

Autumn 2018 No.194



# The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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**Cover photograph:** Yellow-spotted Emerald (*Somatochlora flavomaculata*)  
by Andrew Easton.

**Contact email for articles, photographs, notes and observations is:**

[harrier@sogonline.org.uk](mailto:harrier@sogonline.org.uk)

All material for the Winter Harrier should be received by December 2nd please.

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Website: [www.sogonline.org.uk](http://www.sogonline.org.uk) Email: [info@sogonline.org.uk](mailto:info@sogonline.org.uk)

Twitter: [@suffokbirds1](https://twitter.com/suffokbirds1) Text/Tel: 07951 482547

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# The Harrier

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## Editorial

Welcome to this edition of The Harrier. Carlton Marshes featured twice in the last edition and during the summer a sighting at the reserve brought this superb reserve to the fore again. This was due to a Yellow-spotted Emerald dragonfly, found by reserve voluntary warden Andrew Easton. A first, not just for Suffolk, but the UK as well and deserving to be on the front cover of The Harrier. I'm sure future sightings from Carlton Marshes with its expansion plans in place will no doubt grace the front cover in years to come.

We have a great selection of articles in this edition including two relating to the west of the county; one from two birders aiming to see as many species as possible in the area during a year as well as one on Lakenheath, the most well-known reserve in west Suffolk. This site, similarly to Carlton Marsh shows what can be achieved to create superb habitat for wildlife and we have a welcome update on what has been occurring there. There is an informative piece on BirdTrack and its usefulness for modern birding. Scott will be demonstrating using BirdTrack in the field on an upcoming SOG trip but please note in the announcements a change in the date for this event.

There is an interesting article on encouraging Osprey to breed in Poole Harbour. Maybe one day this will occur in Suffolk; a couple of nesting platforms have been erected in

Common Buzzard



Photo: David Borderick

the county so the species may be attracted to stay and breed while on passage through the county. We've previously had an article on volunteering and in this edition there is another that again shows how people can help. The regular quarterly county bird review has been compiled by Eddie Marsh once again, thanks to him for trawling the records to put the review together. There are a selection of SOG field trip reports from the period and from time to time we have a book review, such as the one in this edition with an interesting and pertinent perspective on wildlife crime, an issue we sadly come across too frequently – we always welcome any further material for review.

*Gi Grieco*

# The Garrod Award

Photo: Brian Buffery



Jean and Ken Garrod

This award was created to celebrate the warm welcome Ken & Jean gave to all – but especially younger – newcomers to SOG. In recognition of this support for younger

people, the award is made annually to a young Suffolk-based bird or wildlife enthusiast for their involvement or contribution to birding, conservation or the environment. This is the fourth year of the award and previous recipients have been Ben Moyes, Ellie Zantboer and Laura Raven.

A nomination form can be entered online on the SOG website - <http://www.sogonline.org.uk/the-garrod-award/> or a paper copy can be obtained by phoning Gi Grieco on 07951 482547. The winner will receive a certificate, a SOG T-shirt and a year's membership of SOG. They'll also have the opportunity to have an article published in The Harrier about their wildlife experiences. The closing date for nominations is January 16th 2018 and the award will be presented at the SOG AGM in February.

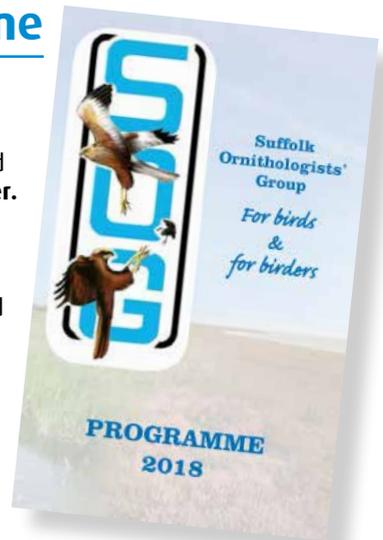
## Changes to events programme

There are a couple of changes to upcoming events, with amendments to one outdoor meeting and one indoor.

The Thorpeness field trip on October 14<sup>th</sup> has been postponed until the following week and will be on **Sunday 21st October**.

The indoor meeting on November 29<sup>th</sup> at the University of Suffolk, Ipswich waterfront is now the talk by Joe Harkness. This was postponed from earlier in the year. Joe's talk is 'Bird Therapy – Exploring therapeutic benefits of bird-watching for mental health and well-being'. The planned talk by Rob Sheldon on 'Birds of Saudi Arabia and Conservation in the Middle East' has had to be postponed until next year. Details will be on the events card with the winter edition Harrier.

Our apologies for any inconvenience caused.





## BirdTrack and me - why I use it ...and why it could be for you

When it comes to keeping bird records I have tended to be what you might call a 'highlights' recorder, you know the type - the ones that record species like Black Tern, Wood Sandpiper or Wryneck but rarely Woodpigeon, Coot or Redshank. Looking back through the collection of notebooks that I still enjoy flicking through this is very much the case; in fact I know that I have never entered Coot in any of my notebooks. The pleasure I get, and I suspect this is not just me, from looking through old notebooks is hard to describe, it's a journey that evokes not only memories of the birds you saw that day but also the trip to twitch them or the people you were with and for me the laughs we had on the way. Each entry is a mark in time that provides context to the type of birding you were doing, be it twitching a windblown waif on the North Norfolk coast or sea watching from a Cornish headland during a howling south westerly or a walk around the local patch recording the first Willow Warbler of the year. As nice as these reminders can be, what value do these records have beyond your bookshelf? Will anybody else really be interested in the observations of a 40-something Suffolk birder? Probably not, but what if they could contribute to our understanding of bird distributions and migration timings and still provide you with that experience of re-living those species that still gets the pulse racing.

As my birding has evolved I have dipped in and out of using various systems to record the species I have seen, from simple excel spreadsheets to dedicated online systems such as BirdTrack. The benefits of using a spreadsheet are they enable you to quickly search for a species, location or data to find a particular record without the need

to thumb through several notebooks. They also have the added benefit, for those with a more analytical mind, of being able to produce graphs and stats for a whole range of variables - such as graphs showing the number of species recorded each year or month, total number of records for a certain species and number of species recorded at each of the sites you have visited. These can make for fascinating study and reveal some interesting patterns within the records you collect, as long as you remember to back them up and not lose them all when your computer dies! This is all well and good if you have a sound knowledge of excel and how to produce graphs and/or extract these data you want to analyse. BirdTrack has the advantage of having analytics built in and only requires the press of a mouse button to display the information you want. As BirdTrack has evolved it has grown from covering just Britain and Ireland to being able to handle records from locations anywhere in the world. What this means is no matter where you visit globally you can enter your records, either via the website on your return or by using the app which works anywhere in the world and doesn't require a Wi-Fi connection. Before I joined the BTO as BirdTrack organiser in August 2017, BirdTrack, of all the recording systems, appealed to me the most, first off it was free, secondly it had an app which allowed me to record my sightings whilst in the field negating the need to enter data when I got home and it had the ability to upload my historical data. Rather than being a laborious task tackled on the rainy days of winter, uploading my historical records was more a case of walking down a very long road of happy memories of birds seen and those special days in the field we wish we could

revisit time and time again. As I entered my rather potted history of my birding life it also highlighted the changing fortunes of many species, from my very first Little Egret in Suffolk which seemed so rare at the time to the decline in Spotted Flycatcher which is on the verge of becoming a less than annual species in the areas I bird - and all this in a birding timescale of some 25 years. Historic records for those that have been birding longer will undoubtedly further highlight these changes and it's this type of data that adds that something extra to BirdTrack that some other systems I used lacked.

### My records within BirdTrack

I now have all my historical records uploaded in to BirdTrack and use the app all the time when birding in the UK and abroad.

With all this data it is now possible for me to delve deeper in to the records I have and look at it in a variety of ways.

The graph below is taken from BirdTrack and shows the number of species I recorded each year. In the early years my note taking was very sporadic, resulting in few species being recorded annually, whilst in the mid to late noughties I started twitching a lot more, that in turn not only meant my life list grew as I added new birds, but so did my yearly lists as I saw species that I didn't record in Suffolk like Red Grouse and Raven. After 2013 I began to twitch less and as a result my year lists tended to drop as my birding was concentrated in Suffolk with only the occasional trip away. It also shows the 2 years that I have lost my notebooks from 2006 and 2014....gutting.

