

# The Harrier

March 2011

Bulletin No 164



**Suffolk Ornithologists' Group**

# CONTENTS

Editorial .....	1	
Apus Capers .....	Gi Grieco .....	2
Tailpiece .....	Jeff Martin .....	4
Recent Field Meetings:		
<i>Dower House &amp; Sizewell</i> .....	Gi Grieco .....	8
<i>Boyton Marsh</i> .....	Steve Freyett .....	9
<i>Levington &amp; Trimley</i> .....	Justin Zantboer .....	24
SORC .....	Justin Zantboer .....	10
'Celebrating birds' colour supplement		
Indoor meetings 2011 .....	Adam Gretton .....	13
AGM .....	Phil Brown/Steve Piotrowski .....	13
Cavenham Heath .....	Richard Rafe .....	14
Announcements:		
<i>Holywells Park Bird Fest</i> .....	Gi Grieco .....	15
<i>Bird Atlas 2011</i> .....	Mick Wright .....	15
Recent Reports .....	Justin Zantboer .....	17
Looking Back .....	Philip Murphy .....	19
Bird club news .....	David Carter & Roy Marsh .....	22
Wordsearch results .....	Richard Rafe .....	23

Cover photography –

Photographer: Bill Baston

The juvenile Hobby was photographed in farmland to east of Ipswich at 08.33 hrs on 24th September 2009; Canon EOS 50D camera body, 500 mm f4 IS lens + 1.4 converter, 1/500 sec exposure, aperture f10

Photographers page 23: Bill Baston and Ian Goodall

Rear cover blue tit photograph: Bill Baston

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## Editorial

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

**W**elcome to Harrier 164 and the bulletin's new editor.

As a relative newcomer to the Group I'm still feeling my way and taking on the editorship has proved to be both an interesting and demanding task. But to start well (I hope), I'd like to offer my thanks to Richard Rafe, the retiring Editor, for his sterling efforts over the last ten years in securing such a high standard for this bulletin. I only hope I can maintain them!

So what are the plans for the Harrier? That's one of the reasons why we're asking you a heap of questions in the form of a members' survey (you should have received a copy of the questionnaire with this issue of the magazine – if you haven't, either download it from the website, or contact Bill Stone for a copy).

We hope this questionnaire shows that the Council is thinking about every aspect of the Society and how we might improve it. But we can only do that if we have your views too. Which is why we urge you to answer the questions as soon as you can and then return the completed forms to us. In due course, once we've analysed the data and arrived at some tentative conclusions, we will publish the results and debate any proposed changes – whether it be to the Harrier, the website or the Society.

As you may have already appreciated, this new editor has already begun to make some changes in how the magazine looks and feels. The intention is to improve its attractiveness and, more practically, its readability. But, depending on what else you the members have to say, further changes may be undertaken and/or features introduced.

In this issue we have introduced a showcase for the Society's many photographers. This month we celebrate Suffolk birds, while in the June issue it will be digi-scoping and, perhaps, in the autumn, Suffolk's landscapes. There are also two new features – news from the reserves and Suffolk bird club news – that we hope to grow. Also, a second insert concerning a Gift Aid Form and request, plus notice of the new Council and officers can be found on the inside back cover.

## Apus capers

Gi Grieco

### *An amazing weekend*

**I**t will be around a year ago that the weekend of March 27th and 28th went down in history

amongst a lot of local birders as an amazing couple of days in Suffolk with an influx of continental birds – initially with two species of swift and culminating in a new species for the county, the lesser kestrel.

### *Persistence pays off*

Following the SOG trip to the Brecks on the 27th, Chris Courtney and I crossed the county to Kessingland, where a pallid swift had been seen earlier that day. Arriving around 4pm we met some other birders who reported no further sightings. We knew that the likelihood of connecting was slight, and so took delight instead in a firecrest along the track and grey and white wagtails at the sewage works. We kept scanning the skies hoping the pallid would return when I received a BINS text to say an alpine swift was north over Kessingland beach at 4.30pm! We could not believe we were so close and had missed a second rare swift species, both of which would have been new to Suffolk for us. Now on the look out for two types of swift, just before 5pm, we picked out an alpine swift over the caravan park, glad that persistence had paid off. We put news of our sighting out, and soon after, news came out on BINS reporting our Kessingland bird and one at the CEFAS building up the coast in Lowestoft. We carried on scanning the skies when yet another text came through half an hour later that two alpine swifts were at Lowestoft – meaning the one we had just found had joined the earlier one.

As we were so close we decided to go and see them and before long had amazing views as they flew up and down just feet above our heads. As time went on the swifts seemed about to roost for the night and took flights up to the wall of the CEFAS building. The elation of finding an alpine swift coupled with such superb views took a turn for the worse when one of the swifts, on attempting to land, slipped down into the rainwater pipe head, emitted some screams then went ominously quiet, while a feral pigeon hidden in the pipe head flew out. The assembled birders' delight turned to concern as ways were considered as to how to rescue the swift. Having to head back home, it was with an air of despondency as we travelled south, but this mood returned to joy when I got a text to say that the feral pigeon had decided to go back into its roost place in the rainwater pipe head and the alpine swift had managed to clamber free, via the pigeon!

### *Second day – double success*

The next day the two alpine swifts at Lowestoft continued to show well and the pallid swift was found again at Kessingland. So, with my friend Dave and my daughter Izzie, I decided to try again. This time the pallid was joined by an alpine swift and both were watched together over the caravan park.

Later, heading back down the A12, news came of a lesser kestrel at Minsmere. Diverting our course home we managed to get flight views before it disappeared towards Westleton Heath. Scanning the heath, Corton birder, James Brown picked up yet another alpine swift –

amazingly my fourth for the weekend!  
All in all a superb weekend of birding in Suffolk – three lifers plus a rollercoaster of emotions, and all well worth ‘capering’ around the countryside for!

*Editor comment: It's not every weekend we get lifers, so I asked Gi to give us his thoughts on identification.*

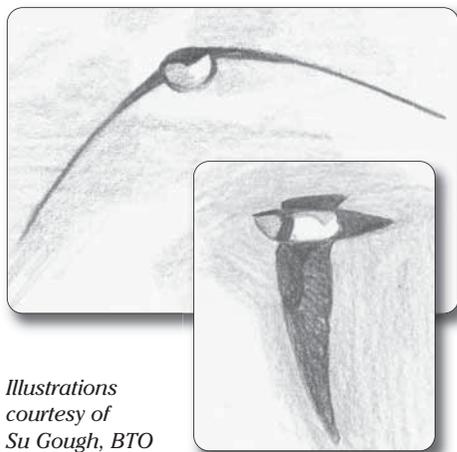
Ed.: What should we be looking out for?

Gi:

#### **Alpine swift:**

*Field id. characteristics –*

Typical swift shape, with scythe-shaped long wings, but the alpine is noticeably larger than the regular common swift, especially its wing span. On the underside, the white belly sticks out against the darker brown wings and vent/tail and upperparts. If seen closely, it also has a white throat (see below).



*Illustrations  
courtesy of  
Su Gough, BTO*

#### **Pallid swift:**

*Field id. characteristics –*

Like common swift, very similar in size and shape and it can hard to differentiate between the two. This was the case with the Kessingland bird. Without prior

knowledge that it was a pallid, it took patience to see the characteristics, as it could look dark brown all over. When it flew over the caravan park it was dark against the blue sky and, only when it banked with the light on it, could the paler colouration be noted. Then also the scaly featheration on the underside was seen, with the paler secondaries and inner primaries contrasting with the darker outer primaries. Similarly on the upperparts, the saddle was darker with paler brown secondaries. On the head the white throat patch could be seen along with dark mask around the eye.

Although the Kessingland bird was silent, having heard the species before in Kefalonia, the call is distinctly different and is a helpful way to distinguish the two species in the field.

#### **Lesser kestrel:**

*Field id. characteristics –*

This rare falcon to the UK is slightly smaller than the common kestrel, with the male being a smart bird and seemingly much richer in colour. When perched the head is a lovely blue-grey with no moustachial stripe – which the common kestrel does have. The back and wings are a rich chestnut brown without spotting and with a grey/blue panel on the wings. On the underparts it has smaller and less dense spotting. If seen well the claws are pale, as opposed to the black claws of common kestrel. In flight from the underside, the wing is much paler/whiter with a dark tip.

