil Whittaker
Treasurer/ Membership Secretary	Bill Stone
Magazine Editor	Phil Brown
Projects Officer	Mick Wright
Website Coordinator	Gi Grieco
Bird Report Editor	Nick Mason

Council Members

Paul Gowen [to 2013], Jon Warnes [to 2013], Jean Garrod [to 2014], Robin Harvey [to 2014], Scott Mayson [to 2015], Craig Fulcher [to 2015]

The above Members were unanimously elected to the posts indicated.

Steve informed the meeting that it was Council’s wish that Adam Gretton be co-opted to SOG Council in order that he may continue in his role as Indoor Events Organiser, this would be enacted at the next meeting of Council.

There being no “Other Business” the AGM was

formally closed at 20.00 hrs.

The meeting concluded with a presentation and awards by members of the BINS team, presentation of the Denis Ockelton Trophy, a short presentation of the BTO Atlas project by Mick Wright, a brief summary of the SOG Members' Survey by Phil Brown and a two-part quiz conducted by Steve Abbott – the winners being Adam Gretton [feathers] and James Davidson [sounds].

Denis Ockelton Trophy

Steve Piotrowski presented the Denis Ockelton Trophy (presented every year in memory of SOG's former Chairman Denis Ockelton) for outstanding achievements in Suffolk Ornithology to Mick Wright this year in recognition of his contribution to SOG and conservation in general over the past 40 years.

February 2012

Editor: Steve Piotrowski's speech delivered at SOG's February AGM follows:

Steve Piotrowski

Mick Wright

A long history of endeavour

“I've been honoured to present the Denis Ockelton award for many magnificent achievements made by SOG members for a number of years now, but it has always struck me that some of those who plod along, performing essential tasks for the Group, are sometimes overlooked. However, this is certainly not the case this year.

I have known this year's nominee, SOG's Project Officer Mick Wright, for over 40 years and, to my mind, no one in Suffolk has sacrificed so much of their life to further wildlife interests. Mick has been seen at the forefront of the founding of a number of institutions and has faithfully served as an officer for both local and national organisations for longer than I have known him.

Founding of Landguard Observatory

I first met Mick at Landguard in the late 1970s where he shared the position of voluntary warden for SWT. The military had just vacated the site and SOG members had a dream of transforming those rundown wartime buildings into a bird observatory.



In 1982, we met one dark November evening in the searchlight building, which was later used as a seawatching hide at Landguard Point, with Mick, Derek Moore, Bill Last and Richard Woolnough. We drew up proposals under the light of a Tilley Lamp and it was here that Landguard Bird Observatory was founded.

Defending the environment

Mick learnt his ringing skills at the observatory and served a term as the Observatory's Chairman. The Bird Observatory hadn't been going long before the threat of the habitat destruction of Fagbury mudflats, by the expansion of the Port of Felixstowe, loomed over us. Mick joined the campaign, which we titled Operation Redshank, or Orwell Under Threat (OUT), and we spent countless nights catching, and marking waders to add valuable data to help our cause. There were numerous meetings at Mick's house and we tenaciously fought the Parliamentary Bill in the House of Commons and The Lords. However, we were all to learn just how callous politics can be when Margaret

Thatcher's Government duly passed the Bill. As compensation conservationists were to receive Trimley Marshes Nature Reserve.

BTO Rep for over 20 years

During the mid-1980s, we decided that SOG should focus our own projects on those chosen by the BTO. To help with this aim, Mick was asked if he would take on the role of Projects Officer for SOG and BTO Rep for Suffolk. Mick agreed and initially managed the BTO Rep role in partnership with his close friend Ray Waters. Sadly, Ray passed away at a relatively young age in the early 1990s and Mick has carried on as the sole BTO Rep for Suffolk ever since.

On the Orwell

Also in the 1980s, an opportunity arose for Mick to leave his engineering job at Ransomes (which incidentally he hated) and to take up a new career in conservation, working for SWT as the Site Manager for the new nature reserve at Trimley Marshes. There couldn't have been a more fitting appointment than Mick for this job, but he was forced to make some tremendous sacrifices. The salary being offered was pitiful and I remember discussing this with him. However, Mick had just paid up his mortgage on his home and he was determined to make the sacrifices that would enable him to do the job, but still provide for his family. I can only admire such dedication.

Mick is a quiet man and very humble, often not wishing to be in the limelight. He has lived in

Ipswich all his life and married his school sweetheart Lynn when they were both teenagers. They have shared a home together ever since and Lynn has provided Mick with tremendous support throughout over 40 years of married life.

Mick and I together have been involved with many campaigns in the interest of preservation of wildlife on the Orwell Estuary. SWT's reserve at Levington Lagoon was once a rubbish tip and there are a number of developers that have been taken to task for carrying out operations illegally on Mick's beloved Estuary. Opposition to the proposed link road through Pipers Vale is one of Mick's recent victories. Mick spends countless hours ringing waders on the Orwell, he has for many years organised WeBS counts, low-tide counts, monitoring of bait-digging, litter picks – you name it, Mick has done it.

