

Autumn 2015 No.182



# The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

£3.25



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# The Harrier

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## Editorial

Welcome to Harrier 182. This is my third Harrier, but first editorial.

I'd like to start by saying a huge thank you to the authors and photographers who have contributed; I do hope you enjoy their work.

Kicking off this edition is a delightful contribution sent in by Liz and Bill Nickson about Wrens observed feeding House Sparrow chicks. Has anyone else seen similar behaviour?

Research showing how improving field margins for mammals can help Lapwings avoid predation is detailed on page 4 and precedes the SOG talk by the RSPB in Ipswich on 26th November about wet grassland breeding waders. Although the Twite is in serious decline in the county (pg 10), there is good news of Little Tern breeding success at Benacre – due in no small part to the considerable effort of RSPB and Natural England volunteers; and there is a celebration of 20 years of the RSPB at Lakenheath. In addition to the BINS summer review, there are two reports from SOG field trips that I hope will tempt more of you to come along on outdoor events. Alison Ballantyne discusses Ted Hughes's opinion of raptors in his poem 'Hawk Roosting' and Richard Rafe is this edition's SOG exile, in Scotland.

SOG Council are currently working hard developing our charity. The Garrod Award to recognise Suffolk's young birders is announced on page 2. The Suffolk Bird Report is approaching completion, although there is still

space for artwork if you've yet to pass yours on. Plans for the SOS Swifts, SCBOP & CARP campaigns are under way for next year; the Rookery Survey results are being analysed and the Programme for 2016 is being put together now. If you would like to suggest speakers or topics for the indoor events or outdoor trip destinations, please let us know. There is a vacancy on the Council if you would like to join in and make a difference. We have five evening meetings a year, which are often preceded by a spot of birding.

At the time of writing, I myself am looking forward to taking my daughters on the overnight Orfordness trip and also to the talk by Colin Shawyer on Barn Owls at The Cut in Halesworth on 19th October. The SOG stand will be there with secondhand books and campaign car stickers for sale. There are a few tickets left at the box office, so please book now if you wish to attend. Dick Newell from 'Action for Swifts' is also giving a talk in Ipswich on 5th November, which ties in very well with the SOS Swifts campaign: it would be great to see you there too.

The Winter Harrier will be out before Christmas and will have an interesting Barn Owl update as well as the latest from the Dove Step campaign for Operation Turtle Dove.

Finally, I would encourage you all to send your observations or articles for consideration to me by the end of November – please remember that The Harrier is both for, and by, Suffolk birders.



## The Garrod Award – a celebration of Jean and Ken Garrod

We are delighted to announce the launch of the Garrod Award. This new honour, which is to be awarded annually, has been set up in memory of Ken Garrod and in recognition of both his past, and his wife Jean's ongoing, huge contribution to SOG and Suffolk birding. Their involvement with SOG has spanned over 30 years: Jean was Outdoor Events Organiser for many years and she and Ken were made Honorary Vice-Presidents in 2006. This award was created to celebrate in particular the warm welcome they both gave to all – but especially younger – newcomers to SOG. In recognition of this support for young people, the award is to be made annually to a young Suffolk-based bird

and wildlife enthusiast for their contribution to these areas. We are currently seeking nominations for the first winner of the Garrod Award.

A form for nominations is on the SOG website. The winner will receive a certificate, a year's membership of SOG and a SOG T-shirt, as well as the opportunity to have an article published in *The Harrier* about their wildlife experiences.

The current closing date for nominations is 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016 and the Garrod Award will be presented at the SOG AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> February.



## Confusion or Cooperation?

The picture below shows our attempt to provide a low-cost social housing scheme for our garden birds. Made entirely from recycled materials, the intention was that the square entrances might appeal to House Sparrows, the larger round holes to Great Tits and the smaller ones to Blue Tits. Needless to say, the birds knew better than to follow our grand design.

We first noticed a pair of House Sparrows feeding their brood in the large round hole as shown below. Both male and female Sparrows were feeding, and it was while watching them that we saw a Wren using another small round hole to the far right in the same large 'apartment' box, at least 80cm away from the Sparrows' entrance hole.

As the Sparrow fledglings grew bigger, we started to see their beaks appearing at the entrance hole, waiting to be fed. Jenny (and, we think, 'Christopher', too) were definitely bringing insect food in for the young Sparrows, between feeding visits from the adult Sparrows. Even further beyond the call of duty, on one occasion We saw Jenny go right into the Sparrows' nest and emerge carrying a faecal sac. The Wrens always also visited their own hole each time they visited the Sparrows' hole, so it all seemed very confusing. We also noticed that during the

day the Wrens appeared to do most of the feeding, while in the evening the Sparrows took over.

We never saw any sign of aggression or territorial behaviour between the adult Sparrows and Wrens; however, once the Sparrows fledged, we never saw another visit from the Wrens.

All this was happening while Springwatch was being televised and we tried to interest them in our observations, but guessed they simply didn't have time.

The only explanation that we can think of for the behaviour we observed is some form of co-parenting, and we'd be really interested to hear if anyone has observed anything similar. We can see how the Sparrows benefited, but what on earth was in it for the Wrens?

Meanwhile, our burgeoning population of House Sparrows is doing its best to eat us out of house and home.



Photo: Liz and Bill Nickson

## A helping hand for Lapwings

The space-invader cries of displaying Lapwings are welcome signs of spring across much of Britain's countryside. Losses of this iconic species, especially in lowland England, have been well chronicled. Conservation organisations, the RSPB in particular, are successfully supporting breeding numbers on nature reserves, but how can their interventions be replicated on working farms without flooding fields and installing mains-powered electric fences?

### RSPB & UEA Research

Dr Jen Smart of the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science and Professor Jenny Gill of the University of East Anglia have been studying breeding waders on RSPB Reserves in the Norfolk Broads for over ten years, but more recently they have extended their wader research into commercially managed grasslands across Norfolk and Suffolk, using funding from Defra. At the February 'Foxyology' conference, Dr Smart explained how the RSPB is trying to manage the conflict between the conservation of ground-nesting birds and foxes. The RSPB does not rule out shooting as a protection measure but prefers to adopt non-lethal solutions to the predation problem. One answer may be to provide foxes with 'convenience food' in the form of mice and voles. If it's easier to find mice and voles than wader nests and chicks then perhaps that's what foxes will choose.

### Foxes

Predation is a natural process but rates can be severely skewed by the way that the countryside is managed, especially when the balance of predator and prey is disturbed. Many predators are opportunists, with species such as foxes, crows, gulls and raptors switching their activities to take advantage of local food availability.

Seasonal abundance of food resources can affect both survival and productivity. An inexperienced young fox must have a better chance of surviving the winter if he is presented with a generous supply of released Pheasants, whilst a vixen trying to raise a litter of cubs will find easy pickings in a gull colony. In the same way, a nature reserve that is full of nesting waders will often attract foxes during the breeding season.