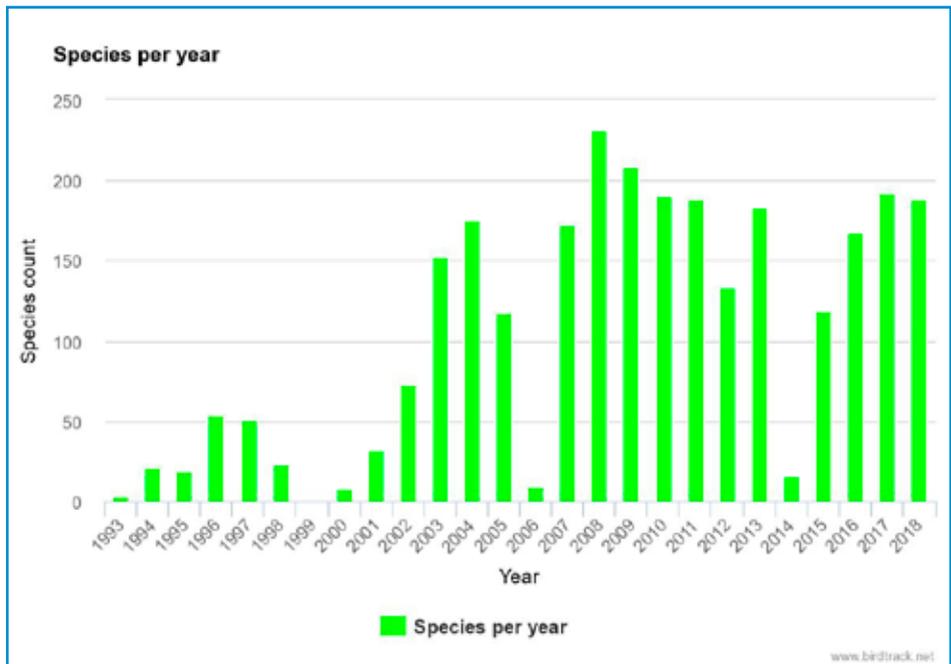


Figure 1. Number of species seen each year.

A species accumulation graph from BirdTrack shows those twitching years of 2007-2013 with 15+ species added most years. In the last 5 years the majority of my birding has been local or patch based and as a result I only add a few species each year, I think it will be a while before I see 500 in the UK! Interestingly the species accumulation

graph for my Suffolk records shows a similar pattern; again it will still be a few years before I reach over 360. It was interesting comparing this graph with other BirdTrack users I know to see how they varied, each person had their own story behind the jumps and flat periods on the graph, perhaps we all have our own BirdTrack fingerprint?

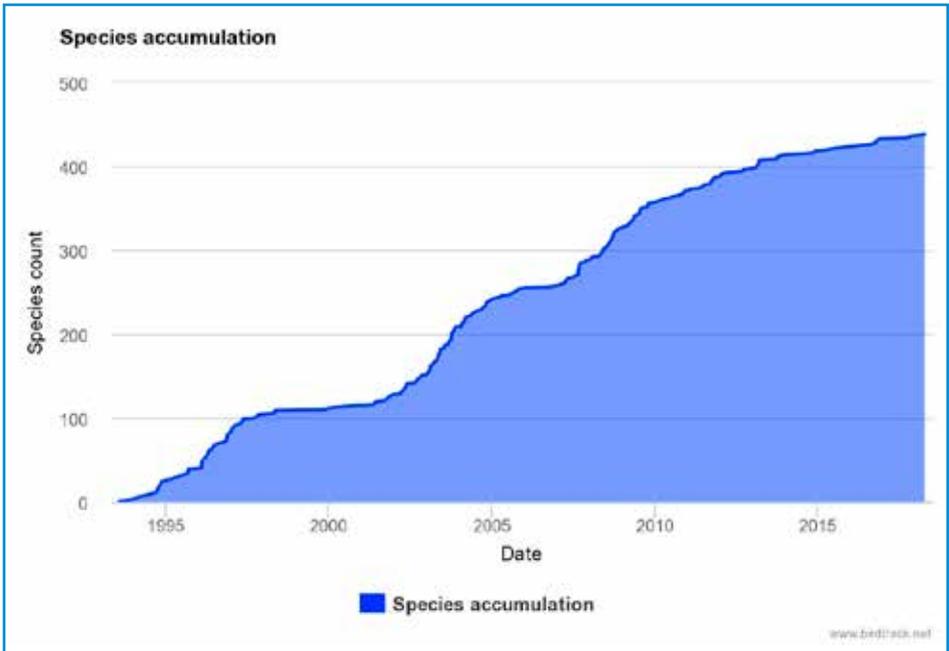


Figure 2. Species accumulation in UK.

Having used BirdTrack in various countries, a feature I really like using is displaying all the places you have been on a global map. Even for a little travelled birder like myself the sites soon add up and make for interesting viewing, again bringing back memories of those special birds - the records for each country, region or site can be downloaded or viewed on the website allowing you to quickly see what species you have seen where and when.

The mapping facility can also be used for a particular species and having used it on several occasions it's surprising how many 'forgotten' birds you are reminded of, first getting that 'hmmm I don't remember that bird' followed by the 'oh yeah I remember, I saw that with...'.



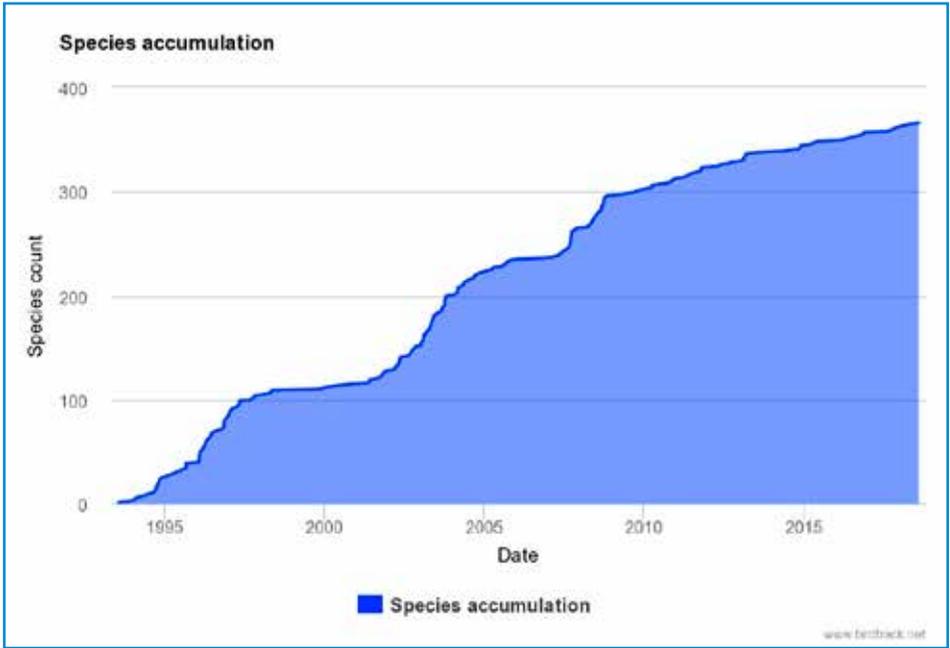


Figure 3. Species accumulation in Suffolk.



Figure 4. Map showing all the places I have entered records for in BirdTrack.



Figure 5. Map showing the locations of all 86 Yellow-browed Warblers I have seen in the UK.

## Beyond your own records

Data collected via BirdTrack is used to look at migration movements and distributions of birds, showing the arrival and departure timings for summer and winter visitors. It is also used to provide information on the movements of passage migrants, such as inland wader movements. An interesting article in BTO news May-June 2011 shows how BirdTrack data can be used to measure the effects of climate change on the timings of migration :-([https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u37/downloads/about\\_birdtrack/BTO\\_294pg12-14.pdf](https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u37/downloads/about_birdtrack/BTO_294pg12-14.pdf)). Data from BirdTrack has also helped understand the changing fortunes of many species and often acts as an early warning system for many species, these can be longer term declines like that of Turtle Dove or short term influxes such as Fieldfare into many gardens during the 'Beast from the East' in late February/early March this year.