The call if heard, is a distinctive hoarse ‘chay-chay-chay’.

Ed.: So now we all know. Best of luck to everyone for this year’s birding.

## Tailpiece

Jeff Martin

### Let me conclude my views on overland migration.

I do not consider myself an expert on bird migration, and neither am I a ringer. The history of how I got here is too long to recite in full. Briefly it was in an obituary of the late Eric Simms, concerning his discovery of an overland migration route that he made just after the Second World War, that caught my attention. This led me on to the work of David Lack.

#### *Bird migration – a history of the thinking*

I don't believe that in general we, as naturalists, look at the historical facts as often as we might, and especially the work of the great David Lack. His studies of bird migration which took in the Chiltern Hills, Cornwall, France, Spain, and also through the Pyrenees (where he also observed insect migration – Williams, 1958), merit reading if you have not already done so. Interestingly, his work on the enigmatic Common Swift has remained sacrosanct, but his remarkable and possibly more important work on overland bird migration has largely been forgotten. From the papers by Simms and Lack there followed a stream of related papers from various authors which were published in *British Birds*, but those papers have also been largely consigned to obscurity.

The reluctance to accept W. Payn's work is a little more easily understood. I never knew Payn, but I am aware he was disliked in some quarters. I am of the view that personalities have been the sovereign with regards to his work rather

than the issues. This is unfortunate. His 'Birds' is 'lighter' than Ticehurst's, but it is clear from Ticehurst's comments in his avifauna that he did not have a complete picture of what was going on in Suffolk. Payn's is the only post-war avifauna in the UK that I have found so far, which dedicates a section to overland migration. He clearly knew and understood that bird migration occurred in south west Suffolk on a regular basis. If he can be criticised, it is because he did not report on the subject more thoroughly.

The debate on whether birds use topographical features, such as shorelines, rivers and ranges of hills, or whether they migrate on a broad front goes back to the 19th century when Palmén, in Sweden, supported by Alfred Newton, considered the first option, while in Germany von Meyer and Gätke, were broad front ornithologists.

#### *Broad-front, but with a difference*

I agree that migration does take place on a broad front, but I believe that my interpretation of a broad front is different to the perception of some others. I don't believe, for example, that at the onset of the autumn migration birds fly off in the general direction of Africa, or southern Europe. Some may do, but not all. I believe that many birds follow definite routes – ones perhaps their forebears have been following for thousands of years. I completely agree that birds do indeed follow all sorts of topographical features, but I believe that certain topographical features i.e. river valleys, hills and ridges, vary in importance at different stages in their travels. I feel that

those features enable most birds travelling across the UK to be eventually funnelled in to main routes across the UK, but this is not a new idea.



*The radio mast at Chedburgh – a prominent local landmark.*

### ***'The Heights' and the importance of markers***

I must make it clear that I do not perceive 'The Heights' as a barrier to migration, but as points on the landscape which birds use as markers, in much the manner in which we use markers, when making a journey. In consequence, it may well be that once we have more information to hand, the long held view that most migrant birds fly *over* the Sahara Desert will not stand up to examination, because there are few markers to show them the way. The recent example of the Nightingale which was tracked through the use of a miniature geo-locator, and was found to fly down across France, through the Pyrenees and then on down the east coast of Spain, on down the west coast of Africa, before arriving at its winter quarters will not, I believe, prove to be an isolated example.

### ***Scandinavian vs. African migrants***

I am of the view that birds, which arrive with us in autumn from Scandinavia,

Russia and elsewhere, do not, in general, behave in a similar manner to our migrants from Africa. Broadly speaking, winter visitors, such as redwing and fieldfare, are often here for food, and so they will usually roam the countryside looking for it. The spring and autumn migrants making their ways to and from Africa through the UK are only intent on mainly using UK airspace to travel through. It may well be that when sufficient information is gathered, it will be found that large numbers of migrants travel through the UK, and not down through mainland Europe. Why this should be I am not sure at present, but Phil Brown makes an important point, I believe, when he mentions the 'old' seacoast.

### ***Coastal vs. inland***

Although the coast has always been the place to see uncommon or rare species, inland areas are often over-looked. So what are the chances of seeing some uncommon species inland? Will there, for example, be further records of Alpine Swift from inland Suffolk? With more concentrated watching I think that is quite possible. Babington recorded two records of Alpine Swift; one from Bury St Edmunds (c.1885) and one from Wickhambrook (June, 1881), and Ticehurst added one from Breydon (Sept. 1887), while Taylor *et al.* (2000) included one from Breydon Water (Sept. 1882). If a line is drawn from Breydon Water through to Wickhambrook, that route illustrates one that I believe is a likely route for Common Swifts on autumnal passage (in prep.) and is one along which I feel the occasional Alpine Swift may still proceed from time to time. I am not alone in thinking that Alpine Swifts are missed flying overland. Webber and Combridge (in Lees *et al.*

2007) reported three inland records of Alpine Swift, and they considered that “this high-flying swift is probably often over-looked in inland southern counties”.

With regards to Stradishall Airfield then as I stated, I do not believe it is such an important place for breeding birds – although those that do breed there, such

as skylarks, meadow pipits and reed buntings, undoubtedly do so because it is a good habitat. The importance of the area, in my view, is that it is a stopover place for many migrants. Further, it is also an excellent place for many species that over-fly the area. Therefore I would pose the question that if a number of species use Stradishall as a stopover site, or as a place to over-fly,



*The ‘Heights’ and their East of England context.  
X denotes Stradishall Airfield and Y denotes Chedburgh Airfield.*

*Map courtesy of the East of England Biodiversity Forum*

what are they doing there in the first place?

### *An interim conclusion*

My conclusion is that large numbers of birds pass through the complex that I have described as 'The East Anglian Heights', i.e. the area that surrounds sites of the old Chedburgh airfield, but more especially the old Stradishall airfield. The majority of these birds tend to fly high on migration, following features on the ground below, such as rivers. However I believe that, as the courses of the River Stour and possibly the River Colne in Essex are less apparent as the migrants near the heads of these two rivers, the birds respond by flying lower to pick up the high ground of The Heights, to guide them on their way. Although I could be wrong, in this part of East Anglia I believe that there are few other significant features in the countryside that birds could use to guide them.

When they reach The Heights they either fly west, on through the Chilterns, or south down the Lea Valley – with the reverse happening in the spring. I also conclude that, whilst mini geo-locators will tell us much about what individual birds are doing on their migrations in the future (such as the flight of the aforesaid Nightingale and the Hobby that was recently tracked from Germany to Africa), it will be some time before they provide us with the density of movements and the numbers involved. As far as diurnal migrants are concerned, in my view the volume of their numbers can only be determined by the concerted efforts of a number of observers watching from strategic points on the East Anglian Heights and elsewhere. It should be remembered that some of the best

places to observe bird migration around the world are on high ground.

Although we do have a lot of information with regards to bird movements between Europe and Scandinavia, I am of the view that many other species enter the UK from other far distant places, which then pass through on their way south. However, we shall have to wait a while before enough information is gathered and we can come to any firm conclusions. When these are determined, I believe that they will show that although our coastal bird observatories do a fine job, they are only reporting a partial story as to bird migration across and around the UK. When we do have a fuller picture, then a UK migration atlas could well be a worthy project.

Finally I should like to say how pleased I am that my article has raised so much interest, and I welcome the comments, supportive or otherwise, of people who share a common interest in birds, and in their conservation. I hope that this subject may stimulate further discussion and research in the future.

### **References**

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## Recent Field Meetings

### *Dower House and Sizewell 4.09.10*

*Leader: Gi Grieco*

**A**nybody who knows me when I am drawn to the sea and have to keep checking and when about to leave will say 'just one last look'.

Well on this trip it's a pity I didn't follow my usual adage as we might of got the bird of the day!