The RSPB has become very good at increasing populations of wading birds breeding on their lowland nature reserves but staff are frequently frustrated by the low numbers of young birds that survive through to fledging. Adding water to the landscape, in the form of pools and ditches, attracts high densities of breeding waders, as these wet features provide insect-rich places to which adults can take their chicks. The RSPB/UEA research team has found that Lapwings are far more successful when they nest at high densities, presumably because they work together to look out for and drive off potential predators; Redshanks similarly benefit from the activities of the more numerous and defensive Lapwings. Practical actions, such as clearing woodland areas that abut wetland or removing single trees in which crows sit to spot the next meal, have been shown to reduce avian predation in the daytime, to such an extent in fact, that three-quarters of nest-losses are now taking place at night. Using cameras, the team has shown that 70% of the culprits filmed taking eggs are foxes, with badgers coming a distant second, at 12%. Wader chicks leave the nest soon after hatching, and RSPB research has shown that chick predation is then largely from foxes at night and raptors in the daytime, with stoats, weasels and opportunistic birds such as Grey

Hérons, taking smaller numbers. Overall, by far the biggest threat to productivity is the fox.

One fox (and badger) deterrent method available on nature reserves is to use well-maintained mains-powered electric fences to surround fields in which waders nest. Trials by the RSPB have shown that Lapwing fledging success is significantly improved in fenced areas, increasing from just over 0.2 chicks per pair to 0.8 chicks. The target level for a sustainable population is 0.6 young per pair, so the lower figure is well below par and 0.8 should be providing a surplus of birds that can go on to nest elsewhere. Fences are not perfect, however: they do not exclude predators such as stoats and weasels, and the increased success of nests means high densities of chicks can be an irresistible resource for opportunistic and adaptable aerial predators trying to feed their own young. Fencing is also only really effective on a relatively small scale, so does not provide the solution to what is a landscape-scale problem. RSPB/UEA research has shown that there is a lot of variability in predation rates, even within a site, which provides opportunities to try to understand the complex interactions between foxes, mustelids (stoats and weasels), small mammals and waders.

### Grass as a defence

Much of the patchiness of productivity within a site is linked to the amount of grass in fields and along field edges. Grazing is a key management tool in wet grasslands, with cattle creating the short and varied sward structure that is attractive to a range of breeding waders. By using ink tracking tunnels, within which mammals leave their footprints, and looking for field-signs of activity, Dr Becky Laidlaw has been able to show that this short grass is of little use to mice and voles. She discovered that they prefer verge areas, outside the fields, where the grass is at least 20 cm tall and where there is ground-level vegetation

cover of more than 80%. Using data on wader nest success collected over 10 years, she was also able to show that Lapwings nesting in fields close to this small mammal habitat had lower rates of predation. Adding in tall grass strips and patches within a farmland landscape could potentially increase the populations of small mammals, thereby distracting foxes and mustelids, and reducing predation pressure. Avian predators of wader chicks might appreciate this intervention too!

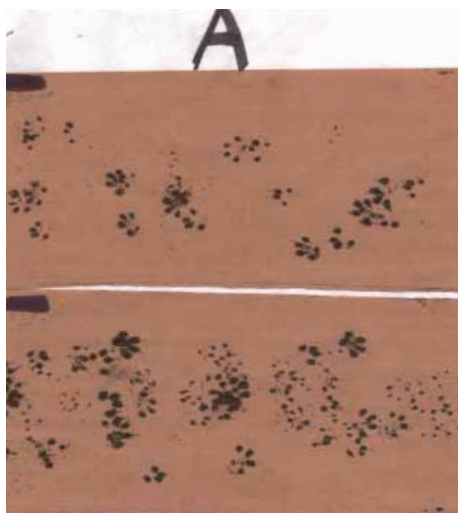


Photo: Becky Laidlaw

These inky footprints belong to a weasel.

### The bigger picture

Although lots of Lapwings breed in nature reserves, it would be sad to lose the species from even more of the wider countryside. In the most recent phase of their research, and using funding provided by Defra, Becky, Jen and Jenny have been looking to see if the constraints operating within farmed lowland wet grassland are similar to those on managed nature reserves. If they are, then it ought to be possible to modify agri-environment options, which are an integral part of farm subsidies, to help Lapwings, and potentially also Redshanks.

Over the last two years, the research team has worked with landowners of commercial grasslands across East Anglia, who, between them, are responsible for a large percentage of remaining breeding wader populations. Building on the work on reserves, the aim was to understand whether habitat suitability and predation processes differ between reserve and wider countryside waders. To accomplish this, they assessed the extent to which grassland management options within agri-environment schemes support small mammal populations, as well as measuring field wetness, Lapwing densities and nest predation rates. They also assessed the importance of different nest predators for waders nesting in the wider countryside and within nature reserves.

### Mammals

Becky and her team found similar distributions of small mammals in the wider countryside as had already been found on nature reserves. Within both, there were higher densities of small mammals within grassland habitats outside fields, while presence within fields did not vary significantly among fields managed under different grassland agri-environment options. Encouragingly, densities of Lapwing nesting in fields managed in accordance with the breeding wader option were significantly higher than in fields with no interventions. Lapwings nesting in areas with many other Lapwings and nests that were closer to patches of small mammal habitat were less likely to be predated, but the rate of Lapwing nest predation did not differ between the wider countryside and reserves. It should be possible, therefore, to create Lapwing hot-spots outside nature reserves, thereby expanding the reproductive potential of East Anglia and beyond. Unsurprisingly, given the previous findings about the causes of nest-losses on nature reserves, wider-countryside sites where foxes were present experienced both higher overall nest predation and nocturnal nest predation.

The main findings of this study are that wader nest predation rates and spatial patterns of nest predation on lowland wet grasslands are remarkably similar inside and outside reserves. This should help to directly inform the design and development of lowland wet grassland landscapes, making them capable of attracting and supporting sustainable populations of breeding waders within the constraints of commercial grasslands. Jen Smart is optimistic: "If we can provide wet fields that look attractive to Lapwings in spring and patches of tall vegetation that hold high numbers of small mammals, it ought to be possible to improve nesting success and productivity". She and her colleagues are now looking at how a range of different agri-environment options might be used to create such landscapes. The next phase of the project will be to try out the most promising options, in order to see the scale at which these patches of tall vegetation for small mammals need to be provided if they are to deliver the desired result - more breeding waders.

By creating shallow ditches, which add water and insects to grassland habitats, Lapwing productivity is increased.



Photo: Mike Page



## RSPB Lakenheath Fen: Twenty years in the making

It's amazing to think that RSPB Lakenheath Fen celebrates its twentieth birthday this year. On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1995, the first sod was dug, beginning the conversion of a square mile of mostly arable farmland into reedbed. The story is full of superlatives and big numbers. To give just a single instance: between 1997 and 2003, a third of a million reeds were planted on the reserve, by hand, mostly by volunteers.