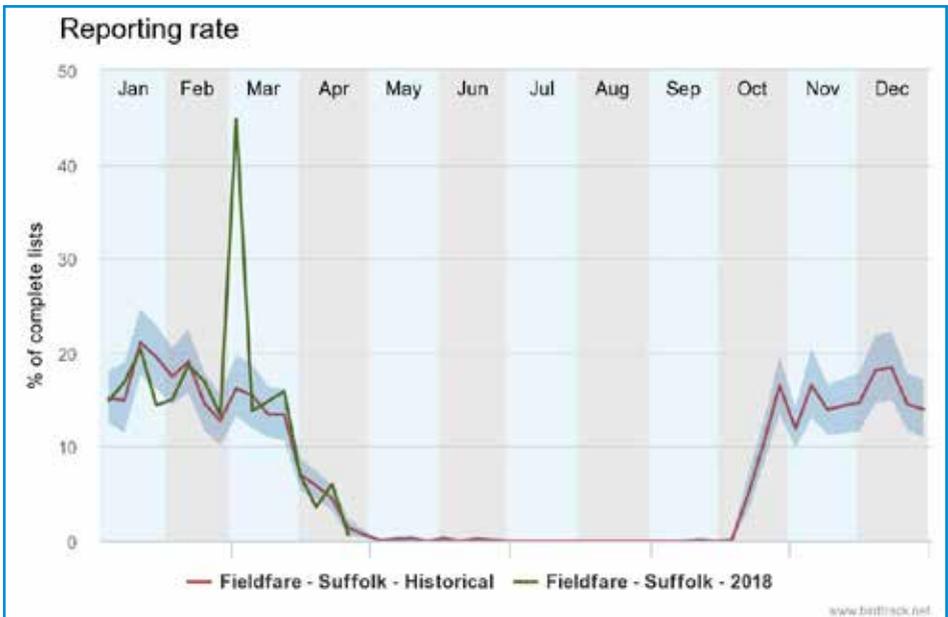




Figure 6. Reporting rate graph from BirdTrack for Fieldfare, the spike in Fieldfare records during the 'Beast from the East' is evident. It also shows that they went as quickly as they came.

For many bird clubs, BirdTrack is a major source of data essential for compiling their annual bird reports and as the county recorder for south-east Suffolk it is becoming an increasingly important tool for record collection especially for commoner species such as Blue Tit, Blackbird and Woodpigeon. Records sent to the recorders tend to focus on species that are either rare, scarce or of noteworthy counts or out of season records and as a result data for common species is often in short supply and can lead to a report being biased toward rarer and scarcer species.

Using the reporting rate graphs generated within BirdTrack it is possible to show how the timings of spring arrival of certain species varies from year to year, 2017 for example saw many species arriving early whilst 2018 arrival times were up to 2 weeks later than the historical average. These graphs can also show variations in arrival between species for the same year.

By using BirdTrack you not only have all your records in one place but they also have added value in that they can be used for both science and conservation as well as reminding you of past birding trips. If you haven't tried BirdTrack head to <https://app.bto.org/birdtrack2/main/data-home.jsp> and sign up, you can either record your sightings in a notebook whilst you are out birding and enter them in to BirdTrack at a later date or download the app on to your smartphone and add them as you go. I will warn you it becomes addictive and whilst I was a casual birder before, only noting the highlights from a day birding I am now regularly recording everything I see and even adding breeding evidence and counts of common birds.

**Scott Mayson**

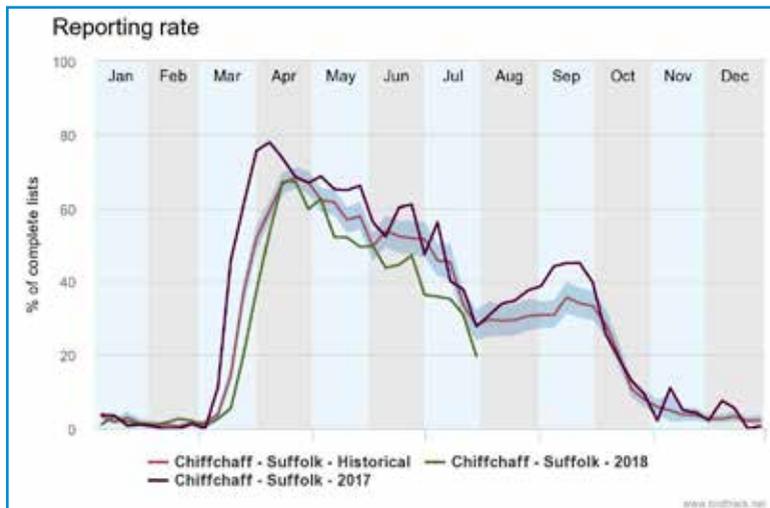


Figure 7. Graph showing the early arrival of Chiffchaff in Suffolk during 2017 compared with a delay of around a week in 2018 compared to the historical average.

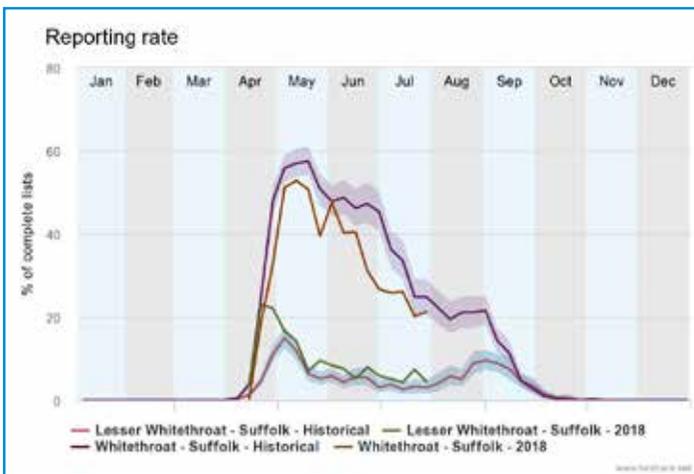


Figure 8. Graph showing that historically Lesser Whitethroat arrives in Suffolk about 2 weeks later than Whitethroat but in 2018 actually arrived en masse at around the same time as Whitethroat.

## A Report On The West Suffolk Birders' Quest for 200 Species In 2017

*“Back in 2016 Bird Watching Magazine promoted the idea of ‘My 200 Bird Year’ (#My200BirdYear) for birders of all ages and abilities. This was attractive to me as a way to invigorate my birding and to also add a numerical ‘challenge’ to my bird watching. As I do not own a car and enjoy travelling on foot and bike, I decided to add my own new twist to ‘My 200 Bird Year’ by focussing solely on my home county and geographical recording area of West Suffolk (Watsonian vice-county 26). I floated this idea with friends on a local group and one, Chris Gregory, was similarly keen and also took up the challenge. 2017 was a great year for West Suffolk birding, but it became apparent part way through the year that even in an exceptional year like this it would be incredibly difficult for one individual to see 200 species. In the end it became a collaborative effort helped a great deal by local birders passing on their records and vital information about sightings. Whilst my total of 170 species fell short of the 200 target a challenge should be just that – challenging. Crucially I thoroughly enjoyed the birding and corresponding with fellow West Suffolk Birders.”* Jonny Rankin

*“When one thinks about birding in west Suffolk, characteristic Breckland species such as Stone Curlew, Nightjar and Woodlark or perhaps forest specialities such as Goshawk and Crossbill usually come to mind. But there is so much more to birding in this region and with the creation of sites such as Lakenheath Fen, we now have some really valuable wetland habitats in an otherwise comparatively dry region. Today, species such as Bittern, Marsh Harrier and Bearded Tit which were scarce or largely absent from this area in the past, are pretty much guaranteed in this land-locked region. In addition to this, other sites such as Lackford Lakes and Micklemere have a great record of attracting waders and waterbirds, so when Jonny came up with this ambitious target there was cautious optimism among local birders! Here’s how the challenge unfolded month by month.”*

Chris Gregory

Continued over page



Iceland Gull

Photo: Jonny Rankin

The year got off to a flying start when a male Snow Bunting previously seen at the end of 2016 was (re)discovered in a large Linnet flock near Cavenham. This was quickly followed by another Breckland rarity, a Dartford Warbler on a heathland site. A number of scarce species were also overwintering in the region at this time, including a small flock of White-fronted Geese and a drake Smew near the Essex border and two Great Grey Shrikes in the Suffolk Brecks. At the end of the first week news came out that a flock of 10 Waxwings had been seen in Bury St Edmunds. The flock initially frequented trees around the bus station before moving off to Western Way where they remained until the end of the month, peaking briefly at 14 birds. A wayward Brent Goose was spotted on Lakenheath Airfield before the second rarity of the year, a Little Bunting, was found by a local birder in a finch flock at Knettishall Airfield. Another potential rarity was found at Newmarket a few days later, but what was initially considered to be a possible Orphean Warbler was eventually identified as a Lesser Whitethroat. Still an intriguing January record! Attention then turned to an industrial estate at Thetford where an immature Iceland Gull and immature Glaucous Gull had been picked out amongst the large gull flock there. Elsewhere, three Cranes and three Great Egrets were seen at Lakenheath Fen and in the final week of a memorable month, a lone Whooper Swan was discovered near Culford.

After a frenetic four weeks, February was comparatively quiet by comparison, but scarce species such as Tundra Bean Goose, Ruff and Mediterranean Gull were all good local finds. As were three increasingly tricky species - Goosander, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker and Crossbill.

March got underway with sightings of several more scarce species, including Hawfinch, Red-crested Pochard, Jack Snipe, Dunlin and Avocet. A visiting RSPB group were lucky enough to see a Black-bellied Dipper on the river at Santon Downham bridge on March 23rd but unfortunately it was not seen again. The first harbingers of spring started to arrive towards the end of the month in the form of a handsome drake Garganey and an early Little Gull, both at Livermere Lake.