For a change I decided on an early start with a sea watch from Dower House for the keen early risers along with checking the immediate environs, followed by a walk across Aldringham Walks to Thorpeness caravan park and back to allow those who wanted a not too early start to join us. A nice turn out of 16 members lined up along the coastal path at Dower House scanning out to sea. Visibility was a bit tricky as once the sun was up the central section was unviewable, so any birds that were seen flying up or down the coast had to be left until emerging out of the glare on the other side. For two hours we picked up a nice selection of birds, predominately small groups of gannets, mostly going north along with the odd kittiwake, two arctic skua, cormorant, common tern, two each of knot and dunlin and singles of sandwich tern, little gull and red-throated diver. Duck species included eighteen teal south, with two pintail, whilst ten common scoter were picked up on the sea.

We walked back to the car park at 09.10 as I had informed some members who rang for details that we would reconvene

around then before the next walk. We were about to have some hot drinks to warm up, as it had been a fresh morning when a BINS text message came through to say a Cory's shearwater had just gone north at Sizewell. This meant that it had come past us just as we headed back, we couldn't believe we had missed it by such a fine margin – oh for just one last look!

Around the car park green and great spotted woodpecker and a few house martins and swallows feeding up before their journey south. We walked along the road and then across tracks around Aldringham Walks, noting a few warblers such as lesser whitethroat, whitethroat and blackcap, with some long-tailed tits moving along a hedgerow. We also saw a nice selection of heathland butterflies including small heath, grayling and small copper and, further along, a fox gave us good views. A shout went up as a hobby, a juvenile, flew over and we were treated to a spectacular display of hunting as it hawked around with amazing aerial skills for 10 minutes. We carried on to Thorpeness caravan park. As that was very quiet and lacking in migrants, we returned along the beach for a second stint of sea watching from Dower House.

This time we saw six arctic skuas along with further gannets with the highlight being two long-tailed skuas. These were picked up by their distinctive flight as they headed north, with an elegant bouncing action, before diving downwards to the sea and up again. They came to where there was a melee

of birds, mostly gulls, near a trawler. They gained in height before heading back south again, one of the birds this time in close proximity to an arctic skua allowing a good comparison in flight and shape along with the long-tailed being a frostier, cooler colour than the dark brown of the arctic.

After collecting our lunch from the car we walked up the coast to have a look around Sizewell. A dead wood mouse was noted along the way and some were lucky to see a lizard scuttling under some gorse. Sitting on the shingle ridge we commenced our third bout of sea watching with little gull, kittiwakes and common tern close in around the water outfall towers. Further out we saw more arctic skua, a red-throated diver and then a call that a large skua was harassing the

gulls, which turned out to be a juvenile pomarine skua. The birds closer in also flew up in alarm, this time a superb pale phase arctic skua gave chase before setting on the sea. It did this a few times, once coming right over our heads across the beach harrying the gulls and terns though with seemingly little success. We left the skua drifting in the current offshore as we did a recce for any migrants along the beach and around the power station finding three black redstarts.

An enjoyable day, shame we missed a 'biggy' (the Cory's), but we more than made up for it with outstanding views of two superb birds and their hunting skills, plus a few migrants and a nice selection of seabirds to make a great birding trip.

## **Boyton Marsh 18.12.10**

*Leader: Steve Fryett*

### *Only the brave, or the hardy?*

**A** second spell of cold wintery weather in December had set in during the week and the covering of snow was probably responsible for a turnout of just three members, the first spell having led to the cancellation of Justin Zantboer's meeting two weeks earlier.

### *Despite low temperatures – good views*

At 9.30am in the car park at Banters barn the three of us checked our car temperature readings and averaged minus 5 degrees centigrade, by far the coldest day of the year so far. Undeterred we quickly set off noting a small flock of Goldfinch's with a lone Siskin amongst them high up in a patch of alder's with two Song Thrushes that may have been recent migrants. Excellent views were

obtained of a Woodcock flushed by a nearby shooting party that zigzagged around before dropping onto the marsh.

Given the weather we had to keep moving, so headed to the Butley River and scanned the frozen marsh towards Hollesley noting four Marsh Harriers, probably all females. A small hawthorn bush held seven Yellowhammers, always a splendid bird to see. The tide was just turning out on the river and a sight I certainly have never seen before, the river was completely frozen over upstream and great sheets of ice were slowly moving downstream crunching past a boat moored midstream. The usual selection of waders were noted with good numbers of Curlew and Avocet actively feeding as the tide revealed some patches of unfrozen mudflats. Duck

consisted almost entirely of Wigeon, with just a few Teal and Shelduck.

Heading towards Burrows Hill we noted a single female Reed Bunting, two Bearded Reedlings and a lone Pipit sp. that was probably a Meadow, but we could not discount Water before it disappeared. The view from the top of Burrows Hill was of a stunning wintery scene across

the marsh towards Havergate. Continuing on we noted a large flock of Mute Swan and a flock of 50 Siskin in alders along the roadside. Fieldfare, Blackbird and Song Thrush were noted on the way back to Banters Barn.

Well that's it for another year of SOG field meetings, ending at a very cold Boyton – I'm off home to a roaring fire . . .

## The Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee

### Article 031

*Justin Zantboer*

**Well I'm pleased to say that by recent standards, the last three months have been extremely busy on SORC.**

We have received and assessed in excess of 30 descriptions, most of which were for 2010, so a big thank you to all who have submitted. At the time of writing, a few of these are still doing the rounds but I would hope that by the time you are reading this, any 'pends' would have been discussed at our meeting on March 12th and an up-to-date list will have been placed on SOG's website!

#### *Volunteer needed*

Record assessing aside, SORC has been relatively quiet as we haven't met since I

last wrote! There have been no more comings and goings, which is a little sad as I was rather hoping a willing volunteer would have been nipping at my heels and moving me aside by now. On that note, this will probably be the last time I write for the Harrier on behalf of SORC although if I'm not replaced before the next article is due, I'll most likely just post a list of the outstanding descriptions.

As ever, I'll close by asking you all to peruse the accompanying list of outstanding descriptions in the hope that we may be able to whittle it down a bit more. As already stated, recent decisions will be posted on the SOG website ASAP.

Take it easy folks – it's been emotional.

#### Outstanding BBRC rarity descriptions for 2009

090308	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere
090729	Pacific Golden Plover	Breydon Water South Wall
091030	Red-breasted Goose	Thorpeness

#### Outstanding BBRC rarity descriptions for 2010

100316	Penduline Tit x3	Minsmere
100317	Penduline Tit x4	Minsmere
100319	Penduline Tit x4	Minsmere
100320	Penduline Tit x1	Minsmere

### Outstanding BBRC rarity descriptions for 2010 *(continued)*

100321	Penduline Tit x7	Minsmere
100330	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere
100430	Savi's Warbler	Minsmere
100708	Black Stork	Capel St Mary
100717	Caspian Tern	Henham
100928	Red-flanked Bluetail	Corton
100930	Glossy Ibis	Minsmere
101010	Isabelline Wheatear (same)	Gunton
101010	Isabelline Wheatear (same)	Lowestoft
101017-101024	Red-flanked Bluetail	Lowestoft
101017-101019	Northern Long-tailed Tit x2	Southwold
101023	Glossy Ibis	Dunwich
101030	Glossy Ibis	Southwold
101030	Pallid Swift	Dunwich
101113	Northern Long-tailed Tit x3	Lowestoft
101130	Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler	Lowestoft

### Outstanding County rarity descriptions for 2010

100104	Rough-legged Buzzard	Uggeshall
100117	Rough-legged Buzzard (pos)	Ramsholt
100124	Cattle Egret	Haughley
100126	Rough-legged Buzzard (pos)	Aldringham
100127	Rose-coloured Starling	Lowestoft
100129	Green-winged Teal - drake	Minsmere
100206	Rough-legged Buzzard	Hen Reedbeds
100321	Rough-legged Buzzard	Aldeburgh
100321	Hooded Crow	Blythburgh
100323	Alpine Swift	Lakenheath Fen
100328	Ferruginous Duck - female	Lakenheath Fen
100328	Alpine Swift	Burgh Castle
100328	Hooded Crow	Bawdsey
100329	Alpine Swift	Lowestoft (1310hrs)
100329	Alpine Swift	Southwold (1430hrs)
100330	Alpine Swift	Southwold (1100hrs)
100416	Raven	Cattawade
100418	Rough-legged Buzzard	Trimley Marshes
100420	Hooded Crow	Kessingland
100421	Hooded Crow	Benacre Broad
100428	Serim	Landguard Bird Obs
100515	American Golden Plover	Minsmere
100516	Purple Heron	Minsmere
100516	Honey Buzzard	Hollesley
100517	Montagu's Harrier - 1S male	Erwarton
100518	Purple Heron (pos)	Beccles
100522	Purple Heron x2	North Warren
100607	Honey Buzzard	Henstead
100607	Marsh Warbler	Lavenham
100624	Quail	North Warren
100625	Quail	Shingle Street
100626	Night Heron	Trimley St Mary
100630-100107	Quail	Great Waldringfield

