

Summer 2017 No.189



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover photograph:

Blue Tits (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) by Gavin Durrant @GavinDurrant1

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The Harrier

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Editorial

Welcome to the Summer edition of The Harrier! We've plenty of articles, trip reports and news for you to enjoy. My recent birding highlight was undoubtedly the field trip this month into STANTA and Jonathan Lawley's trip report is included in this edition. It was great to meet new SOG members and to be out enjoying the flora and fauna with a sharp eyed and keen eared group of people. Watch out for the trip report in the Autumn edition. It has also been great to hear the news from friends of ours that they have Little Owls nesting in their Hadleigh garden: six fledged chicks have entertained them and their children.



Little Owl

Photo: James Allen

In this edition I ask you to do two things. If you use the internet to shop, please could you register with 'Give as you Live'. It takes just a few minutes yet can raise valuable funds for SOG. Secondly, please do book your tickets for the Derek Moore memorial lecture in Ipswich on the 15th November if you can make it. It will be great to see as many as possible of you there.

There is a letter to us all from our new President, the well-known journalist, long-standing all-round naturalist and lifelong Portsmouth FC fan, John Grant.

Locally, we have news of the SOSSwift campaign, with lots of boxes and call systems erected and a series of talks to come during July. The RSPB have contributed an article on their work restoring heathland and David & Margie Carter have an update on their move from the west of Suffolk to the east.

In regular updates, we have trip reports from Eastbridge and Shingle Street, both very enjoyable outings, and Eddie Marsh has once again contributed the Spring Bird Review (I compiled May – look out for errors – so I now know what a heroic effort it is!).

From further afield, the 'Inglorious Bustards' have detailed a year's birding in the Strait of Gibraltar and Stephen Rutt is once again our SOG exile, this time in Madeira.

Rasik Bhadresra, who is fast becoming a regular contributor, describes the dance of displaying waders and Alison Ballantyne has analysed Peter Reading's 'Bird Lady' for our Poetry Corner.

After nearly four years this is my final edition as Editor. I would especially like to thank all the writers and photographers who have contributed so much to SOG and The Harrier and made my tenure here so much easier. Please do keep sending in your articles, observations and photographs; The Harrier is, after all, both by and for you all.

Eddie

PS love you, Granty, but... Up the Cherries!

From Pompey to the SOG presidency – a journey of pride and passion

Photo: By kind permission of EADT



I certainly have since – several times. Football isn't loved by everyone, I can understand that. But those of us with the game, and more especially our clubs, deeply rooted in our lives, our hearts, our DNA, will know that the emotions expressed by those Town fans at Fratton all those years ago are ones to savour and to cherish.

There were people on the pitch. They thought it was all over. And, in a football sense, indeed it was. But as far as my connection with Suffolk, with the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group and a with a much-valued close friend is concerned, in some weird and truly wonderful way, the scene that unfolded at about 4.40pm on Saturday, May 4, 1968, was just the beginning. Let me explain.

I was a 14-year-old Portsmouth Football Club fan looking on from the Fratton End at my beloved Pompey's Fratton Park home as hundreds of Ipswich Town fans invaded the hallowed turf. Us Pompey fans were sporting enough not to begrudge the leaping through their moments of joy – their team, under the leadership of then boss Bill McGarry, had just beaten us 2-1 on the final day of the 1967-1968 season to pip Queen's Park Rangers to the old Second Division title. Good on them. They deserved it, and their unbridled passion and delight I can recall to this day. I hadn't experienced it for myself with Pompey at that stage, but thankfully

I later learned that among the delirious Suffolk hordes dancing about on the pitch was a certain "bean-Pole" of a lad who, 10 years later in 1978, I was to meet for the first time. He's Steve Piotrowski and since that very first introduction during a birding visit to Landguard, long before the place became a bird observatory, he's been a truly great mate and an absolute inspiration for me, as well as for countless other Suffolk birders. Of course, he's pulled my leg on many occasions about Fratton '68 – but Pompey have seen to it that I've got my own back in very good measure several times since!

It was Steve who recruited me to the ranks of the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group and for almost 40 years the group has been a central part of my life. It's been a treasured source of fun and friendship ever since I first signed up. I've enjoyed hundreds of indoor meetings and field trips, and I've always admired – and in my own small ways tried to advance – the spirit of camaraderie that exists among us members. To me, that's

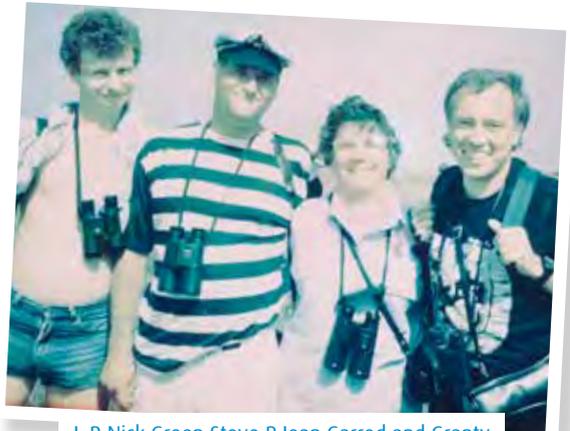
every bit as important as the birding. In the past I've served on the SOG council; for a while back in the 1980s I edited what is now The Harrier, the group's brilliant quarterly magazine, and I've had the privilege of leading many a birding walk for the group. I've loved everything to do with SOG. So just imagine the immense pride I felt when our chairman Gi Grieco told me the SOG council would like me to serve as group president! It took all of one second for me to accept the offer!