April was generally sunny and dry and the fine weather brought with it more rarities. A White Stork of uncertain origin was seen in the south of the region close to the Essex border and a few days later a (truly wild) Glossy Ibis was found at Lakenheath Fen. A party of eight Avocets found at Gifford's Hall Flash near Stoke-by-Nayland were part of an influx of this species into the region at this time. There was a flurry of excitement mid-month when an American Herring Gull, a national mega, was identified in a gull flock near Great Livermere. Unfortunately the bird, an immature, did not hang around and was only seen by a handful of observers. A second Dartford Warbler was found a few days later at Cavenham Heath NNR along with a fine male Ring Ouzel. Additional notable sightings in late April included Whimbrel, Black Tern, Black Redstart and a second Glossy Ibis at Micklemere.

Migration got into full swing in May, helped by the continuing fine weather. During the first week an Osprey drifted over West Stow Country Park and another White Stork was spotted in a field by the A11 at Elveden. There was the usual annual gathering of Hobbies at Lakenheath Fen which peaked at an amazing 60 birds on May 14th. A local

birder living on an estate on the edge of Bury St Edmunds had a pleasant surprise when two Hawfinches visited his birdfeeder one morning, but they did not reappear. Lakenheath Fen then took centre stage with a remarkable run of scarce species during the second week. A singing Savi's Warbler and two Black-winged Stilts were quickly followed by a singing Marsh Warbler and a Spoonbill. Other species of note in the region included a full summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebe at Livermere Lake, and a delightful Wood Warbler in full song at Brandon. By the end of the month the majority of the common migrants had arrived and the number of wader species recorded was well into double figures.

In the first week of June there was a report that a Little Bittern had been seen briefly in flight and later heard 'barking' at Lakenheath Fen, but with no further reports its identity could not be confirmed. A Quail was heard calling on a private estate at Icklingham, and at Gifford's Hall Flash two pairs of Avocets fledged young, the first breeding record for this species in west Suffolk. Last but not least, a Serin landed briefly in a garden on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds, only the second time this species has been recorded in the region.

Notable reports from July included a Honey Buzzard at Denston and a Black Kite at Long Melford. A 'probable' Pratincole species was seen tantalisingly briefly at Gifford's Hall Flash, around the time one was seen on the Suffolk coast. Unfortunately it was chased off by gulls before a positive identification was possible. More scarce species such as Wood Sandpiper and Turtle Dove were also recorded this month.

August was relatively quiet but did produce another regional rarity in the form of a male Bluethroat, which was caught and ringed at Lakenheath Fen. A Whinchat was also finally added to the year list and an exceptional wader passage resulted in the yearly total increasing to 25 species.

September produced few new species, but a juvenile Gannet flying over Thetford was an unexpected bonus. At the beginning of October a lone Barnacle Goose and nine Pink-footed Geese at Micklemere provided some interest but the arrival of a Pectoral Sandpiper at the same site shortly afterwards proved to be far more popular. On a more sobering note, this month saw the only west Suffolk record of Willow Tit for 2017, at Lakenheath Fen.

After the excitement early in the year the second winter period was always likely to be less productive, and so it turned out. November was fairly uneventful until a flock of Parrot Crossbills was discovered just over the border at St Helen's Picnic Site, Santon Downham. Fortunately, the birds made frequent forays across to the Suffolk side of the river to drink! The flock remained in the vicinity until the end of the year.

## Summary

It was fortuitous that Jonny came up with the idea of doing the Bird Race Challenge in 2017 as it turned out to be an exceptional year for birds in west Suffolk. No fewer than 18 regional rarities were recorded as well as a new species for the county. It was also noteworthy as being the first year that Avocets bred in the region. Inevitably there were a few species that 'got away', including the putative Little Bittern and 'Pratincole' species. As the White Storks were both deemed 'escapes' by SORC and the Honey Buzzard was not accepted they are not included in the total.

As Jonny alluded to earlier, the target could not have been achieved without collaboration and the cooperation of local birders who helped us collectively achieve a final total of 200. If anyone is interested in seeing the list you can reach it via a link on the SOG web site.

*Jonny Rankin and Chris Gregory*

## A booming success...

The highlight (so far!) of the season here at RSPB Lakenheath Fen, has simply got to be the success of our Bitterns. The year started off well, with us being able to confirm 10 booming males across the site, a reserve record and a very promising sign for the breeding season to come. Many hours of surveying later, we were able to confirm six nests across the site! What made the season so special were the two juveniles that were being fed right outside Mere Hide, with a very busy Mum constantly feeding two hungry mouths; providing both amazing views and photographic opportunities.

Another very interesting thing that happened this year in regards to Bitterns was the fact that we finally managed to read the ring on the ringed individual that has been present here since June 2017. This was made possible by the fact that we were sent this photograph by local photographer David Gowing. With a little help from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), we found out that this bird, which is an adult female, was the individual that was found by the side of a road in Hertfordshire in September 2016. After a brief period of rehabilitation, it was ringed and released at RSPB Rye Meads

Photo: David Gowing



Bittern

in Hertfordshire. A couple of years later, it arrived here in West Suffolk and it looks like it has nested on the reserve. What an amazing story!

It's been quite a year for our resident pair of Cranes as well, a real tale of survival against all the odds! It was business as usual for them, until we started to see the youngsters for the first time. Reports were coming in of a Crane chick, looking as expected for it's age, alongside a chick half its size, still complete with downy feathers. Had a long legged goose joined the family?! The question then became what would happen to little 'Minimo'. Would he survive? Would he ever be able to fly? Would he be abandoned? The worst was suspected when three cranes, two adults and a juvenile, were seen in flight in early July, as all reports had said they wouldn't abandon Minimo...

However, in mid-August, all four were seen in flight over the reserve which was a relief for all of us! Dave Rogers, our Site Manager, photographed the family of four on 23 August. The family can now be seen flying around the reserve and although the smaller chick isn't quite as good at flying as its sibling, it is getting there - so here is to happy endings!

The reserve is open at all times. The visitor centre and toilets are open daily 9am-5pm. RSPB members visit for free. There is an entrance charge for non-members: Adults £3, Students £2, Children £1.50 (first child free per family group.) Please ring 01842 863400 or e-mail: [lakenheath@rspb.org.uk](mailto:lakenheath@rspb.org.uk); for more information about the reserve.



Cranes

Photo: Dave Rogers



Redshank

Photo: Dave Borderick

Eddie Bathgate

## Volunteering for Surveys

One of the benefits of receiving The Harrier is hearing about surveys run by conservation organisations which require volunteers. Surveying is both interesting and worthwhile as well as offering new birding opportunities for the surveyor. This year I have got involved with both Operation Turtle Dove and the Suffolk Wader Strategy again, with the upcoming Tawny Owl survey still to come.

With a family and the weekend commitments this brings, it hasn't been possible for me to volunteer for WeBS (wetland bird) surveys. High tide times and priority dates always seemed to clash with taxiing/refereeing and general duties. Other surveys however can be fitted in around work and family life more easily, either early morning or later on after work

on days that suit. I'm a social birder and whilst I do pop out on my own, I prefer company, and surveys allow for this too. 'Camo' Chris Keeling is my survey buddy, providing additional eyes and ears along with knowledge and banter.

Training for the surveys is provided beforehand and it is a great chance to meet like-minded volunteers. RSPB often rounds up with a 'thank you' get together, with previous events hosted at Minsmere and on The Boston Belle around The Wash.

Methodology varies considerably from survey to survey. Operation Turtle Dove require volunteers to walk two 1000m transects on public footpaths and log habitat and indicator species such as Yellowhammer along with any of the doves, within a square km grid, on two occasions, a month apart.

We chose to make a recce visit beforehand, which helped us log the habitat and made the recording process easier on the two survey days. We've never had any success logging the doves unfortunately, but lightbulb-like Yellowhammers lit our way, with bonus Little Owls, Hobbys and Red Deer over the years. And a noisy Peacock!

The Suffolk Wader Strategy provided us with a farm to survey on four occasions, several weeks apart. Meeting the landowner meant we could use their knowledge of suitable breeding areas where we could freely roam and observe Lapwing, Oystercatchers and Redshank. The first survey was a very long one; we needed to work out the best vantage points to observe the breeding species without disturbance. The last one too was slightly longer, as we wanted to make sure we hadn't missed any pairs. All four visits made for great general birding aside from the target waders, with the early starts and access to otherwise inaccessible/

private land providing a great backdrop for displaying Marsh Harriers, numerous Common Whitethroat and Reed Buntings with Cuckoos, singing warblers and even Hares.