Worthy winner

To my mind, the biggest coordinated conservation survey ever taken place in the world has been the BTO Atlas Project and Mick has managed this for the BTO and for all Suffolk ornithologists. I dread to think of the number of letters, emails, meetings and telephone calls that Mick has had to make to ensure this project was a success – and what a success it has been.

It is for all of these reasons that I am proud to hand over the Denis Ockelton Trophy to Mick Wright."

News

Peregrines confirmed (?) breeding in West Suffolk

Chris Gregory writes:

I now feel this is an appropriate moment for this information to be made available to the wider birding fraternity.

A small team were involved in this project, all SOG members – namely myself, Simon Evans and Steve Piotrowski. Simon, being an ex-employee of 'the major company' concerned, led the negotiations



and was instrumental in getting a nest-box erected. The same group built this box that produce boxes for the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project.

My involvement has mostly been the monitoring of the birds since the prospect of nesting first arose in 2007. Prior to this we believe the site was purely used as a winter roost by Peregrines, probably involving single birds and not necessarily on a regular basis. Simon, who worked at the site between 1997 and 2007, certainly wasn't aware of any regular sightings until this last year.

Colin Jakes, the West Area Recorder, has been made aware from the outset of these developments on the site, along with a handful of local birders. They all understand that, due to the company's tight security, they cannot go and openly view the birds from within the site. Past incidents with the site's security officers have meant we have been cautious about going public. Now that we have, can we ask fellow ornithologists to respect this situation and not trespass as it could jeopardise the negotiations for the placement of a further nest box that are still ongoing.

Editor: Chris has written an excellent and full overview of this project. Because of the space constraints placed on this issue, we were unable to carry it. Instead the full story has been up-loaded onto the SOG website www.sogonline.org.uk and you can read it there.

Lakenheath Cranes breeding – latest

The two pairs of Cranes returned to Lakenheath earlier in the year and both pairs have bred, producing one chick each. One pair did have two chicks, but in the last few weeks only a single chick has been seen with these adults. While the other pair has not been seen for several weeks, their behaviour (or rather lack of significant alternative behaviour!) suggests that they still have a youngster with them! The team at Lakenheath hope both pairs' chicks will imminently fledge.

RSPB's Discovery Centre opens



2012 has been an important year for the RSPB Minsmere reserve. Not only was its revamped and enlarged visitor centre re-opened in March but, in early May shortly after school holiday break, an important additional Minsmere facility opened to its first group of schoolchildren – the all new Discovery Centre.

These are the major two components of a two million pound Minsmere investment programme – the Discover Nature Project. And these twin assets will transform this site to everyone's benefit.

Both buildings boast impressive environmental credentials. In addition, as well as two large state-of-the-art classrooms (white boards, a/v facilities etc.), the Discovery Centre also provides an extensive Wild Zone in which children can play, plus a Wild Wood Adventure area. These play activities are designed to link directly to the wildlife on the reserve and will also appeal to families with young children who have full access to them.

The value of this new facility is it allows the reserve to dedicate more effort to teaching all youngsters, from key stage one, up to further education, as well as more mature audiences too, without prejudicing the site's bird watching experience. The visit potential for families has also been considerably improved. So these twin developments offer an all round win-win to everyone visiting Minsmere.

SOG attends community event – Chantry Park Bio-Blitz



SOG's Bio-Blitz show stand, before being 'destroyed' by the wind

Saturday 16th June proved to be bright and VERY breezy. By 10:00 six different local nature organisations, including SOG, had descended on the Park with their stands and displays not only to meet the public, but also to conduct a survey of the site's wildlife (in case you wondered what a Bio-Blitz was!).

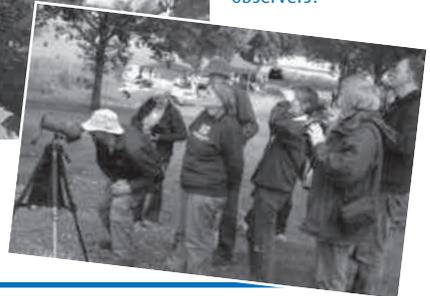
The SOG team had opened the proceedings with a Dawn Chorus walk at 04:30, while the bat group closed the day with a survey in the late evening. In between mammals, flowers, birds (of course), butterflies, moths and reptiles were also listed. In total approaching 700 species were logged over the 20 hours or so.

Other highlights during the day included a visit by the Lady Mayoress, a 'fly-past' by the Red Arrows (actually they were on their way to London and the Jubilee festivities) and an extremely obliging Little Owl which, once located by SOG's Gi Grieco, chose to hang around for most of the day and entertain the public and wildlife experts alike.

Although the numbers of people passing through was less than we would have liked, the networking with other wildlife groups, the Ipswich rangers and the Suffolk Biodiversity team was very useful. Also the SOG show stand with its new boards looked highly professional too – that is until the wind blew it over!



Whooo's observing the observers?