I was deeply moved by the outpouring of praise that came my way at the group's 2017 annual meeting, when I was formally declared president. I must warmly thank our secretary Edward Jackson for his very kind words about me – words that meant a very great deal to me. And I must thank all the members who showed their support for me. I said in my acceptance speech that I will be following in the footsteps of a Suffolk legend. My great friend Mr Piotrowski has served SOG so well in many roles over many years and the last office he held is the one I am now installed in. If I do a job that is a fraction as good as the way he served as president I will be more than satisfied.

I will do my very best for the group, I can assure members of that. I will be striving to see that group membership rises and that we attract as many young people as possible. I am fortunate enough to be in a professional position in which I can help to raise the group's profile and make more members of the general public aware of who we are and what we are doing. As environment correspondent for the East Anglian Daily Times and its associated newspapers and social media platforms I will endeavour to give publicity to any of our group's newsworthy

activities. I would also like to see the group continue and expand its active role in nature conservation and I will try to ensure that it stands up against wildlife abuses wherever possible. The first such issue to arise since I became president has been the appalling culling of Great Cormorants at Loompit Lake, near Felixstowe – the group is continuing its campaign against this entirely unjustified slaughter.

In one sense my connection with Suffolk started in 1975 when I was transferred from the East Anglian Daily Times' Clacton office – actually the attic in the then chief district reporter's house – to the newspaper's relatively palatial Sudbury office after a year in Essex. But isn't life strange sometimes? I like to think that, in some marvellous, mystical way, my journey into Suffolk's birding community was pre-ordained on that Saturday afternoon in May '68 – an afternoon when Suffolk joy came to my home town and this wonderful corner of East Anglia first entered my consciousness. I'm still very much a Pompey fan – I will be till I die – but I've been very much a Suffolk fan too for donkey's years now. I'm also, of course, very much a SOG fan – and you've got yourselves a very, very proud president.



L-R Nick Green Steve P Jean Garrod and Granty

Photo: By kind permission of EADT



Edward Jackson

SOS Swifts

In the past few months, SOS Swifts volunteers have been helping individuals and organisations source Swift nest boxes and call systems, for a variety of both private and more public projects including:

- 16 boxes on Harkstead Church
- 12 boxes on the Suffolk Coastal District Council offices in Melton
- 12 boxes on the Essex & Suffolk Water Southwold water tower
- 6 boxes in the Hopkins Homes Prospect Place new development in Framlingham
- 5 boxes on the United Reform Church in Hadleigh
- 4 boxes at two private locations in Nacton
- 3 boxes at a farm in Milden
-giving a total of 58 boxes so far, all with call systems.

At Framlingham, the new style 'Manthorpe' boxes have been integrated into the building; all the other boxes have been made to order by John Stimpson.

Once again we are offering free public talks throughout July on Swift natural history and conservation. All events run from 7-9pm. Please do come along if you can and encourage family and friends to do the same.

Tue 4 July

Lavenham Village Hall

Tue 11 July

Brantham Village Hall

Thu 13 July

Framlingham United Free Church

Thu 20 July

Haverhill Old Independent Church

Thu 27 July

Lowestoft SWT Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre

SOG News...

Welcome!

Welcome to Samson Richard John Faiers who was born on 12th May weighing 9lb 3oz to SOG members Tasha Stewart and Adam Faiers. Congratulations all three. May he be like his father – sharp of eye and keen of ear.



Photo: Tasha Stewart

Derek Moore Memorial Lecture

The inaugural Derek Moore Memorial Lecture to be given by Dr. Mark Avery is on 15th November at Ipswich School. Tickets priced at £7 each can be purchased via 01473 890089, raising funds for the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Carlton Marsh appeal, a very worthy cause. Prior booking is essential. It would be great to see you there.

Campaign Against Raptor Persecution

SOG are pleased to announce the donation of £100 of CARP funds to 'Birders Against Wildlife Crime'. Please note that any suspicious activity that you see whilst out birding can be reported to the Suffolk Police Wildlife Crime Officer, PC Mark Bryant, on 07880 912234 – a handy contact to store in your mobile phone.



SOG Merchandise

We have a range of SOG branded clothing, mugs and mouse mats available for purchase.

Please contact Mark on 01449 723346 or mark@hudsonteamware.co.uk to place an order.





A Blackcap checking out the new pond!

David & Margie Carter

West to East continued...

It has now been 21 months since we moved from Brettenham into the outskirts of Stowmarket. The new garden planting is starting to get established and we have created a small pond; whereas at Brettenham we had a large, natural pond, approximately 12m x 4m, the new one came in the post!

We had a fairly quiet winter on the bird front, although we did see up to five Little Egrets together on the meadows adjacent to the River Rat and both Woodcock and Common Snipe were flushed from the damp areas of the copse, making welcome additions to the "seen from the garden" list.

Wintering Blackcaps were attracted to the feeders, but we only had one visit from a Siskin and no sightings of any Lesser Redpolls.

Pied Wagtails are nesting nearby under the solar panels on a neighbour's roof.

Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Mistle Thrushes, Blackbirds, Treecreepers and Starlings appear to have bred successfully locally, however our Blue Tit nest failed, probably due to the cold weather in early May.

A recent notable garden sighting was our first House Sparrow, taking our new list up to 70 species.

The Aerobic Waltz

Back in late March we were lucky to have a 'room with a view' in an old mill conversion; even luckier that the view comprised a river running through a marsh, grassy damp areas – some waterlogged – interspersed with large and small areas of the previous year's dry flowering stalks of reeds moving in the wind. There were the 'gooselike' Shelduck, prodding Oystercatchers, feeding Greylags, one or two Curlews wading along the exposed edges of the river, a few Lapwings scattered about, a Little Egret rearing its head with a sagging crest from along a narrow ditch on the far right, and sporadically a Grey Heron flying across the marsh. Occasionally a Marsh Harrier with its somewhat rounded wings would take to the air from amongst the amoeboid-shaped reed swamps, fly-glide around for a while before dropping back into obscurity. Altogether a real treat, especially through the eye of a telescope.