The Tawny Owl survey is about to begin and we've a series of two square kilometre tetrads to survey late in the evening. The process is simple: work your way to the middle of the square and listen for 20 minutes, logging calls and their direction. We're hoping for other species of owl too and there is the bonus of being able to complete the survey paperwork in the pub afterwards.

It's never too late to get involved if you have the time; simply email your details into SOG - [info@sogonline.org.uk](mailto:info@sogonline.org.uk) - and we'll help you get involved. The extended birding opportunities, coupled with the feeling of doing something positive for birds make it a very worthwhile experience. I highly recommend it!

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Paul Morton

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## Return of the Osprey: Year 2 of Osprey Translocation Project in Poole Harbour

### Introduction

Fourteen Osprey chicks have arrived in Poole Harbour from Scotland as part of a five-year translocation project, which seeks to restore a south coast breeding population of this incredible bird of prey. Ospreys, also known as Mullet Hawks because of their exclusive fish eating habits, once bred all across Western Europe, including southern Britain but were sadly persecuted to extinction, with the last known historic breeding attempt occurring on the Somerset Levels in 1847.

### Project Background

Osprey are one of the UK's largest birds of prey with a specialised diet consisting entirely of fish. Seeing one catch a large fish from the surface of the water is a truly impressive spectacle. They were once widespread across Western Europe, but due to persecution and habitat destruction were almost wiped out from everywhere but they managed to re-establish a tiny population in Scotland in 1954. In the late 1990's a pioneering project led by the Roy

Dennis Wildlife Foundation re-established a breeding population of Osprey at Rutland Water in the Midlands; a big coup for Osprey conservation.

Local charity Birds of Poole Harbour are now working with the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation and local tech company Wildlife Windows to use the same methodology, translocation, to re-establish breeding Osprey on the south coast of the UK, which will provide an important link to birds breeding on the continent, central and northern England and Scotland.

### What is translocation?

Translocation is a commonly used method in wildlife conservation, involving moving individuals from a healthy, sustainable population to another suitable location with the goal to create another healthy population. For this project, chicks are collected under licence from Scottish breeding pairs and brought down to Poole. The chicks which remain completely wild and have no human interaction are acclimatised to the area in pens for 2-3 weeks before being released into the harbour, where they spend a further couple of weeks imprinting on the area (memorising it as 'home') before they migrate off to West Africa for two years prior to returning to breed for the first time.

### The story so far

The project began in the summer of 2017 when eight Ospreys were raised and released in Poole Harbour by the team. Incredibly they received news this winter that two of them had been spotted in Western Senegal and one in the Gambia, Africa. In slightly less excellent news it seems that one may have maybe been predated by a crocodile! Mortality is usually high in young Osprey as their first migrations are full of danger, so losses are to be expected and is the reason why a total of 60 chicks will be released over the five-year project.

Photo: Birds of Poole Harbour



Each spring and autumn Poole Harbour sees good numbers of migrant Osprey passing through the area as they make their way back and fourth between their breeding ground. However, excitingly it seems that the presence of the Osprey chicks in the harbour has encouraged Osprey from other populations to stick around and check out the area as well. Last year, a two-year old female from Rutland, CJ7, fed and roosted with the Poole chicks at their release site for a week. This year, on her spring migration up from Africa, she came straight back to the harbour where she was seen investigating several of the nesting platforms put up around the harbour in a previous effort to encourage Osprey to breed. It's hoped that next spring, she may arrive back at the same time as the Poole birds and begin thinking about setting up a territory around the harbour somewhere.

### This season

While the team wait with bated breath to see if any of the 2017 chicks return in the spring of 2019, the team are gearing up for a bumper release this year due to the arrival of fourteen new chicks with the release scheduled for August. Each of the fourteen newly arrived birds has a uniquely numbered leg ring, which for this year will be 001 – 014. Whilst in the pens the birds will be fed by a small team of dedicated volunteers three times a day on freshly cut fish which for a second year in a row has been kindly donated to the project by Poole based fresh fish supplier Seafresh.

Paul Morton, co-founder of the Birds of Poole Harbour charity stated:

*"I can't believe we're in the second year of the project already, it only feels like yesterday we were putting the application together. We've already successfully raised and released eight chicks last year and to have another fourteen this summer is really exciting. The project has had so much nationwide support and we can't thank everyone enough for their kind words".*

There is currently a life-size osprey nest, built by Jason Fathers of Wildlife Windows, on display in the Birds of Poole Harbour HQ on Poole Quay for visitors to see, and this nest will go out into the harbour to be used by the birds later this season. Due to popular demand, the team have also put on a number of Osprey cruises this August so that they can speak to the public about the project whilst cruising around the pristine setting of Poole Harbour and perhaps seeing an Osprey or two.

## Further information

Birds of Poole Harbour – Tel 07711370386

Twitter - @harbourbirds

Facebook – BirdsOfPooleHarbour

Website – [www.birdsofpooleharbour.co.uk](http://www.birdsofpooleharbour.co.uk)

Osprey Boat Cruises -

<https://www.birdsofpooleharbour.co.uk/events>



Photo: Birds of Poole Harbour

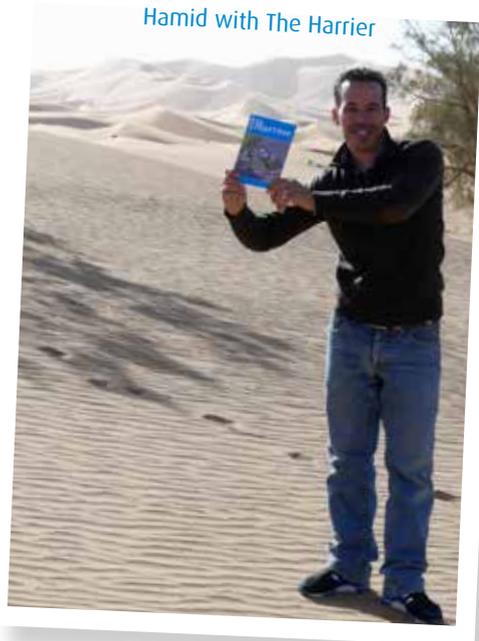
Osprey monitoring

## The Harrier abroad

In a previous Harrier there was a request for any photos of the magazine abroad, following Adam and his travels in China. In March this year, four of us had a week in Morocco, with local tour company Gayuin Birding Tours. Hamid, a driver and bird guide, is pictured near Merzouga in the Western Sahara desert with a recent Harrier. Highlights seen in the desert were Desert Sparrow, Egyptian Nightjar, Desert Warbler and both Spotted and Crowned Sandgrouse.

If any other SOG members have photos of The Harrier in other parts of the world then we'd be interested to hear from you.

Please email [info@sogonline.org.uk](mailto:info@sogonline.org.uk)



Hamid with The Harrier

Photo: Gi Gireco

# Summer Bird Review

## June 2018

The quarterly records section gives a snapshot of birds seen within the county during the period and is compiled by Eddie Marsh, predominately from data received by Suffolk BINS. All scarce and rare birds are subject to submission and acceptance by either SORC or BBRC. Updated lists on Accepted and Outstanding Records for 2017 and 2018 can be found on the SOG website - <http://www.sogonline.org.uk/suffolk-birds/>.

### Weather:-

June was a very dry and warm month with virtually no rainfall, there was just 1mm on the 9th and 10th with another 2mm on the 18th, making the months total 4mm. The month was very warm with daytime temperatures of 20C or above for 26 days; the highest was on the 25th being 28C. The lowest nighttime temperature of the month was 6C on the 11th.

### Birds June 2018:-

The continuing lone **Velvet Scoter** with 450 **Common Scoter** was reported off Minsmere on the 1st and the 15th - it was reported amongst 1000 **Common Scoter**. **Great White Egrets** continue to be reported from all around Suffolk at all the usual sites as reported in previous Harrier issues. This month **Spoonbill** were reported from Boyton RSPB, Hollesley RSPB, Pippes Ford and the highest count coming from Minsmere RSPB with 8 on the 29th. The only **Osprey** reported was north over Kessingland Cliff on the 2nd. At Boyton Marshes RSPB, a **Wood Sandpiper** on the 11th, with another at Minsmere RSPB on the 20th. At the same site a single **Curlew Sandpiper** on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th. The **Temminck's Stint** continued at Tinkers till the 1st at least. Reports of **Little**

**Gulls** from Minsmere RSPB, starting on the 22nd with high count of nine on the 28th. At Minsmere, **Mediterranean Gull** still in good numbers, looks like they are having a good breeding season this year and good numbers of **Common Tern**. On the 10th two **Arctic Skuas** off LBO including both pale and dark phase birds. A few **Black Redstart** still being seen throughout the month.