As special anniversary years go, 2015 has been a pretty good one so far. The two pairs of Cranes that call the reserve home have had their best breeding season yet with three chicks fledging in the same year – a first for us. One pair fledged one youngster and the second fledged two chicks – a relatively unusual occurrence for Cranes.

Our resident “big” Bitterns have had a good breeding season. We had five “boomers” during the spring and there were at least four nests. Also, as many of you know, we were privileged to play host to Suffolk's first Little Bittern (*pictured right*) since 1979. It was first seen on 16<sup>th</sup> May and it continued to bark away happily until well into June. Although it wasn't particularly showy – I only saw it once despite spending over 12 hours listening to it! – it certainly brought lots of visitors in and its presence is a good sign for the future.

On the subject of rare birds, a Collared Pratincole also paid us a visit between 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> June. Along with the Little Bittern, this was another new bird for the Lakenheath Fen bird list. Again, it unfortunately wasn't very visible, but it was a welcome addition to the reserve list

nonetheless! Circumstances dictated that I was the only Lakenheath Fen staff member to see it, although I am sure there will be other records of this striking bird here in the future.

Sadly, the Golden Oriole that was present in West Wood on 7<sup>th</sup> May provided the only record of this species on the reserve this year. Although it is an improvement on last year, when there were no confirmed records of this species on the reserve, it doesn't really bode well. The species hasn't bred on the reserve since 2009, so its future as a nesting bird in East Anglia is not looking particularly encouraging. However, it is interesting that some climate change predictions say this species may in time expand its range northwards, so maybe we will see more Golden Orioles again at some point.

All in all, we are having a very successful twentieth birthday year. It's incredible what has been achieved here in the last twenty years so here's to the next twenty years and beyond! We hope to see you all on the reserve soon!

Photo: Ian Goodall



## Little Tern Success at Benacre



Photo: RSPB Images

Along the coasts of East Anglia, the Little Tern has had a mixed breeding season this year. Many historic colonies, such as those at Winterton, abandoned early in the season, as did the colony at Kessingland, despite having a peak of 66 nests in June. Preliminary data from the east coast show that adequate food supply might not have been available early in the season; our initial chick provisioning surveys showed that the chicks at Kessingland were getting just a fraction of the food that they did last year. With low food availability, both adults have to leave the nest to feed themselves, leaving the eggs and chicks prone to depredation and open to the elements; eggs that are not being incubated take longer to hatch, if they hatch at all.

Here at Benacre National Nature Reserve the terns have fared much better. Over the last few months, many visitors here have been thrilled at the sight of 400 Little Terns fishing, feeding and raising young in

a productive colony: a rare sight in Suffolk these days. Our peak nest count stood at 116 by mid-July, while our peak fledgling count in late July stood at 121, with many more chicks still running around and being fed. We have estimated our overall fledgling numbers to be around 180, meaning that Benacre was the largest Little Tern colony in the UK this year.

Benacre National Nature Reserve is part of a larger Specially Protected Area (SPA) that extends from Benacre to Easton Bavents. It is this designation as an SPA under the EU Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds that has allowed funding from the five-year Little Tern Recovery Project to go to our work here [as described at our April indoor meeting – Ed]. What this translates to in Suffolk is three full-time Little Tern wardens, monitoring and protecting the colonies wherever the birds decide to nest. With this funding, we have improved the electric fences that keep out dogs and other mammalian predators, installed interpretation boards at many different sites, and increased our outreach efforts with the public, at schools and with community groups.

The electric fences were erected early at this site by Natural England, the RSPB Little Tern team and volunteers. Both organisations were involved in dawn-to-dusk wardening here, and we even spent a few nights out guarding the colony for good measure. This site has been very productive, with the average clutch count at 1.85: high for East Anglia this season. Our camera traps have picked up the presence of badger, fox, rat, deer and otter very near the colony, but this year we did not detect any incidents of predation.

We had a higher number of recorded fledglings in Suffolk this year than we have had in the past 16 years, and the efforts of the partner organisations and their volunteers have helped achieve this. But the success was not just limited to the Little Terns. Avocets had a great year with over 17 successful nests, there were also three Oystercatcher nests, and a number of successful Ringed Plover nests.

As the Broad behind the colony dried up exposing the mud banks, many other tern species could be seen from the hide at the southern end. Artic, Common, Sandwich and even Black and Roseate Terns have been seen roosting and fishing alongside their smaller cousins this July. The number of wader species that could be seen on the mud flats in late summer is too long to mention here - you will just have to come and see for yourself next year.

We end the season on a high, with a great outcome at Benacre for Little Terns, and a rewarding season for all involved in the

project. However, this success must be seen in the broader context of Little Tern recovery throughout the region, which has not been so good this year. We are continually looking to improve our efforts on the ground, working with the public to increase awareness and support for improved protection for Suffolk's most charismatic shorebird. We are always looking for help from the public to warden and monitor Little Terns in Suffolk. If you are interested in volunteering as a Little Tern warden then please contact RSPB or Natural England, details below.



#### **RSPB**

Contact Daniel Hercock on 01493 700645 or by email using Daniel.Hercock@rspb.org.uk



#### **Natural England**

Contact Adam Burrows on 01502 676171 or by email using Adam.Burrows@naturalengland.org.uk

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Gi Grieco

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## **Rookery Survey update**

Thanks to all those who have submitted records; there is still a little time to send any remaining records in. Several recorders have also been able to provide useful information on the changing circumstances of existing rookeries, as well as pointing out where new sites have been established.

Below is a summary of this year's figures so far:

- Over 180 rookery sites
- Over 6,800 rookery nests
- Over 30 recorders

The British Trust for Ornithology supplied data from both the Bird Atlas survey of

2007-11 and its 1975 National Survey of Rookeries and our thanks go to Peter Lack for his help with this. This year's update is inspired by and will update the Rookery Survey, 40 years on.

Additionally, a useful comparison with these historic data will enable us to see if any areas of Suffolk have been missed this year. Any gaps will need to be re-checked during next April's nest survey.

The aim is to have an update on the status of the Rook and its rookeries in the county, with a report to be produced for inclusion in Suffolk Birds 2015.

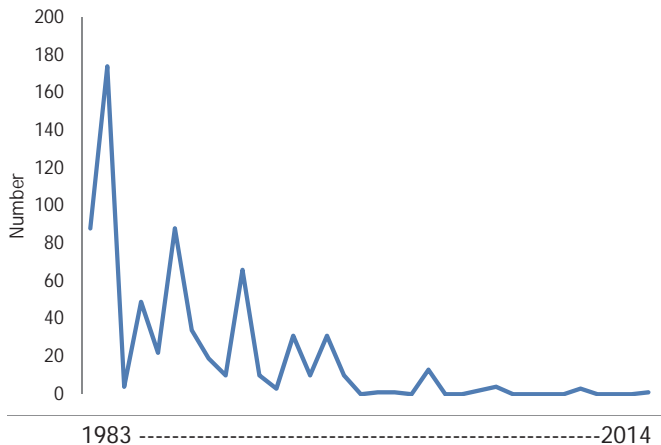
# Twite *Linaria flavirostris* observations at Landguard – or lack of!