But every so often a spectacle would break loose and an innocent looking bird with large white-tipped rounded wings would rise all of a sudden vertically skyward. More often than not followed by another closing in on it, in what looked like a spiral chase, pairs of fan-shaped wings appearing to beat in unison, one moment showing the upper dark side of the wings, next the white generous bib of the underside and the rufous rump as the large flaps flipped. Tossing, turning, twisting, rolling for up to a minute at a time. They reminded one of well-versed ballet dancers dancing in a weightless universe. La La Land. This supple, athletic, flexible and energetic aerial acrobatic dance would suddenly come to an end as one of them literally plummeted down in a joyful, life-affirming plunge to a wonderfully executed landing, wings drawn in microseconds before the dark pink

legs touched the ground, all movements brilliantly controlled, the other following suit.

An extraordinary feat had been performed of which the birds appeared not even to be aware, now walking gently, calmly and confidently as if to say 'life can go on as normal'. The composed manner, the crest erect, difficult to tell if the heart was beating fast, providing a perfect cover for its tantalising manoeuvres in the sky. It was impossible to think this was not planned and executed just as was intended. Once down, the sun caught the emerald green colour varnished with lustrous magenta iridescence of the dark upper parts of the Plover. As it walked, the long curved crest on a black crown of the male bobbed up and down – a mannerism that most probably gave it its name – Lapwing. A few minutes later and we would witness another flappy and dextrous aerial exhibition, wonderfully controlled. And yet another and another, sometimes singly. One simply couldn't tire of this eye-catching spring courtship display of the males. Pure magic.

Photo: Gi Grieco





Heathland regeneration

Ian Barthorpe

RSPB Minsmere heathland restoration project



During the winter of 2015/16, work started to restore part of the famous RSPB Minsmere nature reserve to its former glory. Mumberry Hills, close to the village of Westleton, is an important area of the Suffolk Sandlings heath, but in recent years had become dominated by birch woodland, to the detriment of rare heathland wildlife such as Woodlark, Nightjar and tiger beetles.

The Sandlings heaths are important habitats protected under UK and international designations. Heathland is also one of the RSPB's priority habitats, with many species of bird, insect and plant thriving in this nutrient-poor habitat.

The Suffolk Sandlings is a unique mix of heather and acid grassland that stretches from Lowestoft to Ipswich along the coastal strip of Suffolk, but just a handful of patches remain: as little as 8% of the heaths present in 1900. Losses have been due to a combination of conversion to arable or forestry, house building and reduced grazing.

One of the largest tracts of Sandlings heath occurs in the Minsmere/Westleton/Dunwich area, and this project aims to restore a further 40 hectares around Mumberry Hills to its former purple-clad glory.

Reduced grazing at Mumberry Hills, partly the result of the decline in rabbit populations due to myxomatosis, led to the establishment of self-sown birch and pine over the last 40 years or so. Removal of these trees will allow heather and gorse to once again return, and with them the rare wildlife associated with Sandlings heath will once again find a home on Mumberry Hills.

Many of the trees were felled in 2015/16, with further trees and the piles of brash cleared during the winter of 2016/2107 and these were then removed from site. Over the coming winter of 2017/18, some of the stumps will be reduced in height and the built-up vegetated litter layer removed to expose dormant seed which should then germinate and pave the way towards the re-colonisation of heather, gorse and other heathland plants.

Not all trees have been removed, with those around badger setts, and adder hibernacula left standing. Following consultation with the local community, the felling project was also revised to leave shelterbelts of trees alongside the Mumberry Hills public footpath, which forms part of a popular local walk.

Previous heathland restoration projects at Minsmere and other sites on the Suffolk coast, including a joint RSPB-Forestry Commission project within Dunwich Forest, show that heather and other heathland plants can re-colonise quickly from the seedbank once the trees, bracken and leaf litter are removed and the soil is once again exposed.

There was immediate success when a churring Nightjar was found on the newly cleared area during the summer of 2016. This was the first breeding Nightjar on this part of the reserve for several years. It is hoped that Woodlarks, Dartford Warblers and silver-studded blue butterflies will soon follow, as Mumberry Hills once again becomes an amazing home for heathland wildlife.



Photo: Simon Post

RSPB info board

Give as you Live

If shopping on the internet, please consider signing up for the giveasyoulive.com website. This generates, at no cost to you, a small amount of commission for your favourite charity. It is very easy to use and a button can be saved onto your search engine toolbar that reminds you to click where relevant. To date, with just five supporters selecting SOG as their nominated charity, we have raised over £215 for Suffolk birds and birders, so please consider participating in this additional simple and free way of supporting SOG.



Cory's Shearwaters

Stephen Rutt

Pterodroma

I arrived on Madeira in late August. Madeira at the best of times is a humid, muggy place, as Atlantic islands tend to be. It kicks up out of the ocean, 520 km west of Morocco, a perfect volcanic shape rising to 1,800 metres and wreathed in clouds of its own making. It is mostly cloaked in dense laurel forests and away from the beaches it is hard to get a clear view of it, hard to get a handle on what Madeira is, what it looks like beyond green trees and blue sky. It is hard to get a handle too on their Firecrests, a different, duller species than ours, always slipping into the shadows of the tallest, darkest trees. It's hard to get a handle on their Chaffinches – luridly different with their bright green on the back, salmon pink and grey on the breast – and yet the same species as ours.