### Scarcer June Sightings:-

A **Corncrake** was found calling in the early hours on the Suffolk/Norfolk border near Bungay on the 7th; you had to take the footpath along the Earsham Dam to where the river bends opposite Rose Hall Gardens. The bird was heard calling again in the evening at 20.10hrs and seen very briefly in flight, it continued to call on the 9th and the general feeling was the bird was calling in Norfolk, although when standing in the close at Rose Hall which is in Suffolk the bird seemed very close. So there was lots of controversy as to whether you could count it on your Suffolk List!!! The **Purple Heron** was still at Minsmere RSPB on the 1st, but no further sightings during the month. A **Cattle Egret** at Minsmere RSPB reported flying south over north wall on the 5th. A **Glossy Ibis** paid a brief visit to Carlton Marshes on the 10th and another was seen at Botany Marshes on the 30th. Two **Black Kite** records reported this month, one at Leiston on the 14th (this could be the escaped Wrentham bird) and another over Hardwick Heath, Bury St Edmunds on the 16th.

Several **Honey Buzzard** sightings; from Minsmere RSPB singles on the 3rd, 5th and 13th, Alderton also one on the 3rd, at Dunwich one flew west on the 9th, one north at Boyton on the 10th and one over

Stutton on the 21st. A **Montagu's Harrier** reported from Shingle Street on the 3rd and a nice male reported going south at Lakenheath RSPB on the 9th. Two adult **Roseate Terns** reported at Minsmere RSPB on South Scrape on the 19th. The only **Turtle Dove** report was one from Earl Stonham on the 26th.



Photo: David Borderick

Rose Coloured Starling

### Red-backed Shrike



Photo: Gi Grieco

A nice bird was a female **Red-backed Shrike** found at Lakenheath RSPB by the pond near the visitor centre briefly on the 2nd. Another female was briefly in the North Bushes Minsmere RSPB on the 8th. At Minsmere RSPB the **Savi's Warbler** continued to be heard reeling from the 1st to the 27th at least and was occasionally visible. The 1st was the only day on which two were reported.

There had been an eruption of **Rose-coloured Starlings** reported in Europe and the UK awaited the arrival of this smart vagrant. The first arrival in Suffolk was a female/1st summer male at LBO on the 2nd from 08.30hrs to early afternoon although mobile. Then on the 3rd, possibly 3 birds

at LBO with 2 adults and the bird from the 2nd, good numbers of birders arrived to see them, the female/1st summer male still remained on the 4th. It was strange that these were the only sightings in Suffolk all month.

## July 2018

### Weather:-

July was another very dry and hot month although rain was recorded on six days, the highest at the end of the month with 11mm on the 30th and 22mm on the 31st. The month produced above average daytime temperatures with 30 days 20C or above and the coolest day being 19C on the 29th. We had 16 days of 25C or above, plus 5 days 30C or above with the highest being 34C on the 27th. Coolest nighttime temperature being 9C on the 4th with all the other nights being in double figures and 18C was the highest on the 27th which corresponded with the daytime high.

### Birds July 2018:-

Plenty of **Garganey** sightings with two to four birds being seen from Minsmere RSPB all month and two from Botany Marshes from the 19th till the month's end. The only **Great White Egrets** to be reported this month came from North Warren with one on the 20th and Minsmere with one on the 30th. This month **Spoonbill** reported from Minsmere with a count of seven on the 1st and 4th, two on the 14th, three on the 18th, one over Carlton Marshes on the 15th, one Botany Marshes on the 20th and 22nd and eight on Havergate on the 21st.

**Wood Sandpiper** sightings, three from Carlton Marshes SWT on the 2nd, also one at Micklemere from the hide, Botany Marshes one on the 21st, singles reported from Minsmere RSPB on the 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st. A very good month for adult **Curlew Sandpiper** with up to four at Minsmere RSPB, up to four at Hazlewood Marshes four on the 28th and eight at Havergate RSPB. An unusual sighting was a **Stone Curlew** at Felixstowe Ferry on the 27th. On the 10th single **Arctic Skua** and **Manx Shearwater** reported offshore at Minsmere RSPB. Single **Arctic Tern** from Minsmere RSPB on the 4th, two on the 12th, two on the 20th and an adult and juvenile on the 21st with one on the 24th, 27th and 28th. At Covehithe, one on the 16th and two juveniles at Sizewell on the 29th. A few nice **Black Tern** sightings this month; a single at Minsmere RSPB on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 16th, 22nd, 24th and on the 28th four birds around the reserve.

**Scarcer July Sightings:-**

A juvenile **Purple Heron** reported in flight at Lakenheath RSPB near Joist Fen. Again this month, **Honey Buzzard** sightings from Minsmere RSPB one on the 12th, 14th and 15th, plus also at Snape the 15th, another sighting of one over A12 at Wickham Market on the 31st; sightings presumed to be of the same bird. At Minsmere RSPB two juvenile **limosa Black-tailed Godwits** on East Scrape on the 20th, then one on the 22nd, 25th and 28th. A brief flyover **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Great Livermere on the 17th. Good sightings of **Roseate Tern** this month from Minsmere RSPB an adult on the 5th, two adults on the 8th, one on the 9th and 10th and one on the 27th while at Benacre two adults on the 24th.

Photo: Andrew Easton



Yellow-spotted Emerald

A rare sighting of an **Alpine Swift** was seen west over Blue Farm Trimley St Martin on the 6th. A **Bee-eater** was seen from Minsmere RSPB, at Island Mere Hide before flying off east on the 5th. At Newbourne Springs water meadow a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was heard calling on the 22nd and 23rd. At Minsmere RSPB the long staying **Savi's Warbler** continued to be heard reeling from the 8th to the 27th at least and strangely two birds reported reeling on the 15th and 21st; there had been a report of two in June!! Another **Rose-coloured Starling**, an adult was found with **Starlings** in Long Melford on the 15th; it was very elusive and only seen on the date.

**Of Interest:-**

Two ringed **White Storks** of unknown origin were seen at Theberton on the 7th and 8th and were also seen south over Hollesley on the 8th. There was an escaped **Golden Eagle** at Minsmere on the 12th.

**Insect News:-**

Andrew Easton found a **Yellow-spotted Emerald dragonfly** at Carlton Marsh on July 2nd. This amazing find constitutes not only a first sighting for Suffolk but also for the UK.

## August 2018

### Weather:-

August overall was a very warm month, although rain occurred on thirteen days ranging from 1mm to 20mm. On three dates we had double figure rainfall, these being 20mm on the 9th, 15mm on the 10th and 17mm on the 16th. There were 21 days where temperatures were 20C or above, the highest being 31C on the 3rd and 7th. There were six days where nighttime temperatures were single figures with lows of 7C on the 11th and 25th. The actual high for the month was 23C and actual low being 12C.

### Birds August 2018:-

There were still **Garganey** sightings from Botany Marshes, Havergate, Bawdsey East Lane, and Trimley SWT and Town Marshes, Aldeburgh consisting mainly of adults with the odd juvenile. On Aldeburgh Town Marshes three **Red-crested Pochard** (2 adults and a juvenile) were found on the 12th and remained to the 30th at least. At East Lane on the third lagoon two **Greater Scaup** reported on the 17th and 18th and a single remained until the 24th at least. A **Purple Heron** reported in-off at Hopton on the 17th. A few more **Great White Egrets** were reported this month with a high count of three from Minsmere RSPB from behind West Hide on the 20th. **Spoonbills** increased this month with double figures from Havergate with a maximum of 16 on the 6th and 14 on the 23rd at Hazlewood Marsh. **Osprey** south over Havergate RSPB on the 18th, one on the Stour at Seafeld Bay on the 19th and again on the 28th, one over Hazelwood Marshes SWT on the 23rd and 30th and one over Minsmere RSPB on the 25th and 31st.

**Wood Sandpiper** sightings came from Minsmere RSPB with one on four dates and at Trimley SWT one on the 2nd and two on the 21st. On the 8th, a single on the saltings at Felixstowe Ferry which remained

to the 13th at least. At Botany Marsh RSPB it produced one on the 6th and two on the 11th and three on the 22nd. Benacre Broad one on the 14th and Bawdsey East Lane one briefly on the 19th.

**Curlew Sandpiper** sightings, all adults initially, at Hazelwood SWT, Havergate RSPB and Blyth estuary and then two juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** arrived the end of the month at Minsmere and Havergate RSPB.

A **Caspian Gull**, which was bearing a yellow darvic ring, on the 15th at Benacre and a juvenile bird at Walberswick on the 27th, 28th and 29th. Still a few **Arctic Terns**, which were mainly juvenile birds, being reported during the early part of August with sightings from Sizewell, Felixstowe Ferry and Shingle Street. **Black Tern** sightings continued this month and mostly came from Minsmere RSPB and the Outfall at Sizewell from the 1st to 21st at least; the Terns were commuting between the two sites. An out-of-season **Short-eared Owl** at Kingsfleet on the 12th. Not many **Turtle Dove** records; Westleton Heath seemed the best place to see them being in area all month and two at Hazelwood on the 30th.