Photo: Rob Spiers

Twite, Landguard,  
October 2010

A cataclysmic decline has occurred in the number of Twite recorded at Landguard Bird Observatory during its existence from 1983 onwards (see right).



Numbers were probably even higher prior to the formation of the observatory as evidenced by records in Suffolk Bird Reports, such as 530 passing through the site from October 10<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> 1982 & c.100 on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1981. Older records for the site are not easy to trace, partly due to the lack of meaningful statements about the species with, for example, the Suffolk Bird Report entry for Twite in 1979 stating: "There were reported several flocks of 100 from the usual coastal localities during the winter months". Interestingly in the early 1980s flocks were often noted moving through later in the morning and at lunchtime when other finch passage had subsided, although it is possible that many of the early morning Twite were overlooked amongst the large Linnets movements (M. Marsh *pers. comm.*)

Although the rot was setting in by the early 1990s, numbers have continued to decline to the extent that only 21 birds have been noted at Landguard this century with a total of 13 flying south from September 27<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup> 2001, two south 26<sup>th</sup> October 2004, four south November 1<sup>st</sup> 2005, one (presumed the same) October 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> & flying north 15<sup>th</sup> 2010 with finally one on September 24<sup>th</sup> 2014. Twite is now considered to be a rare visitor to the site.

All records from 1983 onwards have been in autumn from September 24<sup>th</sup> to November 11<sup>th</sup> except for records of one in spring March 11<sup>th</sup> 1984, a very early autumn record on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1987 and one during severe winter weather conditions on February 10<sup>th</sup> 1991.

No Twite have ever been trapped for ringing at Landguard. Ringing evidence from elsewhere in Suffolk, published in Suffolk Bird Reports, shows a strong link with the declining breeding populations in the Pennines, although a Scottish bird

has also been noted. The decline in the Pennines population, which accounts for a significant proportion of birds noted in Suffolk, is probably the main reason why sightings at Landguard have all but disappeared. Wintering numbers in southern England have also plummeted, over roughly the same time period as the decline at Landguard (Balmer et al 2013). The species' conservation status is RED due to the breeding population decline, although in the rest of Europe it is not a species of conservation concern ([www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)).

Twite is one of those species that is frequently mis-identified by tyros and listers who do not appreciate that Linnets will occupy shingle beaches during the autumn and winter months. Although beginners can be forgiven for their errors, problems arise when they send in records to one of the many bird recording services now available online and the records then cannot be deleted and have even ended up in the Suffolk Bird Report (e.g. 20 at Landguard 21<sup>st</sup> September 2013, published in 2014, that were actually Linnets). The Twite is not just a rare bird at Landguard but, as the breeding populations that make up a significant proportion of Suffolk's wintering birds continue to decline, it will gradually become rarer across the entire county and restricted to fewer favoured traditional locations such as the Dunwich/Walberswick area.

Ref: Balmer, D.E., Gillings, S., Caffery, B.J., Swann, R.L., Dowie, I.S. & Fuller, R.J. 2013 *Bird Atlas 2007-11 : The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. BTO Books, Thetford.

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## BINS Summer

### June 2015

The male **Little Bittern** first seen on 16<sup>th</sup> May continued to sing from the reedbed by Joist Fen until 11<sup>th</sup> then again on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, though it was very seldom seen in flight. Three **Little Stint** continued to show on the triangular pool at Tinkers Marsh, Walberswick 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>. A single **Little Stint** was present on the scrape at Hollesley Marsh 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> then three birds there on 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>. A **Grey-headed Wagtail** was noted on the footpath by Loompit Lake, Trimley 5<sup>th</sup>. Four **Spoonbill** were present on RSPB North Warren early morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> and nearby two **Great White Egret** were on the reserve the same day.



A **Collared Pratincole** (5<sup>th</sup> county record) was seen briefly over the western end of RSPB Lakenheath Fen from Joist Fen watch-point during the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> and remained until the 11<sup>th</sup> June.

A **Red-rumped Swallow** was seen over Landguard Bird Observatory for 15 minutes on the 7<sup>th</sup>. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, two **Bee-eaters** flew north over Dingle Marshes and a **Cattle Egret** was seen north offshore from Undercliff, Felixstowe. A **Black Stork** was seen north over paddocks at Tuddenham St. Mary early morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>. A **Hoopoe** was reported singing in Ipswich on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>.



Photo: John Richardson

The 15<sup>th</sup> saw two **Bee-eaters** briefly around Red Lodge Farm, Kirton, whilst a single **Bee-eater** along the north wall at Minsmere was a bit more obliging, spending up to an hour on site. A possible **Cattle Egret** was seen to fly south over Covehithe Broad 16<sup>th</sup>. Ten **Bee-eaters** flew north over Minsmere South Levels 19<sup>th</sup> and continued on their journey north through the dunes and a single **Bee-eater** was seen over Dunwich Heath 21<sup>st</sup>.

A dark-rumped **Whimbrel** (possibly Hudsonian) was seen south off Shingle Street early morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the same day a male **Red-necked Phalarope** was present at SWT Micklemere which remained until the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Photo: Jon Winman

A smart male **Red-backed Shrike** was present along the north wall at Minsmere 25<sup>th</sup>, juvenile **Common Crane** was seen on Peto's Marsh, Carlton Marshes and six **Common Crane** south over Southwold the same day.

Five **Bee-eaters** were seen over Woodbridge 26<sup>th</sup> and what was surely the same flock was seen over Aldeburgh the following day 27<sup>th</sup> with a single **Bee-eater** seen 27<sup>th</sup> over Alderton village. Two **Common Crane** over Lowestoft on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

A **Pacific Golden Plover** was present in the north east corner of Breydon Water viewable from the south wall 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>. An immature **Spoonbill** was on the reserve at Trimley 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> which was joined by a second bird on the 30<sup>th</sup>. A summer plumage **Cattle Egret** was seen briefly on the scrape at SWT Trimley Marshes on the 28<sup>th</sup> before making the short trip over the river and taking up brief residence on Shotley Marshes. A **Honey Buzzard** was seen over Halesworth and four **Wood Sandpipers** were on Carlton Marshes on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

## July 2015

The two immature **Spoonbill** remained at Trimley Marshes 2<sup>nd</sup>. A singing **Marsh Warbler** was present at Carlton Marshes, though very elusive, on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. A **Bee-eater** was heard over Halesworth on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Late morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, ten **Bee-eaters** were found in Leiston, where, due to the inclement weather, the birds were grounded for almost five hours allowing many to catch up with this difficult but beautiful species. It goes without question that this is the same flock that was first seen on June 19<sup>th</sup>! The **Bee-eaters** were then discovered roosting in black poplars along Moat Road, Theberton on the 7<sup>th</sup> and delighted hundreds of birders until they were last seen on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>.