Things are clearer out to sea. I was on a Wind Birds pelagic, on a RIB, which is best imagined as a boat smaller in every

direction than you would want, that thumps into every wave with a jarring vigour. We were here for Pterodroma petrels.

Pterodroma petrels are birds of myth and mystery: what is not known about them vastly outstrips what is. The English name for the family is the 'gadfly' petrel, gadfly defined by my dictionary as "a person who annoys". Though flippantly truthful, I prefer Pterodroma: ancient Greek for "winged runner". Both capture the essence of the family: fleeting, elusive, frustrating.

Fea's Petrels were discovered in 1899 by Leonardo Fea. Not long afterwards, Zino's Petrel was first found, thought to be a version of Fea's, and lost again. It wasn't until the 1960s that Paul and Frank Zino rediscovered them breeding on the third highest of the Madeiran peaks, the Pico do Arieiro, where their mournful wailing haunts the high peaks. They sing slightly differently

to the Fea's which breed on the Desertas Islands and Cape Verde. Both species are rare. There are over a thousand individual Fea's Petrels and somewhere between 100-200 Zino's Petrels, depending on how successful the breeding season is, and where the wild fires that strike Madeira burn. In 2010 only one chick survived; thirty-eight others and four adults were burnt alive.

The Atlantic lapping gently on the harbour wall is blue. Beyond the headland the waves crash harder, blacker. Cory's Shearwaters circle lazily, slowly wheeling through waves. Hugo, the guide, while explaining the rules of the boat, purrs in broad Portuguese-accented English: "We do not stop for Cory's or Bulwer's".

Both were new for me. Both were everywhere among the waves, ever moving.

The Bulwer's Petrels lithe and quick, bat-like flickering wings in a restless flight, their bodies matte dark, tapering to a thin tail. They are unique – breeding across the Atlantic and Pacific in a thin band of latitude, rarely venturing north or south. There is nothing else that I have seen that looks like them. And yet, the boat motors past. Pterodroma or bust. No regard for the commonplace oddities of this place.

I soon saw my first Fea's. Distantly, briefly, underwhelmingly. It was an encounter loaded with an excitement that the sighting — fleeting, distant, disappearing in the gaps between waves — couldn't satisfy. Like meeting a childhood hero. The second, several hours later, was better.

Seabirds harness the wind to fly. Shearwaters sail elegantly, slowly.

Photo: Stephen Rutt



Bulwer's Petrel

Pterodromas spiral up, hit their apex, dip a wing and shoot seawards at a shallow angle, like following waves through the air. We saw this Fea's coming from far off, stitching sea to sky. It is a fast flight, deceptively so. In seconds it was beside us, arcing up, wings flexed forward. Dove-grey back and a fainter black line, zigzagging down the wings. Its tail is paler — the bird fading out. Its head darker — black-eyed, black blunt bill. It dipped its wing and vanished.

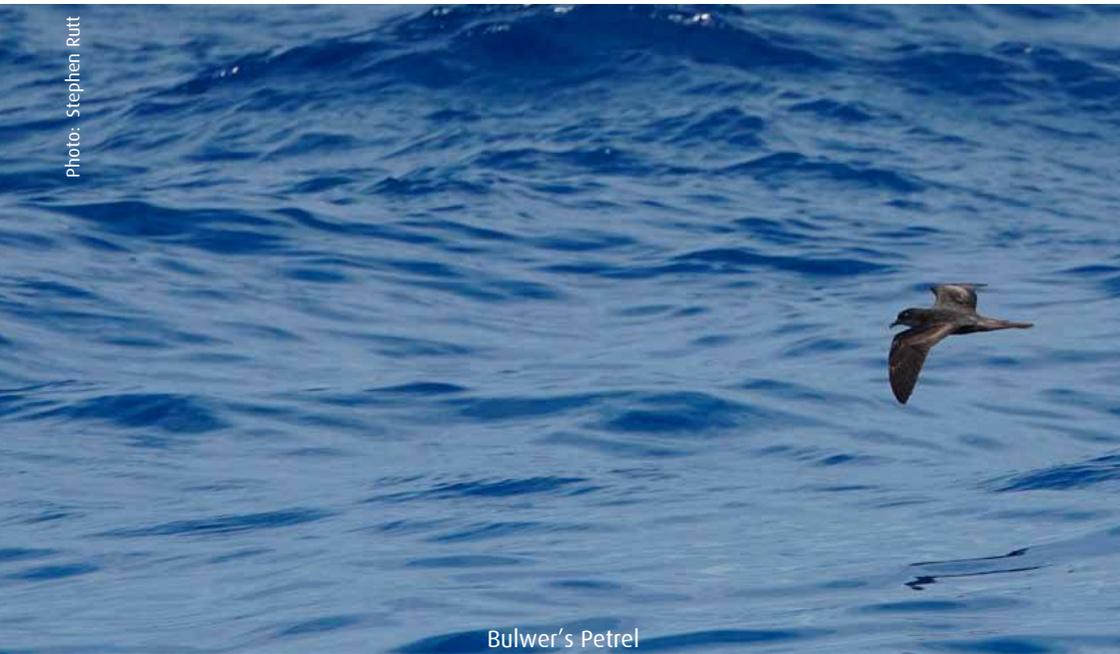
I have a video of that encounter: ten seconds of meeting a mythical seabird. Watching it still sends bolts of excitement through my nervous system.