A **Tree Pipit** was found in Aldeburgh Churchyard on the 15th and two birds were caught and ringed at private site at Hollesley on the 21st. Two **Wood Warblers** were trapped and ringed in Suffolk on the 5th, one at a private site at Hollesley and another one at Brewery Farm, Stonham. Another was seen behind East Hide Minsmere RSPB early morning on the 24th. August was a very good month for **Pied Flycatchers** in Suffolk, with odd ones and twos on the 1st and 2nd and three ringed on the 1st at LBO. Then a major fall on the 3rd with 68 sightings, mostly juveniles, were sent into BINS; Lowestoft area 26 birds reported, Southwold 12 reported, Minsmere RSPB three, Thorpeness Old Caravan Park five, around Aldeburgh 14 seen, Shingle Street



Pied Flycatcher

Photo: John Richardson

16th left roost and headed towards Carlton, roosted again on the 17th. On the 23rd two birds reported one at Carlton presumably the bird earlier and one from Breydon on south wall at Burgh Castle. The Breydon bird was present on the 25th, 27th and 28th. A single bird reported again from Carlton Marshes on the 31st on the scrape.



Spotted Crake

Photo: Barry Woodhouse

one, Bawdsey area nine, LBO area two and Loompit Lake one, how many were not found? Still a few around on the 4th but the numbers had decreased, high counts being Gunton six, Aldeburgh seven, Thorpeness three, Orford two, LBO two and East Lane one. None reported on the 5th, but singles reported from LBO and Aldeburgh on the 6th and single Dunwich on the 7th. Then no reports until the 21st when a mini fall happened, three seen around Southwold, at East Lane area six, LBO recorded four and three from the Tomline Wall Felixstowe. Finally another five at LBO on the 31st.

#### Scarcer August Sightings:-

A **Quail** was heard calling at Kingsfleet on the 5th. On the 26th at Southwold, a **Sooty and Manx Shearwater** seen in the morning. A **Glossy Ibis** was reported from Botany Marshes RSPB on the 2nd and another sighting over Church Lane, Barham on the 25th. A **Cattle Egret** seen over Carlton Marshes SWT late evening and then seen to roost at Leathes Ham on the 15th, then on

A nice **Spotted Crake** at Lackford SWT from the Double Decker Hide showing on Jason's Pool on the 11th, and showed again throughout the month. The bird was extremely elusive and seemed to show briefly very early morning only, therefore a very frustrating bird to see. It was 20 years ago to the month that a **Spotted Crake** had last been seen at Lackford SWT.

On 13th a mega bird arrived in Suffolk, being an **American Golden Plover** in full summer plumage.



American Golden Plover

Photo: Andrew Moon



American Golden Plover

It was found by Richard Drew on Hazlewood Marshes SWT early afternoon, then flew off with **Golden Plovers** and was re-found in an onion field skirting the main road where better views were obtained and remained until 16.45hrs, but had been flighty and mobile. The bird showed again on the marsh and onion field on the 14th, was not located on the 15th. It was on the marshes late morning on the 16th and this brief sighting being the last of this cracking bird. To cap it all it was a new Suffolk tick for Suffolk's top lister Steve Piotrowski, how amazing is that!! Well done Steve and good to see you there.

Then in less than a week another mega and another American wader turned up,

this time it was a juvenile **Semi-palmated Sandpiper** at Minsmere RSPB on East scrape on the 18th. Found by Ali Riseborough he was not 100% sure of its ID, but knew he had a good bird. It was often distant and mobile, so was difficult for him to get close views also he found it hard to contact some of the counties top birders as they were either at the Bird-Fair or not available to get to site. A few good birders arrived including Gerald Jobson (who was pretty sure it was semi "P"), Jon Evans and few others. Then around 10.45hrs I arrived with two American birding friends Bob and Juli Toleno on holiday from California. Bob was soon on the bird with his scope and



Semi-palmated Sandpiper



confirmed it was a Semi "P" telling everyone the features that clinched it as this species. With the confirmation the news was soon out on the BINS network. It flew to the right of East Hide briefly and a few photos were obtained, it then flew to South Scrape and was soon re-found to the delight of birders turning up. The bird remained until the 23rd commuting between South and East Hides, showing well although a bit distant, but a lot of happy birders. Who would have guessed those two cracking birds turning up in Suffolk and in a few days of each other? On the 13th a Dotterel heading south calling at Shingle Street. On the 28th a smart **Red-necked Phalarope** arrived on Havergate RSPB at 11.00hrs and was seen straight out from the main hide.

A **Wryneck** was found at Minsmere RSPB sluice bushes on the 30th and also seen

the morning of the 31st, it was generally very elusive. On the 30th, Will Brame found a juvenile **Tawny Pipit** on the common at LBO just after 09.30hrs, a rare occurrence in Suffolk these days. Unfortunately the bird was lost at around 11.30hrs and it could not be relocated. On the 1st a nice female **Red-backed Shrike** was reported south-west of the Manor Terrace Car Park, Felixstowe and on the 17th a juvenile was found at Shingle Street near the Tennis Courts although a very elusive bird, it was re-found early evening 100yds south. A juvenile **Barred Warbler** was found in a hedgerow near Covehithe Church but it was extremely elusive and no further sightings. Another elusive bird was at Beach Farm on the 31st. A very nice surprise on the 22nd was a juvenile **Ortolan Bunting** caught and ringed at a private site in Hollesley; a very rare bird in Suffolk these days.

# Field Trip Reports

Gi Grieco

## Blaxhall for Nightjars

Friday, 8th June 2018

Leader: Ashley Gooding

There tends to be fewer SOG field trips during the summer; the two in June are based on seeing Nightjar. We're lucky in Suffolk to see these amazing birds and there is nothing better than standing out on a heathland late evening, either on the Suffolk Sandlings or in the Brecks listening to their evocative sound, hoping for it to fly past when you can sometimes then hear some of their other calls and wing-clapping display. On this trip Nightjar numbers were down compared to previous years, whether it was due to timing or fewer birds in the area. We were sure there was only one bird present in the area; we initially heard churring on one side of the track, followed by a close fly-by that allowed good but brief views then the churring commenced on the other side. Later as the light was fading we had another fly-by and the churring started back on the other side.

When standing out in the dark, other wildlife sounds fill the still nights such as the hooting of Tawny Owl and the barking of Muntjac but one species that we've not encountered for many years and which was always a precursor to the main event was Woodcock. Their display, known as roding, occurred as the light started to fall and they would do large loops around an area, circling as we stood. You knew soon after that it would then be the time of the Nightjar. Sadly Woodcock has declined greatly as a breeding species and we haven't encountered any on our trips in recent years. This year one member did find a nice roosting congregation of Silver-studded Blues at the start of the trip and we all admired this stunning butterfly, a specialist of the heathland we were visiting. Along the path we also found a colourful Cream-spot Tiger moth. Our thanks to Ash for leading the trip.



Silver-studded Blue

Photo: Gi Grieco



Marsh Harrier

Photo: Gi Grieco

Paul Gowen

## Nightjars at Minsmere

Friday, 15th June 2018

Leader: Paul Gowen

Seven members joined the leader on the annual Nightjar evening at Minsmere in June. It was good to see some new faces in addition to SOG Chairman Gi. The preamble before the Nightjars was a slow walk to Island Mere and Bittern hides, there unusually being little of interest on the Scrapes. The group headed up along the track to the top of Whin Hill and then proceeded down to Island Mere. On the way a Green Woodpecker played hide and seek on a telegraph pole and we heard Whitethroat in the bushes. We were able to spot Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Barn Owl, Cuckoo and Hobby amongst others but were all unable to locate the Savi's Warbler that continued to reel throughout our stay in Island Mere Hide just as did the two birds on the previous year's trip. There were quite a few mosquitoes through the wood but we briefly stopped at Bittern Hide when a birder

with binoculars said there was a raptor on a bush outside the hide. We set up scopes and saw it was a lovely Marsh Harrier and the birder was grateful for closer views in the scope.

With the weather fine, if a little breezy, the walk up to the heath for the Nightjars was pleasant and the first Nightjars were heard calling at 21:15, earlier than usual. Birds were heard calling intermittently up until 22:00 at which time a bird flew past the group who were all becoming annoyed by the mosquito/midges that filled the air as the breeze dissipated. There seems to be a definite decline in the Nightjar numbers in the Westleton/Minsmere area based upon the last five years of this SOG field trip, let's hope for better things in 2019. Also missing this year were the Glow-worms but we did hear a distant Stone Curlew.