## Outstanding County rarity descriptions for 2010 (continued)

100712	Black Kite	Lavenham
100805–100807	Ferruginous Duck	Lackford
100817	Icterine Warbler (pos)	Felixstowe
100823	Cory's Shearwater (prob)	Southwold – north 1415hrs
100823	Cory's Shearwater	Kessingland – north 1430hrs
100824	Cory's Shearwater	Felixstowe – north 1400hrs
100829	Barred Warbler (prob)	Gunton
100901	Honey Buzzard	Ufford/Wickham Market
100903	Kentish Plover	Blythburgh
100906	Sabine's Gull – Juvenile	Sizewell
100909	Barred Warbler	Landguard Bird Obs
100910	Buff-breasted Sandpiper – probable	Blythburgh
100913	Black Kite	Metfield
100913	Grey Phalarope	Trimley Marshes
100930	Goshawk	Southwold
101002	Honey Buzzard	Eastbridge
101007–101009	Honey Buzzard	Great Glemham
101009	Richard's Pipit	Thorpeness
101013	Rough-legged Buzzard	Benacre Broad
101013	Ortolan Bunting	Landguard Bird Obs
101017	Black Guillemot (prob)	Southwold
101018	Rough-legged Buzzard	Dunwich – 1052hrs
101019	Rough-legged Buzzard	Somerleyton
101019	Rough-legged Buzzard	Sotterley
101022	Rough-legged Buzzard	Henstead – 1246hrs
101022	Barred Warbler	Landguard Bird Obs
101024	Rough-legged Buzzard	Ipswich
101025	Hooded Crow	Dunwich
101026	Rough-legged Buzzard	Great Glemham
101027	Raven	Long Melford
101030	Rough-legged Buzzard	Stoven
101030	Rough-legged Buzzard	Wangford
101107	Cory's Shearwater	Slaughden
101107	Rough-legged Buzzard	Shottisham Creek
101109	Balearic Shearwater	Southwold
101112–101113	Pallas's Warbler	Lowestoft
101113	Siberian Chiffchaff <i>tristis</i>	Gunton
101113–101115	Siberian Chiffchaff <i>tristis</i>	Lowestoft
101113	Pallas's Warbler	Gunton
101113	Yellow-browed Warbler	Elveden
101125–101130	Hooded Crow	Lakenheath Fen
101130	Rough-legged Buzzard	Barsham
101205	Rough-legged Buzzard	Dalham
101207; 101208; 101218;		
101219; 101223	Little Bunting	Great Glemham
101210	Rough-legged Buzzard	Orfordness
101217	Ferruginous Duck – 1st winter Male	Leathe's Ham, Lowestoft
101218	Rough-legged Buzzard	Stutton Mill
101227	Black Brant	Shotley Marshes
101227	Sabine's Gull – Adult	Pakefield
101228–into 2011	Green-winged Teal – Drake	Minsmere



# Celebrating birds



## **Bill Baston**

Wheatear, Shingle Street, April 2006: Canon EOS-1D Mk II; 500mm f4 IS lens + 2x converter; exposure 1/320; focal length 1000; aperture f13.

Great spotted woodpecker, near Hadleigh, January 2011: Canon EOS-1D Mk IV; 500mm f4 IS lens + 2x converter; exposure 1/800; focal length 1000; aperture f9.

Yellowhammer, Hadleigh, January 2011: Canon EOS-1D Mk IV; 500mm f4 IS lens + 2x converter; Exposure 1/640; Focal length 1000; aperture f9.



**Jon Evans**

Bittern: Photographed at Minsmere in March 2010 on a Nikon D300; Focal length 600; f8; Exposure 1/640.

Kingfisher: Photographed at Minsmere, September 2010 on a Nikon D300; Focal length 600; f4; Exposure 1/1000.

Spotted Flycatcher: Shot from a garden hide on a Nikon D300; Focal length 600; f4; Exposure 1/160



250.





### **Ian Goodall**

Red-footed falcon, Lakenheath, May 2008: Canon 40D 400 f5.6 1/2000 sec @ f.5.6.

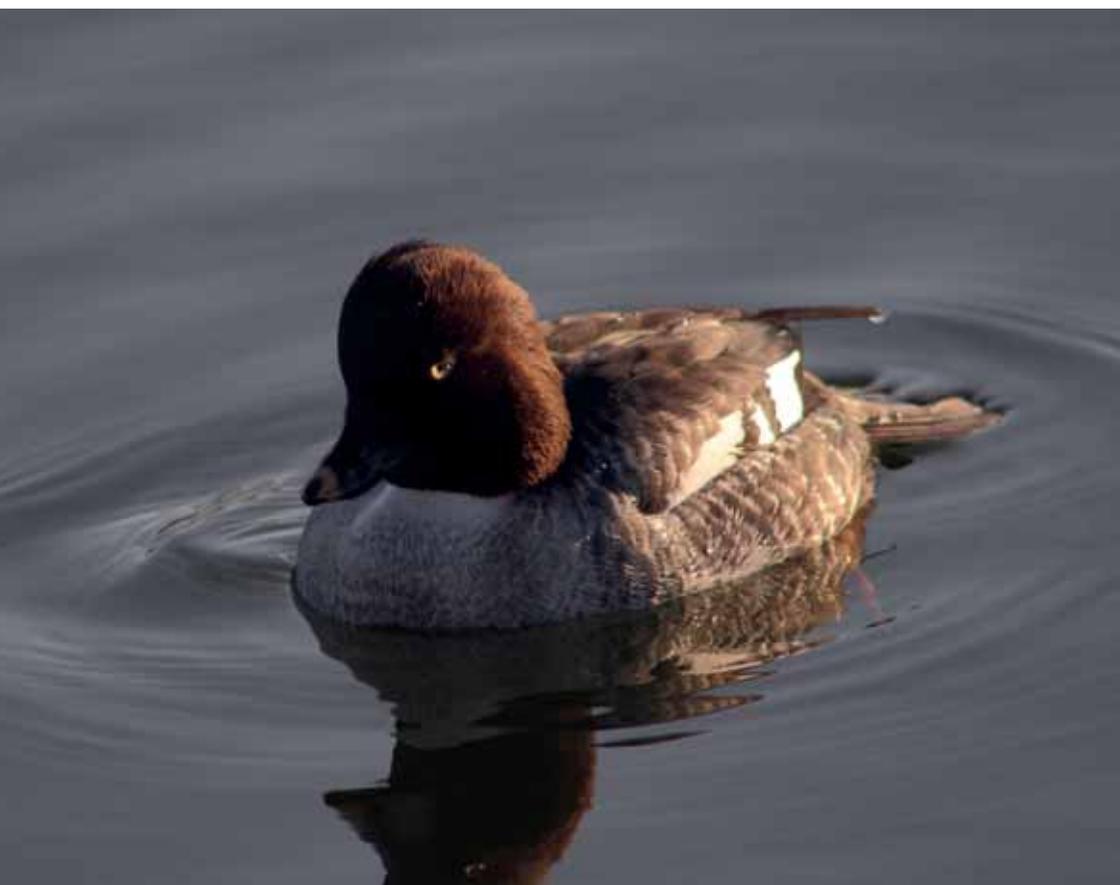
White stork, Lackford SWT, April 2010 Canon 1D Mk3 500 f4 + 1.4x 1/1000 sec @ f5.6.