It wasn't until the second afternoon at sea that we found a Zino's. Catarina behind the boat's engines spotted a Zino's. She shouted: all idle chat stopped. A boat full of binoculars all drawn to one bird. It is essentially identical to a Fea's. It swung up, reached its apex, and sheered down alongside the

boat. It took all I could remember and all I could see to note the differences. The whiter underwing, the thin black bar running up it. The smaller, lighter size, the bill not so brutishly big, the flight that feels slower. It sheered behind the boat, between us and the high Picos of Madeira, before flying away over the waves. We all watched it until it disappeared over the edge. And as it disappeared the feeling was part relief — the trip a success, the birds still in existence — and part awe that they exist at all.

Yet. As I look back on it now it all seems tainted with metrics. It is not because of their essential similarity to the Fea's Petrel — the two species have a very different essences — but because rarity is a fact that conquers all. Fea's may thrill but the experience of a Zino's is difficult to separate out from their sheer precariousness of their population. Metrics trump the mystery.

Photo: Stephen Rutt



Bulwer's Petrel



Photo: Simon Tonkin

Common Cranes at La Janda

Niki Williamson and Simon Tonkin

A Year in the Straits

The ebb and flow of migration across the Strait of Gibraltar never really stops. Here's how in the past year The Inglorious Bustards have been gaining a new perspective on the journeys of some familiar – and less familiar – species.

Birdfair 2016 marked the beginning of our journey this year – a beautiful summer weekend to bid a fond hasta luego to friends before heading off to our home in the Straits of Gibraltar on our next tour-leading adventure. We weren't the only ones choosing to head south, and our movements coincided with the steadily mounting autumn migration.

All through **August, September and October**, our Suffolk-bred Turtle Doves, Barn Swallows, Cuckoos, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Marsh Harriers to name but a few were streaming south,

travelling mostly by cover of darkness, all following the bustling East Atlantic flyway to wintering grounds in Africa.

At only 14 km wide, the Strait of Gibraltar is the narrowest stretch of water between Europe and Africa. As well as many millions of Northern European passerines, twice a year over 250,000 migrating raptors choose this point to cross between continents.

The birds gather in huge numbers, making use of the thermals that rise off the rocky coastlines to give them the lift they need to traverse the short – but potentially deadly – stretch of sea.



European Bee-eaters

Photo: Simon Tonkin

This breath-taking migratory spectacle is beyond compare. Imagine looking up and seeing 20,000 Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, White Storks, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, with supporting groups of Black Storks, Egyptian Vultures and European Bee-eaters. No matter how many times we see it, it never loses its magic. It's not surprising that this experience has the power to reduce many folk to tears!

This phenomenon continues well into **November** as thousands of Griffon Vultures join the throng. At this time, we also enjoyed exploring the more mountainous inland areas of Malaga province, where delights such as Alpine Accentor, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Rock Sparrow were starting to move down to more agreeable altitudes for the winter, making them much easier to find. We also got to enjoy the odd migratory overshoot, in the form of Fieldfares and Redwings enjoying ex-pat life as well as a wealth of fruits and berries on the nearby farmland.

December and January were fine months to explore the area's wetland habitats. The flooded farmland fields were at their absolute best, hosting a wetland spectacle to rival Coto Doñana. Many thousands of Common Cranes congregated, while we enjoyed huge flocks of Northern Lapwings, Skylarks and more, many of which I'm sure are wintering here thanks to the gargantuan conservation efforts of Sam Lee and her RSPB Farmland team, doing their

best to ensure a successful breeding season in the UK's harsh farmland habitat. While we were still without a heart-warming pint of Adnams, wintering Common Chiffchaffs, Robins, Song Thrushes and Blackcaps provided us with a much-needed taste of UK life.

February is when it all kicks off again. One day conditions will suddenly be right, and huge columns of Black Kites are visible surging from the northern coast of Morocco as if someone has popped a bottle of champagne. Seemingly within minutes they're here – and if we're not working, we like to sit on the clifftops and raise a glass of vino tinto to their welcome arrival!

Perhaps surprisingly, at this coldest, dampest part of the Suffolk year, swallows and martins have already started their passage north by now – the earliest we had were on Christmas Day!

This year for us, February also brought everyone's favourite waif and stray, Jonny Rankin, who stayed with us for the first legs of his epic Dovestep 3 walking extravaganza, so well-supported by the good people of SOG.



Photo: Simon Tonkin

Short-toed Eagles on migration



Northern Bald Ibis

Photo: Quentin Blake (probably)

Throughout **March and April** the migratory return journey was in full rush hour. What a joy to see the promise of return fulfilled by familiar species such as Barn Swallows, House Martins, Ospreys, Nightingales, Common Redstarts – and the odd flavissima Yellow Wagtail – pouring through on their way back to the UK! We also got to enjoy the arrival of such stunners as Collared Pratincoles, Stone Curlews, Melodious Warblers, Tawny Pipits, Woodchat Shrikes and Black-eared Wheatears.

As you read this, we'll have been enjoying the later movement of UK birds like Common Swift, Pied Flycatcher and the deeply anticipated Turtle Dove, all merged in with a fantastic passage of almost the entire European population of Honey Buzzards. It's also been the peak of the **May and June** breeding season – a perfect time to observe local resident species. This is one of the very few areas in Europe where you can find all five of the European swifts: Common, Pallid, White-rumped, Little and Alpine. It's also a fine place to get outstanding views of the critically endangered Northern Bald Ibis. A successful reintroduction programme of this weird and wonderful avian creature means that the Straits now holds possibly the most viable – but certainly the most viewable – population in the world.