A **Honey Buzzard** was seen over Island Mere, Minsmere 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> then over nearby Theberton Wood 9<sup>th</sup> and finally Westleton on the 11<sup>th</sup>. **Spotted Redshank** numbers peaked at 25 at Minsmere and **Little Gulls** at 51. A record count of **Mediterranean Gull** was made, with a staggering 463 birds logged at Walberswick!

A **Black Redstart** was trapped at LBO on the 8<sup>th</sup> and an **Osprey** was seen to fly over Lound Lakes the same day. What is presumed to be the escaped **Black Kite** from Wrentham was seen north over Leiston 9<sup>th</sup>, then further sightings were reported from Wivesham 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, Pippis Ford, Needham Market 26<sup>th</sup> then finally Bawdsey 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>.

Aside from the Leiston/Theberton spectacle, further **Bee-eater** sightings were reported from Bucklesham and Alderton 10<sup>th</sup>, Wickham Market 14<sup>th</sup> and finally two birds at Field Farm, Covehithe 23<sup>rd</sup>. An unconfirmed report of a **Glossy Ibis** was reported from Southwold Town Marshes on July 11<sup>th</sup>.

Astonishing news broke late on Sunday afternoon, 12<sup>th</sup>, that an adult **BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS** was on the pool behind South Hide Minsmere!! Almost on discovery this majestic creature took flight and headed back out over the North Sea, much to the disappointment of anyone not present in the hide at the time for what could have been a once in a lifetime sighting.

A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at Bawdsey on the 13<sup>th</sup>, a juvenile **Black-necked Grebe** was present on Livermere Lake 17<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> and a small passage of **Black Tern** took place offshore on 25<sup>th</sup>. A first summer **Purple Heron** was a surprise discovery on the reed fringe waterway of Kingsfleet, Deben estuary on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The bird remained into August though was often very elusive and would go missing for several days. A **Velvet Scoter** north off Southwold 26<sup>th</sup> was unseasonal. A smart **Pomarine Skua** whizzed around Minsmere Scrape 27<sup>th</sup>, whilst nearby up to 70 **Little Gull** were feeding off the rigs at Sizewell Beach.

Finally, six **Spoonbill** were present on the south marsh at RSPB North Warren 29<sup>th</sup>, **Raven** over Hazlewood Wood Marshes 31<sup>st</sup> and a **Red-necked Phalarope** was seen briefly on the Orwell estuary from Levington the same day.

## August 2015

The first summer **Purple Heron** remained at Kingsfleet until 17<sup>th</sup> and was possibly seen over Shingle Street 5<sup>th</sup>. **Montagu's Harriers** were reported from both Breydon Water and Kingsfleet 2<sup>nd</sup>. An **Osprey** was seen over Pipp's Ford 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>. The juvenile **Black-necked Grebe** continued to show on Livermere Lake until 4<sup>th</sup>. A **Serin** was noted at Landguard on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>. More **Bee-eaters** were seen over Minsmere: a singleton north over the car park on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and then four noted north on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

Two **Spoonbill** were present at the east end of Breydon Water 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> and further **Spoonbill** sightings were noted at Hazlewood Marshes where seven birds were present 12<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> and finally thirteen birds seen on Havergate Island 15<sup>th</sup>. The peak count of **Little Gull** involved 91 birds on the scrape at Minsmere 11<sup>th</sup>. A **Raven** was seen over Westleton Heath on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Wood Warbler** sightings were good in the south of the county: one was seen in the



Aquatic Warbler

Photo: David Fairhurst

grounds of Bawdsey Hall 8<sup>th</sup>; a single bird was trapped at LBO on the 11<sup>th</sup> and then three birds were present also at Landguard 14<sup>th</sup>. The 9<sup>th</sup> produced a 'spotty' **Spotted Sandpiper** that was present on the Alde estuary and also an **Aquatic Warbler** that was netted on Orfordness.

A **Roseate Tern** was seen over the observatory at Landguard early morning 11<sup>th</sup> and the same day a juvenile **Purple Heron** was picked up exhausted on a fishing boat 16 miles offshore from Southwold then later that day released at SWT Carlton Marshes where it stayed until August 17<sup>th</sup>.



Purple Heron

Photo: John Richardson

An **Osprey** was seen for several days mid-month on the Blyth Estuary. A remarkable count of c.1,300 **Mediterranean Gull** was made at Breydon Water on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> and it goes without saying that this is a new highest count for the county!

It was noted mid-month that there had been a small influx of common migrants, with **Pied Flycatcher**, **Whinchat** & **Redstart** all being the first of the autumn. A **White Stork** was briefly reported from Levington Creek on the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> before flying off. Mid-month, **Wood Sandpipers** were noted in good numbers, with several sites recording seven or more birds on numerous days and up to 12 birds present at RSPB Hollesley Marshes on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

A small influx of **Pectoral Sandpipers** occurred with birds being seen at Minsmere between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, Hazlewood Marshes 19<sup>th</sup> and finally Havergate Island 21<sup>st</sup>. Minsmere scrape held up to four **Little Stint** 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> and an adult **Temminck's Stint**

on 26<sup>th</sup>. A **Great White Egret** was seen on Hockwold Wash, RSPB Lakenheath late in the month.

A small influx of **Wryneck** occurred late August with birds being seen at the following sites: Kessingland Sluice 22<sup>nd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>; Easton Bavents 25<sup>th</sup>; Corton old sewage works 25-27<sup>th</sup> – two birds there 28<sup>th</sup>; Gunton Warren 28<sup>th</sup>; Minsmere 29-30<sup>th</sup>; Thorpeness 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>; and finally Town Marsh, Southwold 31<sup>st</sup>.

Sea-watching highlights included a **Long-tailed Skua** south off Thorpeness on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, five **Balearic Shearwater** south off Southwold 26<sup>th</sup> and a single **Balearic Shearwater** north off Southwold on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

A juvenile **Red-necked Phalarope** was noted on RSPB Hollesley Marshes 23<sup>rd</sup>, the same day seeing eight unseasonal **Pink-footed Geese** on the reservoir at SWT Trimley Marshes. A juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** was seen at Easton Bavents 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>. Two **Icterine Warblers** were noted, first at East Lane, Bawdsey 25<sup>th</sup> then at Thorpeness old caravan park 27-28<sup>th</sup>. Twenty-two **Whinchat** were noted between the Bailey bridge at Walberswick and Tinkers Marsh on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

Finally, a **Black Stork** was seen circling over LBO during the early afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> and presumably the same bird was photographed at Clacton, Essex later that afternoon.