### **Paul Lacey**

Common goldeneye – Canon EOS-1D Mk2 N; ISO 400; Shutter 1/500, saved as RAW in sRGB.

Lens – Canon 800mm F5.6 'L' FD (coupled with a Canon FD-EOS adaptor), Aperture f8;

Effective focal-length, 800mm x 1.25 (effect of FD-EOS adaptor) x 1.3 (smaller camera sensor factor) = 1300mm; Effective exposure setting at ISO 400, 1/500 at f11.



## Indoor Meetings 2011

Adam Gretton

The turnout to Alan and Ruth's talk on the 'Biggest Twitch' was very gratifying (circa 65).

SOG would like to thank the many

members who attended this event for their support. The programme for 2011 will be equally interesting, so hopefully our meetings can continue to command this excellent level of support.

## AGM – 24th February 2011

Phil Brown/Steve Piotrowski

*Outgoing Chairman's efforts awarded*

The attendance at February's AGM was an impressive 45.

There was a good deal for the attendees to enjoy – BINS provided their 'Review of the year' and Ken Verlander presented the bird highlights of his Antarctica trip. But the assembled throng were also delighted to be able to congratulate Richard Rafe on his receipt of the Denis Ockelton Trophy.



As you know this is awarded annually for an outstanding contribution to SOG/Suffolk ornithology. And Richard's career with SOG fitted this requirement well, as Steve Petrovski wrote:

"Richard arrived in Suffolk in 1992 to take up a position with English Nature (or was it still Nature Conservancy Council?), based at Bury St Edmunds. Although, at this time SOG were still going strong, some

Committee members had become slightly jaded as they were nearing the end of a long stint on Council. Richard was very keen to promote our local bird club and soon joined SOG. He was almost immediately elected to Council where he has served as Editor of *The Harrier* and two terms as Chairman. He also stepped into the breach to take on the Editorship of the Suffolk Bird Report.

Richard has been instrumental in creating strong links between SOG and other organisations and has inspired Council to further the aims of the Group. He is unashamedly a keen lister and rejuvenated the "Mr (& Mrs) Lister" theme encouraging members to submit their Suffolk Bird Lists for a competitive revue. This was not only great fun, but it encouraged local birders to focus on Suffolk rather than birding in North Norfolk or elsewhere. Richard has been very keen on the record committee and has acted as an important link between SOG, SORC, SBRC and other NGOs. All in all, Richard has inspired everybody and there is no more deserving case for the trophy in all the years that it has been presented. Sometimes it is only when someone leaves that you realise just how much they have done for the County.

We all wish Richard well on his retirement and hope that he will appreciate that our view is that Suffolk's loss is most definitely Scotland's gain, but we hope that he will remain a regular visitor."

Adam Gretton, who has worked alongside Richard at Natural England over the last 4.5 years, delivered Steve's appreciation and added his own personal comment about Richard's great contribution – it being that “not

least as it was Richard who first got me involved with SOG!”

Well done Richard – and enjoy your well-earned retirement.

## News from the reserves

### *The water is back at Cavenham Heath*

*Richard Rafe*

**W**hile best known for its heath, Cavenham Heath NNR, northwest of Bury St Edmunds, also contains a large area of low-lying grassland alongside the River Lark that, under natural circumstances, should act as a river floodplain. Unfortunately there hasn't been any significant water on these meadows for decades, due to the embankment and deepening of the river channel. Last year the Environment Agency, working with Natural England, built two weirs into the flood bank with the intention of re-establishing the winter flooding onto the riverside grassland.



*One of the weirs in the river floodbank permitting water to flow onto the grazing marsh.*

The heavy winter rains in January raised levels in the river and water successfully

spilled out over the weirs onto the Cavenham Heath grassland – for the first time in 50 years. It may take many years before the floodplain grassland re-establishes itself, and we see the return of a more diverse wet grassland flora, but already the floods have been used by large flocks of gulls and Lapwings and an otter has been seen exploring one of the weirs.



*January 2011, a view of the extensive flood pools covering the grasslands adjacent to the River Lark.*

If you have records of birds or other wildlife using the newly created temporary floods then please let Michael Taylor know – Mike is the Reserve Manager for Cavenham Heath NNR.

*Michael.taylor@naturalengland.org.uk*

## Announcements

### *Holywells Park Bird Fest*

*Gi Grieco*

On Saturday, 21st May 2011 there will be a bird festival in Holywells Park, Ipswich.

This will be run by the Park Rangers, in conjunction with a variety of groups including SOG and Ipswich RSBP.

The event will start with bird ringing from 06.00 and continue through to 14.00 with

a variety of activities including guided walks at 8.00, 10.00 and 12.00 and nest box building. All are welcome.

#### *Assistance needed*

As SOG is planning to have a stall there, we would welcome any assistance in running it and/or participating in the walks etc. Please see the SOG website – [www.sogonline.org.uk](http://www.sogonline.org.uk) – for further details and contact.

### *Bird Atlas 2011*

*Mick Wright*

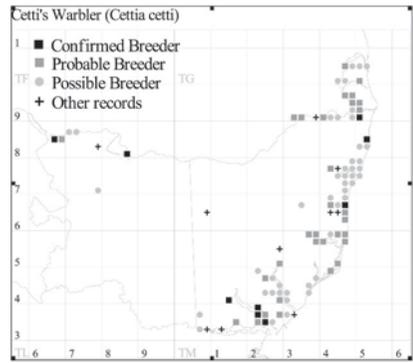
#### WINTER SEASON 2010–2011

Efforts of the volunteers over the winter period have been really impressive; there were over 120 TTV's surveyed and all the tetrads with less than 20 species in them have been targeted.

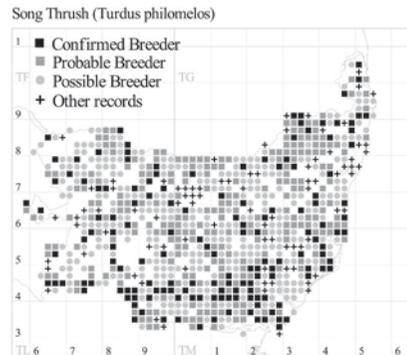
A number of people have been blitzing the west of the County and have provided several hundred records in a single weekend. I would like to thank all those responsible for making a special effort with this fieldwork.

The 'backroom' work continues apace. There are probably over 200,000 records still needing to be verified and considerable numbers of species still need entering onto the database – but more are still needed, and in good time (the prompter the better).

The valuable maps right and overleaf, based on data collected so far, reveal the changing breeding status of four of the County's bird species:

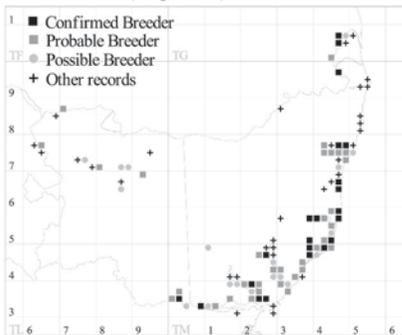


Cetti's – are showing signs of significantly expanding its breeding range.



Song thrush – remains widely distributed. More sites with proof of breeding would be very useful.

Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)



**Redshank** – appears to be hanging on in the coastal belt, albeit in smaller numbers.

Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)



**Cuckoo** – seems to be showing signs of decline, with only six confirmed breeding sites across the County.

These four maps reveal the classic mix of species performances, ranging from winners to losers. In order to get a better handle on the status of all of our breeding birds we desperately need more proof of breeding throughout the County.

**BREEDING SEASON 2011**

This April we start fieldwork for the fourth and final summer period for the Atlas; just two visits are required one in April/May and one in June/July. We continue to need volunteers for timed

counts in the tetrads (2 x 2 km squares) indicated below:

- TM16M TL66H, X&E TL74P&T TL75G, H, I, Q, V, W&X
- TL76 P&U TL77B&C TL78A, B, H&M TL86C
- TL88E, K&L TL93K

As I noted above, we are still short of **CONFIRMED BREEDING** records, even for the coastal squares. We do not have this information for many of the commoner species. Please do not rely on someone else sending in the records. Records can be sent online to the BTO or in paper form to me.

I would urge all birders to compile species lists, especially for those tetrads with less than 20 species.