With its intense heat, **July** is probably the quietest month, so this year we'll spend

it in air-conditioned offices, forging ahead with new partnerships we are building to ensure that we, and the people we bring here, are able to give something back to conservation in the Strait. We're working with organisations like Fundacion Migres, who have been monitoring the migration for 25 years and are the source of much of the available data on it.

And all too soon it will be **August** again, and we are Blightly-bound to catch up with old friends and new at the Birdfair. Will we see you there? Come and chat to us and we can tell you in person how, no matter which of the 365 days you choose, every day is a good day in the Straits!

Niki Williamson and Simon Tonkin are www.ingloriousbustards.com. Based at www.huertagrande.com near Tarifa, we offer birding and wildlife package tours across the East Atlantic flyway, from Suffolk to Senegal and beyond!



Photo: Simon Tonkin

Western Osprey passing through



Tawny Owl

Photo: Gavin Durrant



Temminck's Plover

Photo: Gavin Durrant



Barn Owl

Photo: Robert Howlett



Spotted Flycatcher

Photo: Will Brame



Dotterel

Photo: Barry Woodhouse



s Stint



Photo: Will Brame

Great Reed Warbler



Photo: Robert Howlett

Photo: John Richardson

Remote control Cuckoo



Red Footed Falcon



Photo: Barry Woodhouse

Corn Bunting

Spring Bird Review

March 2017

March was mild and wet. Although no day had more than 9mm of rain, 13 days were wet with the 8th reaching 8mm. On only four days the temperature dropped to single figures, with 8°C being the lowest on the 8th; whereas 11 days had temperatures of 14°C and above, the highest of 20°C occurring on the 30th. Night time averages were: low 5°C and high 13°C.

Swans

The poor winter in Suffolk continued on the wintering swan front, with only three sightings of Bewick Swans all month – two at Walberswick on the 2nd and 7th, then two NE over Minsmere RSPB on the 13th. No Whooper Swan reports; let's hope for an improvement in the winter of 2017/2018.

Geese

Of the wintering geese, both White-fronts and Pink-feet continued into March. Highest counts of Pink-footed Geese included nine at Boyton on the 4th, 9th and 13th, dropping to seven on the 31st; four at Southwold Town Marshes on the 30th and a single at North Warren on the 1st. Highest counts of White-fronted Geese were: 230 at North Warren on the 1st including three neck-collared birds and 214 on the 5th; Hollesley RSPB 60 on the 1st, 12th and 13th, 80 on the 4th and still 22 on the 20th and a final report of 19 on the 27th; Boyton RSPB counts of four to 92 from the 5th to the 18th with the highest count of 92 on the 9th. Trimley SWT reported 12 on both the 2nd and 10th. It has been a very good winter overall for geese.

Ducks

A Greater Scaup (female) was seen on Alton Water on the 4th and a single Velvet Scoter remained off Dunwich on the 1st and 2nd; the only other report was of two on the Stour at

Stutton Ness on the 28th. Common Scoter were in the bay Dunwich all month! Long-tailed Ducks continued for a few days into March, with five off Dunwich on the 1st, a drake on Island Mere Minsmere on the 3rd, four North offshore on the 4th and four off Dunwich on the 10th. The only sightings of Smew came from Minsmere RSPB where a drake and a red-head continued from the 1st, 3rd and 4th, then two pairs seen on and off from the 5th to the 25th. Again at RSPB Minsmere, seven Goosander roosted overnight on the 7th. At Hollesley Marsh RSPB on the 12th, three Garganeys (two of them drakes) arrived at the reserve. Subsequently three were at Boyton on the 15th and two drakes on the 23rd. At Lakenheath two, one of them a drake, were seen on the 15th. At Minsmere up to four were seen several times during the month and at Carlton Marshes a single drake was seen between 21st and 29th.

A Great Northern Diver was seen on the Alde Estuary on the 1st and another single past LBO on the 14th. A Red-throated Diver spent the 18th and 19th on Carlton Marshes near Lowestoft. Occasional Slavonian Grebes continued to be reported during March with sightings from Alton Water on the 4th and 7th and daily from Oulton Broad from the 5th-10th. Black-necked Grebe were very thin on the ground with the only report from Larchwood, Alton Water on the 2nd and 4th.

All month, Great Egrets continued to be reported from coastal Suffolk and Lakenheath RSPB. The very faithful and obliging Cattle Egret remained at Sandy Lane Iken and showed very well till the 24th at least.

Raptors

March was a good month for Red Kite sightings beginning with two at Walberswick playing field on the 1st; further sightings occurred over Minsmere Visitor Centre, Hollesley RSPB, Felixstowe Docks, Carlton Marshes, Upper

Hollesley Common, a high of five on the 21st at Smere Marshes Raydon, Southwold, Coddendam, Melton Park, Papps Ford, Alton Water and finally a single at Dramsden on the 30th. There were reports from Westleton Heath of Ring-tail Hen Harrier: two on the 4th and one on the 13th and 19th. An adult male was reported north past Hollesley on the 6th and at Hemley a Ring-tail was also seen on the 6th.

A Merlin was seen at Trimley SWT on the 10th and a single was reported from LBO on the 17th and 30th. A very early Hobby was seen flying over Upper Hollesley Common by John Richardson on the 23rd.

The only reports of continuing wintering Purple Sandpipers came from East Lane Bawdsey with the two faithful birds showing very well on the London clay at low tide up until the 28th at least. Jack Snipe appeared this month: three at Minsmere on the 13th and 18th; one at Bawdsey Lagoons on the 29th and one on the flash at Boyton on the 31st.