## Redgrave and Lopham Fen

Sunday, 8th July 2018

Leader: Gi Grieco

It had been many years since my last visit and thought it would make a good choice for a SOG trip during the summer; to visit somewhere away from the usual places. In addition, due to the time of the year, many July trips look at more than birds so this excellent SWT reserve made a perfect choice.

Ten members, including two new ones on their first trip and two who lived locally and who were very helpful with details about the site, assembled in the car park at 9.00am and even by then the temperature was high, the county being in the midst of a heatwave. We were delighted to see two Spotted Flycatchers in the adjacent trees, for some the first of the year for this declining species. As we headed out on to trails around the fenland we encountered many butterflies including Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small White, Large White, Small Tortoiseshell and a Brimstone. This was the case across the site and Odonata were well represented too with species such as Southern Hawker, Common Darter and Azure Damselfly. To add to the mix we also saw Six-spot Burnet Moth and a black and yellow Spotted Longhorn beetle.

Across the reedbed we noted Marsh Harrier and Reed Bunting and later on Grey Heron and Blackcap. We headed down the Spider Trail hoping to see a speciality of the site, Fen Raft Spider. We had no luck initially, but Matt did find Great Diving Beetle larvae in one of the pools - then a shout from Brian went up saying he'd found an interesting dragonfly - likely Keeled Skimmer. As we

Photo: Gi Grieco



Keeled Skimmer

assembled we agreed that this was the case and fortunately I'd brought two books along, one on plants and the other on dragonflies and damselflies. From the photos we took we confirmed the identification, a species we had not expected to encounter. While we were all scanning the pool Marion said she'd found a Fen Raft Spider down by some pondweed, right under our noses although it was well camouflaged!

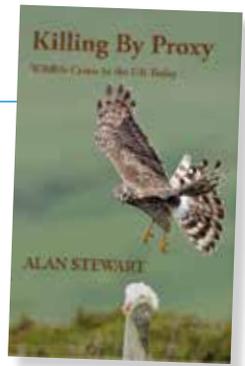
We proceeded around the site, the temperature and humidity rising all the time. Of a few interesting plants seen, Cotton Grass and Lousewort were notable. We came to a pool where a lucky few either saw or heard a Kingfisher briefly and there were three Little Egrets present. We passed very quickly through the woods, any lingering and we were soon covered in mosquitoes! We came to an area known for Scarce Emerald Damselfly and after some patience finally managed to find one individual. Back at the centre we stopped for much needed refreshments and whilst there had good views of Purple Hairstreak in the oaks.

As insects played such a part in the day we decided to continue the theme and finish the day at Pakefield Woods. We were delighted to see at least three Silver-washed Fritillaries along with further close views of Purple Hairstreak. All in all an enjoyable day and well worth the decision to add it to the events calendar.

## Book review

# Killing by Proxy, Wildlife Crime in the UK

by Alan Stewart



This is a book about wildlife crime that doesn't pull any punches in describing the author's work and experience as a police wildlife crime officer, investigating hare coursing, badger baiting, deer poaching, illegal fox hunts and the killing of raptors. Alan Stewart is a retired Tayside police officer who, after retirement in 1997, went on to become the force's wildlife crime officer in a civilian capacity, the first such full time post in Scotland. Retiring from this role in 2011, he continued to be involved in wildlife crime related work as an intelligence officer with the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit, finally retiring in 2015. Alan Stewart has been presented with several prestigious awards during his policing career. In 2001 he was most notably awarded the MBE for services to policing wildlife crime.

When I agreed to review *Killing by Proxy* it was with the expectation of a dramatised account of the author's career as a police Wildlife Crime Officer - I couldn't have been more wrong. The author draws on his experience to consider and discuss the mindset of the keeper who sets traps or poisoned baits, and the attitudes of landowners who plead ignorance as to the actions of their employees, as well as those organisations that refuse to condemn or even acknowledge the killing of protected species.

Alan Stewart makes his own views on the shooting of game clear when he says that he owned a .22 rifle until the 1990s and used a shotgun until 2011. In doing so he makes his personal position clear when he

says on page nine that he is not against the shooting of game birds. As a teenager he helped local gamekeepers with their work and regularly joined the beaters on driven grouse, partridge and pheasant shoots. I hate to use the term 'countryman' which in my view is too often used to justify outdated prejudices and practices in the countryside while only city dwellers ignorant of 'country ways' or, at worst, animal rights anti activists, would take the opposite view. In this instance I am happy to describe Alan Stewart as a 'countryman.' A challenge to rural stereotypes he makes it abundantly clear that he is opposed to fox hunting, indeed for a shooting man he appears to be surprisingly tolerant of foxes. Bang! Bang! There goes another stereotype.

Topically, the book's cover carries a photograph of a Hen Harrier which appears to be targeting a baited post. On first sight of the book's cover it will come as no surprise that I expected a rather predictable and sad tale of ingrained attitudes and the wanton killing of birds of prey. I was very quickly proved wrong, as the author opens with the difficulties of prosecuting fox hunts in breach of the letter of the law on hunting with hounds, the use of snares and hare coursing. The illegal killing of raptors is of course discussed in depth and begins at the end of the first section on blood sports, but within the wider context of wildlife crime in the UK.

Nevertheless I was surprised to find reviews on Mark Avery's blog *The Sunday Book Review* expressing disappointment with so

much attention spent on wildlife crime other than raptor persecution, particularly of hen harriers. I find such views to be blinkered and frankly missing the vital and key point. Thus this reviewer draws the reader's attention to Part 2 *page 73*, Raptor Persecution Today – where in discussing the RSPB Bird crime 2016 report the author quotes BASC's acting chief executive as saying that the killing of raptors to protect game birds was a fool's bargain that had to stop or risk their sport being banned, and that those who do so are criminals who risked wrecking shooting for the majority. A key point well made. Sadly while organisations such as BASC, which the author describes as by far the most rational and reasonable of the organisations representing shooting and game management, deliver statements encouraging a change in attitudes and behaviours there will always be those who are prepared to break the law and risk prosecution and conviction in the courts. I have worked with wildlife crime officers and I am only too aware that they may be obliged to carry out wildlife crime investigations while at the same time investigating the regular run of burglaries, muggings and assaults that human beings inflict on one another. This is an important consideration in any discussion of wildlife crime and is discussed in detail under the heading Partnership Working and the Use of Experts.

However, given the authors experiences on Tayside there is understandably a strong Scottish bias throughout, so while I was pleased to see the author recommending a review of the complement of police officers dedicated to investigating wildlife crime in Scotland, I would have liked to see this discussion widened to cover the rest of the UK. Similarly, the author's view that Spain is possibly nearest the UK in terms of private land ownership, game shooting and raptor persecution. Therefore I would like to have seen exploration of the Spanish experience widened to discuss the attitudes of Spanish landowners and hunters.

That is not to say by any means that the author's focus is entirely on Scotland. Investigations and incidents across the UK are held up for forensic dissection and the author does not hold back with criticism of botched investigations and mistakes made by police NGO's and the courts. It will come as no surprise that Westminster politics and driven grouse shooting come in for scathing criticism although there is no mention of Natural England's controversial hen harrier brood management plan.

If I have to make a criticism at this point, it would be that the book is divided into parts rather than chapters; each section is broken into sub-headings which in some cases deserve lengthy chapters of their own. Consequently I felt a little cheated by the rather brief diversion on re-wilding which I am prepared to argue would have positive implications for field sports as well as biodiversity. A further criticism with regard to the book's layout is the omission of an index which means that the serious student of wildlife crime will make heavy weather of referring back to a specific text or legislation.

I would like to know more about the author's background and his interest in wildlife and the driver that led to him becoming a wildlife crime officer. It is I confess a minor criticism, the author's style is direct and unsentimental, and wastes no time in getting down to the facts. This is a very readable account of wildlife crime in the UK which explores the attitudes and prejudices of landowners and their employees and the politics that invest and hamper investigations and prosecution of wildlife crime. While targeted at readers with a wider interest in wildlife crime and legislation this book crucially explores the economic and cultural drivers for example, peer pressure, which encourages gamekeepers to break the law. If birders as a pressure group are to influence government and landowners then I strongly recommend that you add *Killing by Proxy* next to Mark Avery's *Inglorious* on your bookshelf.

## Council for 2018

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### Bird Recorders

#### North-east Area Recorder:

**Andrew Green**, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP  
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: [bird-ne@sns.org.uk](mailto:bird-ne@sns.org.uk)

#### South-east Area Recorder:

**Scott Mayson**, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY  
Tel: 01394 385595 Email: [bird-se@sns.org.uk](mailto:bird-se@sns.org.uk)

#### West Area Recorder:

**Colin Jakes**, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN  
Tel: 01284 702215 Email: [bird-w@sns.org.uk](mailto:bird-w@sns.org.uk)

### Membership Secretary

**Kevin Verlander** 9 Heron Close, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1UR



# 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
- 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*

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