Photo: John Richardson

Icterine Warbler



John Richardson 2015



# Field Trip Reports

Gi Grieco and Val Lockwood

## RSPB Minsmere for Migrant Waders

19 July 2015

Leaders: Gi Grieco & Dave Pearsons

With the Stanta trip having been moved to May, July was suddenly empty, so a trip to RSPB Minsmere was arranged to coincide with the first returning passage waders. Although SOG is primarily a birding organisation, other wildlife seen on trips is enjoyed and appreciated, and an insect report is included in this write-up, reflecting this.

### Birds

A good number of members gathered at the Minsmere car park for the early morning start. We got caught in a brief shower as we headed to East Hide for our first bit of birding and some shelter. Across the scrape a number of returning waders were present; highlights included a Little Stint, Dunlin, Green and Common Sandpipers, five Ruff, a Little Ringed Plover and several Spotted Redshank. There were also good numbers of Common Tern, including a number of juveniles. Two Red Kites along with a Buzzard and a Marsh Harrier could be seen in the distance and a Kingfisher flashed past the front of the hide.

We headed off to look at the levels south of the sluice and although it was quiet on the patches of water, we did have excellent views of the two Red Kites that proved popular; these were initially seen over the Island Mere reedbeds before flying close overhead.



Photo: Barry Woodhouse

On South Scrape there were several Avocet, more Common Tern – amongst which a Black Tern landed – as well as 29 Little Gulls and further waders including a Greenshank and three Knot. On West Scrape, with careful scanning, our patience was rewarded when a Wood Sandpiper was found. We then headed back to the visitor centre, where some of the members said goodbye for the day. The remainder stopped for lunch and an afternoon where insect observations predominated.



Hornet Mimic Hoverfly



Photo: Gi Grieco

## Insects

As we did our birding circuit of RSPB Minsmere, the temperature started slowly to rise as it got closer to midday, and in the dunes around East Hide we saw Essex and Small Skippers on thistle. The keen-eyed among us picked out the black on the underside of the tips of the antennae on the Essex Skippers, differentiating these from the Small Skippers with orange undersides.

White Admiral



Photo: Gi Grieco

In the quiet periods during the seawatch, several Graylings were seen perching in the coastal dunes – a first of the season for most in the group. It was fascinating, as always, watching them turn their wings to the sunlight. A couple of Small Copper butterflies delighted those who were looking down and around them rather than through their scopes. These butterflies' vivid wing colouration and excellent condition suggested recent emergence, second generation.

Lunch was put on hold on our way back as we stopped to observe butterflies on the buddleias near to the visitor centre. Our attention was drawn to a Painted Lady, again a seasonal first for most of the group, alongside a Red Admiral, a Large White and a Peacock butterfly. Another highlight was one of the UK's largest hoverflies, the impressive Hornet Mimic Hoverfly. After lunch by our cars in the Minsmere car park, the general consensus was to look for birds and butterflies on the woodland trail and as the temperature

had dropped we decided to make haste. We stopped off at Canopy Hide where we were fortunate enough to see at least three Purple Hairstreaks at fairly close range on the oak trees, courtesy of this excellent tree-top vantage point. We pressed on and added Speckled Wood and Ringlet to our list. Then another of our target species – a White Admiral – was spotted briefly by most of the group as it glided past at speed and did a disappearing act into the canopy. There was disappointment voiced from those who had missed the fleeting visitation, but thankfully this was short-lived as there were at least four or five more sightings of White Admiral butterflies further along the woodland ride. Other insects seen were *Rutpela maculata*, a yellow and black longhorn beetle and Twin-lobed Deerfly; the latter can give a painful bite, as one of the leaders found out!

By the time we returned to the car park, the group's appetite had been whetted for going on to Dunwich Forest to look for White-

letter Hairstreak and more White Admiral butterflies and the chance to increase the number of species seen that day.

On arrival at Dunwich, we could see that the habitat was ideal for butterflies: a wide open ride with long grass, lots of wild flowers and a profusion of bramble (in flower) – and to cap it all, the sun was shining. Within a few minutes a White Admiral was spotted, the first of about 10, then the first White-letter Hairstreak was identified in the canopy above our heads and further along another was seen at even closer quarters, nectaring on bramble. A very pleasant afternoon was spent walking along the rides observing the many species of butterflies and those with cameras were rewarded with some close shots of White Admiral, White-letter Hairstreak and all the species previously mentioned, as well as Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns, and Commas.

As the saying goes “variety is the spice of life”; this SOG outdoor meeting certainly packed a punch from start to finish!



From left to right: Gi Grieco, Brian Buffery, Eddie Bathgate, Val Lockwood, Ivan Lockwood, Keith Freeman, Dave Pearsons, Chris Keeling, Chrissie Freeman.

Photo: Gi Grieco

## Havergate Island

8 August 2015

**Leader: John Grant**

It was a small group that gathered with John at Orford Quay and welcomed new member Ivan Leeks from Stowupland, who had never been on the island before. As usual David Fairhurst was our captain and he took us across on the 'October Storm'. Thirty-four Avocets and a Whimbrel were seen on the trip along the water.

On arrival, we all made our way to the site of the old visitor centre which had been removed and replaced by a new hide erected a few metres further along. This new hide was designed and constructed by volunteer Peter Merchant at RSPB Boyton in sections, which were then ferried to the island by boat and erected on site.

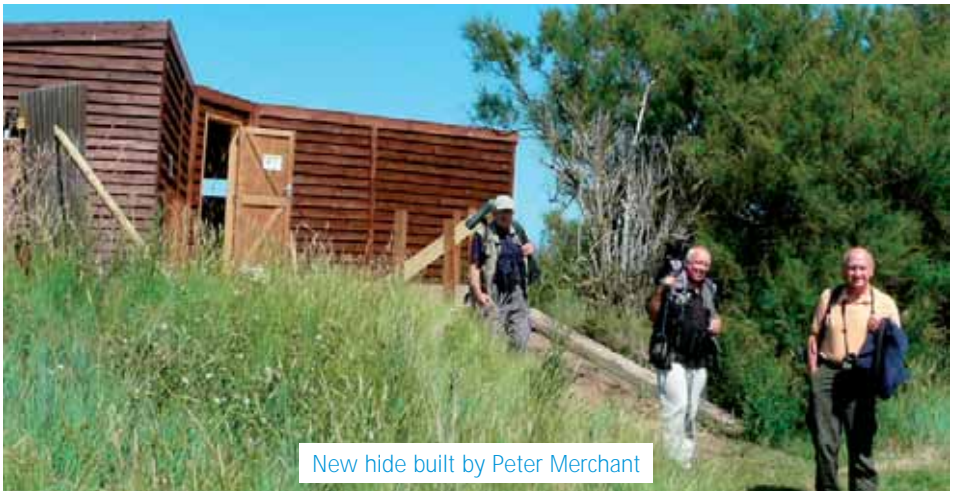
This was our first stop and John soon found a Spotted Redshank. However, before we could all get on to it, a Peregrine was spotted in hunting mode. This meant that the few waders that were about were soon in flight. After we had lost sight of the Peregrine, we

started our full species count for the warden. There were good numbers of gulls, summer plumaged Grey and Golden Plovers, plus a few Redshank, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits. Also present were two Common Terns, two Kestrels and a female Marsh Harrier.