Gulls

On the gull front this month there was an Iceland Gull reported from LBO, a Glaucous Gull from Minsmere and Caspian Gulls were reported from Minsmere, Hollesley and Southwold, with a Yellow-legged Gull only reported at Minsmere. The long-staying adult Little Gull was reported at Loompit Lake plus four more adults on the 27th, with other sightings at Minsmere, Livermere and Broadwater.

Short-eared Owls were still being seen at most of the usual sites in Suffolk. The House Martins remained around the Cefas and Kirkley House area till the 4th.

It was good news from Santon Downham again this March with up to three Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers reported from the 7th to the 25th at least. It seems as if they are hanging on in the West Suffolk area.

Water Pipit was still being seen at its usual

location – see report from last month – with three being reported at Carlton Marshes on the 22nd and 23rd.

Waxwings

Still plenty of Waxwing sightings during March. Maximum count was 75 in Melton by the crossroads on the 22nd, then 71 in Lowestoft, specifically Gresham Avenue, Oulton Marsh on the 4th. Ipswich saw 36 at Sherington Park on the 6th, Hollesley had 37 near the village stores on the 11th and Woodbridge reported 46 on Old Barrack Road on the 18th. Presumably the later dates were the Lowestoft birds moving south searching for berries. The flocks were very mobile and often split into random smaller flocks.

A Black-bellied Dipper was seen briefly at Santon Downham on the 23rd. The Great Grey Shrike that had been really elusive the previous month re-appeared in the Upper Hollesley Heath area on the 10th where it showed well on both sides of the road until the 28th. A Raven was seen and heard over Ladybird Nursery Snape on the 5th, another at Carlton Marshes on the 16th. A Hawfinch was seen at Sizewell car park on the 24th.

A few spring migrants were reported. At Wickham Market on the 29th, an un-ringed White Stork was seen in fields next to the River Deben viewable from Southbound A12 (Wickham Market bypass) at 4.15pm. The bird, missing many secondaries from both wings, was then seen to fly NE at 5.07pm and land in a field being ploughed 2km NE of the A12 road-bridge. The bird roosted on the roof of Wickham Market railway station and was seen again on the 30th. The general feeling was that it was an escaped bird, so it will be interesting to see if it gets accepted!

A Sandwich Tern was seen at Hollesley RSPB Reserve on the 22nd and a single off LBO on the 29th.

A very early Quail was reportedly flushed by the power station on the 14th. On Ordford Ness

four Wheatears were seen on the NT reserve on the 12th, with singles at LBO on the 14th, 15th and 18th. Several Black Redstarts appeared in the county during March at the usual coastal sites. It was a poor spring for Firecrest sightings with singles just at LBO on the 21st, Trimley Marshes by The Pilgrim on the 24th, Santon Downham near the bridge on the 25th and a final sighting at Bawdsey on the 26th. A Sedge Warbler was reported early morning at North Warren on the 29th and another at Alton Water on the 30th.

Photo: Barry Woodhouse



Glossy Ibis

April 2017

April was a very dry month. Eight days were completely dry, and a further seven had 3mm or less rainfall. The highest fall was 5mm on the 26th. It was also a warm month with 23 days averaging above 13°C, the highest being 23°C on the 9th. However 15 nights were below 5°C including one of -1°C on the 27th. The average high was 14°C and the average low 4°C, so a cool night time month.

On the wintering wildfowl front, six Pink-footed Geese were still seen at Boyton, a Long-tailed Duck was spotted south off LBO on the 22nd and a Drake and Redhead Smew were reported at Minsmere RSPB on the 2nd. An out-of-season Goosander (female) was found at Hollesley RSPB on the 24th and four more on North Warren on the 27th. A late Black-throated Diver was seen offshore at Minsmere RSPB on the 14th.

All month, Great Egrets continued to be reported from coastal Suffolk sites and Lakenheath RSPB. Strangely no Cattle Egret were reported during month until two appeared at Sandy Lane Iken where they showed very well till the 30th at least. A few reports of returning Spoonbill came in during April at the usual Suffolk locations. A

Glossy Ibis was reported from Lakenheath RSPB Reserve on the 6th and remained till the month's end with another at Micklemere from the 27th to the 29th.

Raptors

A Black Kite was seen north over Minsmere RSPB Workshops on the 6th and Red Kites continued into April with sightings of singles chronologically at Hen Reed Bed, Minsmere and Hacheston; Southwold Harbour, Wenhaston, Hollesley Village; two over Smere Marshes Reydon, then two south over RAF Bawdsey and another single at Kingsfleet on the 13th. Two reports came in of Hen Harrier from Boyton during the month (1st and 17th) and a nice male south at Minsmere RSPB on the 11th. A Merlin was seen at Boyton RSPB on the 4th and 5th.

The only reports of continuing wintering Purple Sandpipers came from East Lane Bawdsey with one on the 2nd and 5th and two re-appearing on the 12th. The Jack Snipe continued at Boyton in ones and twos in the first half of the month.

Gulls

Regarding gulls, a 2nd year Glaucous Gull appeared at Abbey Farm, Snape on the 3rd and 15th, a 2nd winter at Hollesley RSPB on the 4th, then a single 3rd cy on the 16th, a single at Botany Marsh on the 15th, and a single at Great Livermere on the 16th. Great Livermere saw two 2 Iceland Gulls on the 16th and 17th. Good numbers of Caspian Gulls were still reported throughout the month mostly from Minsmere RSPB, Southwold Hollesley and Great Livermere area. Second winter Yellow-legged Gulls were reported at Minsmere and Hollesley RSPB and a great count of 101 Med Gulls was made on the 6th. The long-staying adult Little Gull continued at Loompit Lake with two reported at Lackford Lakes and two then three at Livermere and four on Ampton Water on the 9th.