If you wish to take on a new TTV for the summer of 2011 or be a Roving Recorder please contact **Mick Wright**, Atlas Co-ordinator for Suffolk, on **01473 710032** or email **micktwright@btinternet.com**

By visiting **www.birdatlas.net** you can easily see the vacant tetrads and be able to select the one/s you would like to survey; this will automatically generate an email to me – just follow the online instructions.

*Thank you for all your help and enjoy 'Atlasing' this summer*

**Members of the Atlas working group are:** Steve Piotrowski, Peter Lack, Andrew Green, Colin Jakes, Nick Mason, Andrew Easton, Margaret Regnault, Rob Wilton and Mick Wright.

**ROVING RECORDS ARE ENORMOUSLY IMPORTANT  
WE ALSO NEED SPECIES LISTS FOR EVERY TETRAD**

## Recent Reports – October to December 2010

Justin Zantboer

**A**ll National and County rarities are still subject to ratification by the relevant committees.

It is also important to remember that probably most of these records will still need submitting to the relevant County Recorders, so please ensure that if any of you as individuals saw any of the following mentioned birds, please submit them ASAP.

Although a good percent of the following records were received from the Rare Bird Alert information, I would like to thank all of the observers who passed on their information directly to me.

### October 2010

October proved to be an excellent month for the County, with a noticeable bias to the North. The star bird for the crowds had to be an Isabelline Wheatear on 10th at Lowestoft but the competition was hot! If it wasn't just seen by a lucky few, I think the Issy Wheatear would have been eclipsed by a presumed Black-browed Albatross seen flying north off Dunwich Cliffs on 25th! Unfortunately though for Suffolk's legions of seawatchers, it frustrated them all by passing unseen into the abyss of the North Sea! Other National Rarities included a Great Snipe which showed briefly just three times to its finder and then a fourth and final brief time to a lucky few observers at Covehithe on 1st; Suffolk's third Red-flanked Bluetail of the autumn, with a typically elusive bird at Lowestoft from 17-24th, two Northern Long-tailed Tits which delighted the hordes at Southwold from 17-19th; an elusive Glossy Ibis which was seen on 23rd and 30th; a

Pallid Swift which was reportedly over Dunwich Heath on 30th and of course, last month's King Eider which remained faithful to Dunwich/Minsmere/Sizewell throughout the month!

Our lands were also seemingly abound with County Rarities, with the best being either a female Ferruginous Duck at Lackford Lakes from 3rd-18th, with possibly the same bird at Lakenheath Fen on 25th, or a Short-toed Lark at Covehithe on 4th! Others reported included Honey Buzzards over Minsmere and Eastbridge and Lakenheath Fen on 2nd, while Rough-legged Buzzards arrived *en masse* with sightings at Benacre on 13th, Bawdsey, Havergate Island and Orfordness and Southwold on 17th, Dunwich, Kirton Creek and Wantisden on 18th, Somerleyton on 19th, Henstead and Minsmere on 22nd, Ipswich on 24th and Wangford on 30th, while upto three birds were well watched in the Potters Bridge area from 20-25th! A Red-necked Phalarope was at Minsmere on 8th; Sabine's Gulls were off Thorpeness on 16th and Covehithe on 25th; Richard's Pipits at Thorpeness on 9th and Gorleston on 19th; Barred Warblers at Burgh Castle on 17th and Landguard on 22nd; Pallas's Warblers at Kessingland from 11-14th and Sizewell from 17-18th; a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Corton on 11th; Hooded Crows at Minsmere on 17th, Covehithe on 23rd, Dunwich on 25th and Orfordness on 30th; a Raven over Long Melford on 27th and an Ortolan Bunting at Landguard on 13th.

A vast array of scarcer species completed an outstanding month, with the best of these including three Black-throated and

one Great Northern Diver, one Red-necked Grebe, five Sooty Shearwaters, possibly five Great White Egrets, two Red Kites, eight Hen Harriers, one Pectoral Sandpiper, three Grey Phalaropes, three Pomarine and one Long-tailed Skua, one Puffin, three Long-eared and possibly 14 Short-eared Owls, two Wrynecks, 22 Shore Larks, 11 Yellow-browed Warblers, nine Great Grey Shrikes and 13 Lapland Buntings. Also of note were the early appearances of Little Auks from 16th, Waxwings from 21st and Common Redpolls from 18th.

### November 2010

Whilst North Suffolk had a rather memorable year, South Suffolk waited all year for a touch of fortune and with the arrival of November and hopes diminishing, the finding of an American Kestrel at Landguard on 3rd was, for an hour or so, the absolute show stopper of the year! However, the delight was short-lived as firstly, a ring was noted on the bird before the drama concluded when 'Dillion's' owner arrived from Stonham Barns to return him to his cage!

After 'Dilliongate', the rest of the month was rather muted, especially after such a good October! The King Eider remained on the sea off Dunwich and Minsmere up to 16th and three Northern Long-tailed Tits were seen in Lowestoft on 13th. A Humes Yellow-browed Warbler was reported from Lowestoft on 30th but, with no sight or sound of either it or the observer thereafter, it seems likely the report was erroneous!

Star bird of the month (sorry Dillion!) I think for a change went to a County Rarity with a very obliging Cattle Egret alongside the River Gipping at Great Blakenham from 2nd-3rd. Other County

Rarities included assumedly October's Ferruginous at Lackford Lakes again on 7th; a Cory's Shearwater reportedly off Slaughden on 7th; a Balearic Shearwater off Southwold on 9th; Rough-legged Buzzards reported from Shottisham on 7th and Barsham on 30th; an obliging Richard's Pipit at Covehithe from 2nd-6th; Pallas's Warblers at Lowestoft from 12-13th and at Gunton on 13th, Siberian Chiffchaffs at Lowestoft from 6th to 7th and 13-15th and at Gunton on 13th while last month's Hooded Crow remained on Orfordness throughout the month where it was joined by a second bird from 6th, while a single was at Lakenheath Fen on 25th and 30th.

Scarcer species included five Grey Phalaropes with birds past Dunwich on 2nd and Felixstowe on 17th while the other three lingered at Minsmere from 7-10th, at Loompit Lake, Trimley St Martin on 10th and at North Warren from 20th-21st. Other scarce species included three Long-tailed Ducks, two Smew, five Black-throated and six Great Northern Divers, three Red-necked Grebes, three Sooty Shearwaters, four Great White Egrets, one Red Kite, six Hen Harriers, two Pomarine Skuas, one Iceland Gull, two Puffin, three Long-eared and 15 Short-eared Owls (six on Orfordness on 21st being noteworthy!), 23 Shore Larks, two Yellow-browed Warblers and six Lapland Buntings.

Waxwing numbers steadily increased throughout the month with flocks of 30-40 being widespread. The peak counts came towards the end of the month with flocks of 150+ being at both Ipswich and Worlingham on 28th.

Also of note were some lingering summer migrants which consisted of a Turtle Dove at Lowestoft on 17th, a

Whinchat at Barsham Drain on 6th, a Wheatear at Landguard upto 24th and a Reed Warbler on Orfordness on 21st.

### December 2010

As is often the case, December failed to produce a National Rarity. There were a few County Rarities, with the best being a Little Bunting seen at Great Glemham on 7th, 8th, 18th, 19th and 23rd! As ever with this species in Suffolk, it caused ripples of discontent as most observers who twitched it came away frustrated, failing to see it! Elsewhere, a Black Brant was with Dark-bellied Brent Geese on Shotley Marsh on 27th; a drake Green-winged Teal on Orfordness on 5th and then either the same or another at Minsmere on 28th and 31st; a drake Ferruginous Duck at Leathes Ham, Lowestoft on 17th; Rough-legged Buzzards reportedly at Dalham on 5th, Orfordness on 10th and Stutton Mill on 18th; a Sabine's Gull reportedly at

Pakefield on 27th and two Hooded Crows on Orfordness upto 11th with remaining well into 2011.