At the next hide, there were 34 Little Egrets, several distant Buzzards and nine Oystercatchers. On the retreat however, we only found two gulls.

We returned to the first hide for our lunch. This time there were not many waders about, only some distant Buzzards. At the next hide, we were told by David to expect more species and indeed we found good numbers of Redshank and a few Dunlin, but could not find anything of greater interest. We then had a look for hares which are frequently to be seen there, but to no avail.

We went back to the jetty for our return journey. On the way we encountered the Aldeburgh lifeboat. It was towing in a motor cruiser that appeared to have suffered a small fire. Back at the jetty fire engines were waiting for them. We docked at the yacht pontoon where we thanked John and David for what had been a very good trip.



New hide built by Peter Merchant

## What is it about raptors?

### **Hawk Roosting**

*by Ted Hughes*

*I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.  
Inaction, no falsifying dream  
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:  
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.*

*The convenience of the high trees!  
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray  
Are of advantage to me;  
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.*

*My feet are locked upon the rough bark.  
It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold Creation in my foot*

*Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -  
I kill where I please because it is all mine.  
There is no sophistry in my body:  
My manners are tearing off heads -*

*The allotment of death.  
For the one path of my flight is direct  
Through the bones of the living.  
No arguments assert my right:*

*The sun is behind me.  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My eye has permitted no change.  
I am going to keep things like this.*

But what makes them so endlessly fascinating? Is it their looks? Possibly. Those eyes! Those talons! That beak? (Eek!) Maybe. Or maybe it's the total mastery of their environment: the aerial skills, the control, the 'allotment of death'.

That last phrase I took from Ted Hughes's poem 'Hawk Roosting'. It's such a famous poem with so many different erudite commentaries I hesitated initially to explore it. But it's a poem about a bird and I wanted to look at it from the point of view of someone who is interested in birds. Does this poem give me a different perspective on hawks?

Consider the title. It's not 'A Hawk Roosting' or 'The Hawk Roosting'. So what? I think the absence of any article gives us Hughes's view of these birds. Quiz time: what significant word rarely uses 'a' or 'the' in front of it? Try 'God'. From the outset, Hughes is implying that this bird is a supreme being: god-like, omnipotent and omniscient. That sums up a hawk: all-powerful and all-seeing.

So how does Hughes convey his admiration (or is it worship?) of this bird? In the first stanza, Hughes begins to explore the bird's mastery of its environment in a number of ways. First, the poem is written from the point of view of the hawk: 'I sit' does not refer to Hughes lurking in a bush... We are being invited to see the world from this creature's point of view. The next word that intrigues me here is 'inaction'. Look where the word is placed in the stanza. For me, that word works two ways. It refers back to line one where the bird is totally still, high in the top branches with eyes closed - clearly

### What is it about raptors?

In all the times I've been out with SOG groups, there has never been a moment when someone has said "Oh, it's only a Marsh Harrier". Most members seem to have birds that they have seen so many times they barely merit a mention; for instance they say: "did you get the (yawn) Chaffinch/Magpie/Woodpig?". But not so with hawks and falcons. These are a never-ending source of excitement and awe.



this bird does not expect to be attacked, it is the top predator. But the word also refers to: 'no falsifying dream,

Between my hooked head and hooked feet:'

And here Hughes is reminding us that a raptor's single-minded purpose is to hunt and kill: there is nothing else. Hughes suggests this bird doesn't waste time dreaming when it's asleep – that would be a form of fantasy. Instead it rehearses 'perfect kills'. This is nothing but a factual acceptance of what it does.

Stanza two develops ideas about the bird's total mastery of its environment. According to the hawk, everything around it is the way it is because it suits the bird, including 'the earth's face upward for my inspection'. Some readers of this poem see this as an arrogance in the bird, but I don't agree. For me, this is Hughes introducing another theme in this poem – that of Darwinian natural selection and how it has worked for this bird. He neatly turns the argument: 'It took the whole of creation to produce my foot' to 'Now I hold Creation in my foot' to remind the reader how long it took to create a hawk and how perfect its adaptations are. This is objective acceptance of the status quo as far as the hawk is concerned.

Stanzas four and five continue this theme – that of a creature unquestionably in control of its environment: 'I kill where I please because it is all mine'. Anthropomorphic, but not sentimentally so. Hughes shows us that, as far as the hawk is concerned, there is no false sentiment or sophistry here. This is survival as Tennyson

indicated: 'nature red in tooth and claw'. The hawk's capacity to kill 'is direct through the bones of the living'. The question of what is right or wrong does not exist for this creature.

The final stanza reiterates Hughes's argument of the mastery of this bird. Line three: 'My eye has permitted no change' can be read in two ways. The use of 'my eye' has connotations of keeping an eye on everything around him on one level; but for me it also refers to the perfection of the evolution of the eye as an organ – the development of which has often been used as an argument for the existence of God. And thus we return neatly to the idea of the bird as god-like.

So did Hughes's observations about a hawk roosting develop my knowledge and understanding about hawks? Hmm. Yes and no. It didn't really increase my knowledge about hawks, but it did make me think about them and their place in nature – that this is a creature that appears to have reached perfection and has no need to evolve further. As the hawk god says: 'I am going to keep things like this'.

Photo: Brian Buffery





## A SOG Exile in Scotland

In October 2011 my wife Brenda and I moved from Suffolk to Ullapool. I had taken early retirement that summer from the public sector at the time of the austerity cuts; our three children are grown up and independent and since none of them was necessarily settled we decided to move 'up north'.

From a birding perspective I was keen to try something new. In Suffolk where I had spent the last 20 years there are lots of good birds and there are lots of active birders – almost anywhere you go there will be other birders and the chances are someone will have been there before you, so most of the time you know what you are going to see before you get there.

So how have I found birding the north-west Highlands? I think a simple summary statement would be that "it's hard work!" Let me explain.