Announcements

Craig Fulcher

September sponsored Bird Race

On September 15th the Group is launching its inaugural autumn sponsored bird watch.

As Phil Brown has mentioned in his editorial, finances are very tight for the Group at this time. To try and raise some additional funds and

ensure SOG continues to thrive, we would like as many of you as possible to participate in this fun event.

Your participation can take whatever form you wish, whether that be a couple of hours watching your garden, a morning on your local patch, or all day across the county! Either on your own or with a few friends – all we ask is that you take part and raise as much money as possible.

If you are unable to participate, or do not know anyone to sponsor, then you can still donate if you wish, just send a cheque to our Treasurer

made out to SOG, the address can be found in the front of the Harrier.

The full details of the race can be found on our website. For those of us who will be out and about competing on the day though, the sponsorship forms are downloadable from the SOG website, so let's get out there and see some birds and have some fun, be as green as possible (there's a 'Green' category) and, most importantly, raise a few pennies too! Your help is greatly appreciated!

Phil Whittaker

The Power of Twitter

We have been running a Twitter site for some time and it is proving to be a powerful way of communicating news and providing a social network for Suffolk birdwatchers.

Now we have 279 followers and we are following 416 tweeters. Just glancing for a minute at the twitter stream as I write this, there are interesting and informative tweets from: New Forest Goshawks, BTO, Rutland Ospreys and Subbuteo Books. There is also plenty of 'wit and witticisms' and much serious comment from a wide range of local and national birders.

Twitter as a medium is proving very useful in many campaigns of local and national interest to the Suffolk bird watching community and SOG is increasingly using it to lobby local and national government and nation bodies such as Defra. The recent successful campaign mounted through Twitter, to which we contributed, against the taxpayer funded research project into controlling Buzzards, by that very organisation, is an excellent example of the power of Twitter!

Join us at @suffolkbirds1. It's all free!

Photos:

Malcolm Ausden (page 4), Bill Baston (front cover & page 24); Jon Evans (page 4 & 5), Gi Grieco (page 27 & back cover); Crown copyright, RSPB licence 100021787 (page 3); Mel Kemp (pages 4 & 5), Adam Rowlands (page 5 & 26), David Tomlinson (pages 8 & 9).

Illustrations:

Su Gough – pages 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21 & 25.

Mick Wright

Estuary counts volunteers needed

You'll have noted in the AGM Minutes that there was a plea for new volunteers for the estuary counts, as many of the current surveyors had completed more than 20 years each and were "dying on their feet". If you'd like to help please contact Mick by emailing mickwright@btinternet.com or phoning 01473 721846.

Roy Marsh

Treasurer post

As was noted in the Editorial, as well as in the AGM's minutes, Bill Stone who has operated as a superb Treasurer completes his three-year term at the end of 2012. So the Group has a vacancy for this Council position from the beginning of our next financial year in January 2013.

Bill tells me that overall it's not that demanding a role. Typically it involves him in a couple of hours each week, except at the beginning of the year when the membership list needs to be re-compiled and the year's accounts need to be signed off.

The skills needed include being an orderly administrator, some mathematical/ arithmetical competence and, ideally, some confidence using Excel. Naturally, if needed, Bill will be happy to show you the ropes to begin with.

So why not submit an application? In the first instance you could email info@sogonline.org.uk, heading your message 'Treasurer post' or write to Roy Marsh, SOG Chairman, 56 Tuddenham Avenue, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2HF.

Council for 2012:

Officers

Honorary President: **Steve Piotrowski**
Chairman: **Roy Marsh**
Vice-Chairman: **Steve Abbott**
Secretary: **Phil Whittaker**
Treasurer/Membership Secretary: **Bill Stone**
Project Officer: **Mick Wright**
Magazine Editor: **Phil Brown**
Website Co-ordinator: **Gi Grieco**
Bird Report Editor: **Nick Mason**
Outdoor Events Organiser: **Jean Garrod**
Indoor Events Organiser: **Adam Gretton** [co-opted]

Members

Paul Gowen [to 2013]
Jon Warnes [to 2013]
Jean Garrod [to 2014]
Robin Harvey [to 2014]
Craig Fulcher [to 2015]
Scott Mayson [to 2015]

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean & Ken Garrod
Mike Jeanes
Mike Hall
Robin Hopper



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 colin@jakes.myzen.co.uk



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
- Quarterly magazine – **The Harrier**
- Annual review – **Suffolk Birds report**

Trips and talks

- Extensive range (20+) of field trips every year – 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

- Provides a county-wide field force of bird surveyors (100+)
- Organises and promotes bird surveys
- Inspires and undertakes conservation projects
- Numerous achievements:
 - Contributed to many species breeding successes (Peregrines, Barn Owls etc.)
 - Undertakes monitoring
 - Involvement on community and education projects
 - Organises and hosts dawn chorus walks
 - Assisted with fund-raising for bird hides
 - On-going participation in key bird surveys for the BTO, such as BBS, the Bird Atlas and the recent Nightingale survey, plus studies for environmental waste companies etc.



For birds & for birders

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

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