Scarcer species noted included up to 13 Tundra Bean Geese, four Long-tailed Ducks, 20 Smew, one Black-throated and three Great Northern Divers, one Red-necked Grebe, one Great White Egret, one Spoonbill, six Hen Harriers, three coastal Common Cranes, two Little Stints, one Iceland Gull at Lowestoft all month, two Glaucous Gulls, two Short-eared Owls, 21 Shore Larks and two Lapland Buntings.

Of note, two Lesser Whitethroats were reported with one in Kesgrave from 4-15th and another at Farnham All Saints on 5th, while Waxwings appeared almost anywhere and everywhere, with the largest gathering being a flock of some 300 birds in Ipswich on 19th!

## Looking back – January to March 1961 and 1986

*Philip Murphy*

### Selected highlights from the 1961 and 1986 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period January to March.

#### 50 years ago

The 1961 Suffolk Bird Report (SBR) was the first to be edited by William (Bill) Payn, assisted by the two Recorders – Rex Beecroft and Curly Curtis – and the six members of the County Records Committee – G.B. G. Benson, FK Cobb, FC Cook, PHT Hartley, ACC Hervey and AE Vine. The report cost the princely sum of four shillings – this, for the benefit of any reader under the age of 45, is equivalent today to 20p in 'new money'!

#### *Grebes a plenty*

The early months of 1961 were generally mild and wet. Up to 50 red-throated divers and six great crested grebes off the Minsmere/Dunwich area in January were deemed worthy of mention. The total of seven slavonian grebes off Minsmere, 12th January remains as the equal highest gathering of this species ever recorded in Suffolk. The place to be on 15th January was Easton Broad, where up to three black-necked grebes and three long-tailed ducks were present – the latter birds remained there until 5th March.

The total of about 100 velvet scoters off Dunwich from the 1st to 15th January was one of the principal highlights of this

period, being at the time the largest gathering of this species ever recorded in Suffolk.

### *Geese*

The peak count of 480 brent geese on the Stour Estuary, 15th January was a noteworthy total for the early sixties. A flock of 30 pink-footed geese was at Minsmere, 24th January and what were probably the same birds were noted inland over Badingham the next day. A maximum of 350 white-fronted geese was at Breydon, 7th January.

A Eurasian spoonbill spent the winter of 1960/61 at Breydon; what was believed to be the same bird was at Blythburgh, 2nd to 15th January.

The Mediterranean gull that had spent five successive winters in the Pakefield area remained there until 10th March – it did not return in the autumn.

### *Migrants leave*

The peak emigration of winter visitors such as northern lapwings, common blackbirds, fieldfares, redwings and rooks was noted at Lowestoft and Minsmere between 4th and 18th March.

Havergate's first returning pied avocet of the year was noted on 24th February. An early returning stone-curlew was at Minsmere, 28th February. The most notable early migrant in March was a common redstart at Pakefield on the 24th.

Perhaps the most unexpected record in March was of an immature black-legged kittiwake "found dead in Breckland" on the 19th – but no indication was given in the report as to why the location had been kept so vague.

### *25 years ago*

Just as in 1961, the SBR witnessed the start of a new era with Steve Piotrowski taking over as the report's editor. Steve was assisted by the County Bird Recorder, Bob Warren and the members of SORC – Rex Beecroft (joint recorder in 1961), Brian Brown, John Grant, Gerald Jobson, Michael Marsh, Derek Moore, Philip Murphy, Cliff Waller and Malcolm Wright. There were 252 contributors to the 1986 Report – whereas in 1961 there had been just 68.

January witnessed alternating cold and mild spells which resulted in some interesting sightings; these included 2800 common shelduck south off Landguard, 9th, up to 1300 brent geese at Alton Water, 12 over-wintering glaucous gulls and, remarkably, a great skua feeding on a roadside rabbit carcass inland at Hadleigh, 31st.

### *February – harsh weather*

Then an anticyclone over Scandinavia produced the coldest February since 1947, which had a dramatic effect on the county's birdlife. Unfortunately the rarest visitor was found dead – an immature black-crowned night heron at Bawdsey, on the 14th. Not surprisingly water birds featured prominently and amongst them were Alton Water's first record of great northern diver, 15th to 20th and a black-necked grebe found on the A12 at Martlesham, 14th (this was released on the Deben Estuary at Waldringfield). Records of European shag included maxima of nine at Ipswich Docks, 23rd and eight at Lowestoft, 12th; in addition one had been found dead in a chicken run at Ipswich in mid-January and another was located amongst a roost of great cormorants at Long Melford, 2nd March.

### *Wildfowl arrive*

The harsh weather in February also induced a marked arrival of wildfowl. Totals of diving ducks on the Orwell Estuary at this time included 109 common goldeneye, 38 red-breasted mergansers and 36 greater scaup; up to 52 of the latter species were in the Benacre/Pakefield area that month too.

### *Raptors roost*

A roost of seven hen harriers at Minsmere, 16th February included five adult males. A peregrine falcon over Havergate Island, 4th February was one of only two noted in Suffolk in 1986. A long-eared owl was watched hunting in daylight with a short-eared owl at Boyton Marshes, 2nd February.



Short-eared owl, Boyton Marshes.

### *Woodcock sightings*

Two reports of Eurasian woodcock were particularly interesting; up to ten foraged on a lawn at Minsmere in February and the holes made by one in the lawn of a Felixstowe garden, on the 18th were carefully inspected by a group of starlings, presumably just in case the wader had overlooked any prey items!

### *Passerines gather*

During February there were also several notable gatherings of passerines; principal amongst these were 1000 skylarks on the Alde Estuary saltings and

marshes, 9th; 200 bramblings at both Cavenham, 14th and Aldeburgh, 20th; 210 Eurasian siskins at Bromeswell, 15th; 278 twite on the Alde Estuary saltings, 9th and 180 at Hemley, 16th; plus 700 yellowhammers on the Alde/Ore/Butley saltings and marshes, 9th. In addition, unprecedented totals of yellowhammers occurred at Landguard, including 21, on the 21st February and 40, 1st March; equally unexpected were two common bullfinches on the saltings at Felixstowe Ferry, 10th February.

The cold spell continued on into early March when the Orwell Estuary was reported to hold 120 great crested grebes, 135 common goldeneye and 552 tufted ducks; the latter, described as an "incredible number", were in Ipswich Docks.



120 great crested grebe, Orwell Estuary.

### *Summer visitors*

Finally the weather relented and a few early summer visitors managed to reach Suffolk; these included a northern wheatear at Ipswich, 15th; sandwich tern, Benacre, 17th and an osprey over Tunstall, 29th. This last bird was, at the time, the earliest osprey ever to be recorded in Suffolk.

Parrot crossbills had been present on the Suffolk coast in 1984 and 1985; three were located on 8th March seven kilometres away from the 1984/5 site.

## Bird club news

**F**rom time to time, in the interests of stimulating Suffolk birdwatching, we hope to publish news and broadcast events being run by fellow clubs and societies.

Our current list of organisations is as follows:

**The Lowestoft Lounge Lizards/  
Lowestoft Bird Club  
Suffolk BINS  
Landguard Bird Observatory  
Ipswich RSPB local group  
Bury St Edmunds RSPB local group  
Lowestoft RSPB local group  
Woodbridge RSPB local group  
Waveney Bird Club  
Lavenham Bird Club (no website)  
Beccles Bird Club/Society  
Golden Oriole Group  
SORC  
Bawdsey Bird Club  
Stour Estuary Bird Group (no website)**

Should you be able to add further names to this list, and/or you have some information you'd like conveyed then please advise the Editor. In turn I am liaising with the SOG webmaster to carry a similar column on the Group's website – which is probably a more appropriate vehicle for bird club news items.



### **Lavenham Bird Club:**

The Club held its 40th Anniversary in 2010 marking it with a celebration evening held at The Wildlife Gallery in Lavenham. Robert Gillmor, who has a long association with the club, was the guest of honour.

The club currently has a membership of around sixty-five people, mostly drawn from the surrounding area of southwest Suffolk. We hold monthly indoor meetings throughout the winter on the third Saturday of the month at Lavenham Guildhall, and offer a programme of guests speakers talking on a wide range of subjects.

A programme of summer field trips is organised to local reserves and a survey walk of the Lavenham Railway Walk takes place on the first Saturday of the month.