There are fewer birds up here, both in terms of numbers and species. We are further north, and although the landscape is spectacular, vast areas of upland habitat are 'inhospitable' and support few species of birds. There is extremely limited broadleaved woodland, or even conifer woodland, and farmland (arable or improved grassland) along the north-west coast so whole suites of associated birds are largely absent. Similarly there are few nutrient-rich wetlands but instead a multitude of nutrient-poor upland lochs, which, whilst they support the core populations of both species of diver are generally poor in birds. The west coast has an extensive system of sea lochs but these have only small areas of mud at their head, mainly because the rivers and streams tend to be shorter and carry lower sediment loads. Consequently, they support few estuarine-type birds;

indeed half a dozen Redshank or Dunlin is a good count for here! I remain surprised that the coast does not have big flocks of sea ducks; again, a couple of Common Scoter or a dozen Eider is notable, whilst in contrast Great Northern Diver are numerous in winter in most of the sea lochs and bays. So generally there are fewer birds up here than in Suffolk, or indeed than in the east around the Moray Firth basin.

There are also few recognised birding sites and no real 'hot-spots'. There are few bird reserves and very limited infrastructure – hides and visitor facilities are virtually non-existent. This probably reflects both the landscape – there are genuinely no real 'hot-spots' for migrants and the 'special' upland species are widely scattered – and the distance from major centres of population.

The other reason that makes birding challenging (but exciting) is that there is such a vast area, much of which is difficult to access, and very few active birders. I am lucky in having moved to Ullapool that there is a like-minded birder in the village with whom to share time in the field and exchange sightings; although I was looking to escape the crowds I do enjoy the camaraderie of birding friends. However, apart from this one person, I rarely see anyone else out with binoculars, except for the occasional visiting birding group in the summer. So, in this huge area, maybe good birds do turn up and are never seen by anyone; possibly many rarities go undiscovered. This scarcity of birders has some benefits. We can visit an area and there's a very good chance that no other birder has been there recently so if anything is around we'll find it (unfortunately most of the time there isn't anything good!) and we don't get 'gripped off' – there are very few

other people out birding so its unlikely that anyone else is going to see good birds on 'our' patch.

Part of my rationale for moving to this area was that it was so under-watched and surely I would be able to find my own good birds. The Birds of Scotland, when discussing rarities, says that "on the mainland there is a definite east-west split with 70% of the non-passerines and 84% of the passerines being observed in recording areas that border the east coast. In fact of the 331 Scottish records of rare passerines, no more than nine have been seen in the western half of mainland Scotland." This scarcity of rare birds is obvious to anyone who subscribes to the Rare Bird Alert (or similar) service - on most days at any time of year the distribution map of scarce and rare species shows records concentrated in the south with a huge 'black hole' in north-west Scotland. Is this a true reflection of the distribution of the birds, or just a reflection of birdwatcher activity? At the moment I tend to favour the former but hope for the latter!

Rarities in the north of Scotland generally seem to attract far fewer admirers, this presumably being a combination of the fewer local observers and the distance from the major centres of population which means that few birders will make the journey up here for a scarce bird unless it's an absolute 'mega'. Half a dozen people is a good twitch crowd up here - often you are on your own - and absence of news for a

day or two doesn't mean the bird has gone, simply no-one has been to look. Compare this with experiences in birding hotspots like East Anglia when all you have to do is turn up and ask someone where the bird is and it will be pointed out. Here, you need persistence and greater ID skills because you have to put in the effort and find birds yourself, even previously reported birds. I have to confess it means I have paid far more attention to the (few) rarities I've seen up here.

As can be ascertained from the above personal comments about birding, I am definitely a 'lister' - the possibility of adding a new bird to a list is a major incentive for me to go out birding. Since moving up here I have kept a Loch Broom parish list and more recently decided to build my Scottish list. My Loch Broom parish list now stands at about 140, not too bad considering all my whinging about lack of birds! I have quickly developed different expectations of my local birding up here - I was extremely pleased with a Smew, some Bean Geese, a couple of Velvet Scoter and a Kingfisher, good local birds but not exactly rarities. I do try and 'escape' occasionally and twitch something further afield, and I've just spent an autumn week on Shetland (a first visit to the islands) so my Scottish list is - slowly - growing.

*Most SOG members will remember former SOG Chairman, Richard Rafe and will wish him every success in turning up a Highland mega - perhaps another Needletail, Richard?*

Photo: Richard Rafe



## WeBS Counters

The Stour and Orwell estuaries are among the UK's top 20 sites for wintering wildfowl and waders, despite port expansion and increased recreational disturbance both on and off-shore. The data provided by volunteer WeBS counters are vitally important to conservation and government bodies when considering the likely effects of proposed developments, plans and projects or when informing compensation strategies. Increasingly important as an early warning, WeBS count data may also raise an alarm, such as when changes in the distribution and numbers of birds wintering in our estuaries indicate that climate change may be encouraging some species to winter further east, forsaking our estuaries for increasingly less hostile winter quarters in continental Europe.

If you can spare two or three hours one Sunday a month during autumn and winter, you could make a real contribution to our understanding of wintering birds on the Stour and Orwell and hopefully ensure that these continue to be among the UK's top 20 sites for wintering birds. Please contact the British Trust for Ornithology who can put you in touch with your local WeBS count organiser. Contact Heidi Mellan WeBS Counter Network Organiser by email at [heidi.mellan@bto.org](mailto:heidi.mellan@bto.org) or telephone the WeBS Office 01842 750050. More information on WeBS counts and how to get involved can be found by logging onto the BTO website at [www.bto.org/webs](http://www.bto.org/webs).

Edward Jackson

## Low Tide counts on the Stour and Orwell estuaries

Suffolk Wildlife Trust is once again arranging Low Tide counts of waterbirds on the Stour and Orwell on one morning each month from November 2015 to February 2016. This project has been in place since 1999 and continues an important relationship with Harwich Haven Authority to monitor wader and wildfowl numbers and also their feeding areas. The counts take place on weekday mornings (in part to reduce the likelihood of disturbance along the estuary shores) and last around three hours.

SWT wishes to recruit additional counters for this winter season. To express your interest, please call or email SWT as soon as possible on 01473 890089 or [info@suffolkwildlifetrust.org](mailto:info@suffolkwildlifetrust.org) and give your name, address, email address and phone number. The counts organiser will contact you to discuss things further.



Photo: Ed Keeble

## Council for 2015

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Indoor Events Coordinator: **Adam Gretton**

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**Vacant Post** (2016)  
**Adam Gretton** (to 2017)  
**Nick Mason** (2017)  
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### Bird Recorders

#### North-east Area Recorder:

**Andrew Green**, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP  
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#### South-east Area Recorder:

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#### West Area Recorder:

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### Treasurer/Membership Secretary

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



# Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



## Who we are

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

## What we do

### Networking

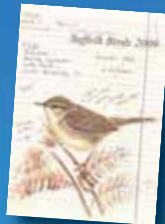
- A voice for Suffolk birdwatchers
- With established links to many naturalist and conservation organisations

### Media

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

### Trips and talks

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



### Protecting birds

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



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

*For birds & for birders*

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

[www.sogonline.org.uk](http://www.sogonline.org.uk)