The club welcomes new members and guests to the meetings and field trips. If you are interested please contact the Chairman for further details:

David Carter, Chairman  
davidgcarter@aol.com

### **Suffolk BINS:**

February saw the annual airing of the BINS birds of 2010 presentation at the SOG AGM. 2010 was again a fantastic year for Suffolk, with 2 firsts for the County being recorded, King Eider on the 12th September initially picked up off Kessingland, found by Chris Darby, before satisfying us all, as this long staying individual performed well most days off Minsmere through to November 2010.

A fantastic Male Lesser Kestrel was another amazing and unexpected highlight for the year. It was a surprise find at Minsmere on 28th March and frequented Westleton Heath through until the 2nd April.

As part of our annual event, we give two awards, firstly to the finder of the Bird of

the Year. This bird was selected by our members via a text voting mechanism, and remember, it's votes that counts. This year's winner was:

**Votes & Percentages**

- KING EIDER – 34 Votes = 50%
- LESSER KESTREL – 20 Votes = 29%
- ISABELLINE WHEATEAR – 6 Votes = 9%

So the award of the BINS 'Finder's Keepers Cup' at the SOG AGM went to the original finder of the king eider, Chris Darby.



BINS New Year's Day Cup winners, the 'Pied Twitchers', receiving their trophy at the AGM – Craig Fulcher, Nick Andrews, Lee Woods, Scott Mayson.



Chris Darby being presented with his cup by Roy Marsh and Lee Woods at the SOG AGM

The second annual award is given to the team recording the most species on January 1st New Year's Day bird race. The 2011 event ended as a tie, with 121 species recorded.

The 130 species count thus remains the

current County record for any budding teams planning to enter for 2012. It was interesting to note the quality of the best birds seen, but also of those once common birds missed, full details can be seen by visiting the BINS website.

For any SOG members who have not yet visited the BINS website, this is a site which is free to access, and well worth a look, so why not take a look around, and feel free to drop us a line if you happen to locate a mystery bird in the garden, then perhaps it could be your name engraved on the Bird of the Year award next year!

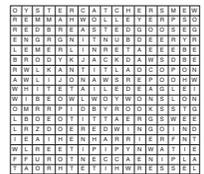
Suffolk BINS – <http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding/>

**Results of Christmas word-search competition**

The first correct solution, drawn out of a "hat", was from Jeff Martin from West Bergholt. Congratulations to Jeff (although I think his wife did most of it) who has been sent a book token prize for his efforts.

For those of you interested, the list of 37 bird names hidden by Brenda Rafe was: Alpine accentor, bee-eater, coal tit, eider, great tit, green winged teal, hen harrier, hobby, hoopoe, jackdaw, jay, knot, lesser whitethroat,

linnet, merlin, osprey, oyster catcher, razorbill, red breasted goose, red kite, redpoll, redwing, ross's goose, ruff, snew, snowy owl, swift, tawny pipit, twite, whimbrel, white tailed eagle, whooper swan, willow warbler, wren, yellowhammer



And the message spelt out 'goodbye'.

*Editor: I think we can treat this as Richard's swan song?*

## Recent Field Meetings

### Levington & Trimley 8.01.11

*Leader: Justin Zantboer*

**I** have to admit that when I picked up Dave Pearsons, I uttered one or two profanities on the way to Levington as it seemed that once again, this trip was going to be dominated by lousy weather!

As ever though, I was amazed by the number of members who decided to endure the elements, which in turn, quickly improved my initial sombre mood. A strong South-westerly wind and frequent showers did make the first couple of hours a bit difficult but the trip got off to a great start as first, an Eider was found on the choppy River Orwell before three Red-breasted Mergansers and two Goldeneye were located.

#### *Extremely quiet*

Loompit Lake was extremely quiet, playing host to just a handful of Tufted Ducks and Pochard while the mudflats faired even worse, with just a few Avocet and little else noted. The mudflats in front of Thorpe Bay Cliffs were more entertaining though, with at least 10 feeding Bar-tailed Godwits showing well, along with several Dunlin and one or two Knot. A Common Buzzard over Sleighton Hill was nice, although the views were a little brief, while scrutiny of a good-sized flock of Chaffinches unfortunately didn't produce any surprises. My usual stomp over the saltings of Trimley Retreat failed to produce the much hoped for Jack Snipe but ten Common Snipe were flushed along with a couple of Skylarks and a Rock Pipit. Trimley Retreat itself was almost devoid of life!

Our walk continued around Broomhill Grove, Woodruff Grove, Morston Hall and Fire Hill with the highlight being eight or nine Corn Buntings seen in flight by just Will and myself! The Common Buzzard seen earlier performed a bit better for us, while several Yellowhammers were noted and Siskin was heard. The Maize Strip at Stratton Hall unfortunately was deserted but a Great Spotted Woodpecker was noted flying into Stratton Hall Wood.

Levington Lagoon was the last port of call where the wintering Spotted Redshank saved us a bit of a stomp by flying from the Lagoon to the Creek, although the subsequent views were a little distant. I was fortunate enough to see a Water Rail cross a dyke on the Lagoon, while most of us got views of a distant Kingfisher feeding on the far side of the Creek – desperate times called for desperate measures! Waders on the Creek included Ringed, Golden and Grey Plover and both Bar and Black-tailed Godwits. The home run though reflected pretty much most of the morning as we failed to find any Jack Snipe where they had been seen previously, before then managing to not find a Rock Pipit at normally one of the best Rock Pipits in south Suffolk!

#### *Camaraderie – the bonus*

Still, although the birding was a little underwhelming, the company and the resulting banter was excellent, making for a very enjoyable trip. As always with birding, there's always next time!

## Council for 2011:

### Officers

President: **Steve Piotrowski**  
Chairman: **Roy Marsh**  
Vice-Chair: **Steve Abbott**  
Secretary: **Phil Whittaker**  
Treasurer/Membership Secretary: **Bill Stone**  
Bulletin Editor: **Phil Brown**  
Project Officer: **Mick Wright**  
Website Co-ordinator: **Gi Grieco**  
Bird Report Editor: **Nick Mason**

### Members

**Jean Garrod** [to 2014]  
**Robin Harvey** [to 2014]  
**Adam Gretton** [to 2012]  
**Roger Walsh** [to 2012]  
**Jon Warnes** [to 2013]  
**Paul Gowen** [to 2013]  
**Richard Rafe** [Co-opted]



### Bird recorders

#### **North East Area Recorder:**

**Andrew Green**, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP  
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: [andrew@waveney1.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:andrew@waveney1.fsnet.co.uk)

#### **South East Area Recorder:**

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Tel: 01394 385595 Email: [s.mayerson@fsmail.net](mailto:s.mayerson@fsmail.net)

#### **West Area Recorder:**

**Colin Jakes**, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN  
Tel: 01284 702215

### Subscription Rates:

SOG: Adults – £13.00; Family: £15.00

Joint SOG/Suffolk Naturalists' Society: Adults – £26.00; Family – £30.00

# Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

*Who we are, what we do*



SOG is the Group for people interested in the birds of Suffolk, and provides a network and a voice for birdwatchers in the county. The Group is administered by Suffolk birdwatchers for Suffolk birdwatchers, keeping them in touch with what is going on and with each other. Through the Group's Council, SOG has links with other naturalist and conservation organisations in the region.

SOG organises an extensive programme of field meetings, an opportunity for members, young or old, novice or expert, to see birds, and to share camaraderie with fellow enthusiasts.

Indoor meetings are held in Ipswich, with quality speakers entertaining members with stories of birds and birdwatching, both local and from around the world.

The Group's bulletin, *The Harrier*, published quarterly, keeps members in touch with what's going on - with a mixture of stories about birds, conservation, reserves, organisations and people.

Once a year the Society and its team, with the support of the Suffolk Naturalists Society (SNS), produces the Annual Bird Report.

SOG organises and promotes surveys and projects on the birds of Suffolk, with an opportunity for members to participate. SOG is also able to support worthwhile projects through bursaries.

Membership of SOG is open to anyone with an interest in the birds of Suffolk. For details of membership, contact: Bill Stone - 27 Draymans Way, Ipswich IP3 9JT.