A few Short-eared Owls were still being reported from the usual wintering sites during April. Water Pipits were still being seen in highest count of seven at Carlton Marshes, new county hotspot, on the 8th. Waxwing sightings continued during April with peak counts of 60 at the railway station in Melton on the 26th. Elsewhere in the county sightings included 40 at Sherrington Road Ipswich on the 25th and 20 at Capel St Mary on the 22nd and 21 at Garden Lane Worlingham on the 2nd.

A Great Grey Shrike was seen at Brandon Country Park on the 1st. Ravens were observed at the following locations during April: NW over Carlton Marshes on the 7th, a single south at Westleton on the 8th, one (heard only) over Sandy Lane, Woodbridge on the 11th, one at Great Livermere on the 16th.

Spring Migrants & Rarer Birds

On the 20th, a White-tailed Eagle was seen circling east of Kirton then drifting north at 10.35am. It was then picked up going north over Whin Hill Minsmere RSPB at 11.15am then sighted minutes later going north over

Westleton Heath at 11.19am. On the 25th it was on view on the salt marsh off Stutton Ness for five minutes from 5.20pm after which it flew west and was then found sitting in a tree viewed looking west from Stutton to Stutton Mill. An Osprey was seen north over Minsmere car park on the 3rd, and one over Trimley Retreat on the 20th.

A nice American Wigeon (drake) and a Kentish Plover were viewable from the South Wall at Breydon on the 9th, the Kentish Plover remaining until the 10th. Garganeys were still being seen during April from most of the sites in last month's report, along with a nice showy drake on a small pool near Martlesham Sewage Works on the 9th, 10th and 11th.

At Cornard Tye the White Stork that was recently present at Wickham Market was re-located in horse paddocks at nearby Sackers Green and Greys Hall where it remained from the 2nd to the 17th at least. As said in last month's report, the general feeling is that it is an escaped bird so it will be interesting to see if it gets accepted. Another was reported over Sibton on the 9th, but no mention of the tatty plumage (especially the wings) of the other individual.

Photo: Andrew Moon



White Tailed Eagle



Dotterel

Photo: Andrew Moon



Ring-billed Gull

Photo: John Richardson

A Dotterel was seen on RSPB Havergate Island on the 21st. Little Ringed Plovers were seen as follows: two at RSPB Hollesley the 7th and one on the 9th, one same day on Tinker's Marsh and one also on the common at LBO on the 9th, where it was also seen 10th, 11th, 13th and 14th; four were at Southwold Town Marshes on the 17th and two at East Lane on the 29th. A Black-winged Stilt arrived at Carlton Marshes on the 20th, three were seen at Boyton on the 30th, of which two left mid-morning and visited RSPB Hollesley and at 4pm all three birds were present on Orford Ness. A few Whimbrel moved though during the month. A single Wood Sandpiper was at RSPB Hollesley from the 22nd to the 30th and then two on the 27th; two Little Stints were seen same location on the 30th and then one at East Lane on the 30th.

A **Mega** was discovered north of Great Livermore lake in pig fields on the 15th in the guise of a 2nd year **American Herring Gull** – a first for Suffolk! It was spotted at 6.57pm and remained till 7.35pm when it flew off, which sadly meant that only a handful of birders connected with this much-wanted addition to the Suffolk List! The bird made the briefest of appearances on the 16th in the same area for just four minutes from 6.56pm although it was looked for during most of the day, with no success!

At RSPB Minsmere on the 28th, a Ring-billed Gull (1st summer) was found by Dave Fairhurst on the scrape at 8.50am. The bird (a first for Minsmere) remained on view until 10.45am when it flew out to sea, although it did return to the South Scrape at 3.10pm. It was claimed from North Hide at 8.10am on the 29th, before it flew off south.

On the 30th, a movement of Pomarine Skuas was observed: three north off Corton, eight north off RSPB Minsmere and six north off Sizewell, plus a single Bonxie. A few Sandwich Terns continued to pass through Suffolk during April. The best count of Arctic Terns was 35 at Carlton Marshes on the 30th followed by 21 off LBO on the same day. A few Common Terns were noted around the county plus a Black Tern on Island Mere, RSPB Minsmere on the 9th, two at Lakenheath on the 30th and seven on Ocean Pit, Weybread, where there was also a single Little Tern on the same day.

At Carlton Marshes, two Common Cranes were seen circling at mid-day on the 10th and 23rd. A single was seen over Minsmere on the 11th, then two at Southwold on the 23rd and two at Butley the same day.

A Common Swift was noted at Great Livermore on the 23rd followed by three at Alton Water on the 25th. A Turtle Dove was seen at Lackford SWT on the 22nd, one at Westleton Heath on the 23rd, 25th and 28th

and one at Hinton also on the 23rd. It's sad to think how rare these beauties are in Suffolk now.

A Wryneck was seen by the road at the north end of Heveningham on the 14th and one again at Carlton Marshes on the 22nd. A nice sighting of a Red-rumped Swallow flying west at RSPB Boyton at 3.40pm on the 15th was reported; then another at SWT Reserve Trimley Marshes on the 16th between 4.40pm and 7.20pm. A sprinkling of Yellow Wagtail reports came across throughout the county in April. At Hollesley RSPB there were two White Wagtails on the 4th and one on the 13th, then a Blue-headed Wagtail on the 7th-8th and one at Carlton Marshes on the 23rd; and two White Wagtails at East Lane on the 12th.

An early Nightingale was reported singing at Nacton campsite at 3am on the 9th. Then more than one were heard on Westleton Heath on the 13th. A good scattering of Ring Ouzels arrived throughout the month with a bigger influx at the end.

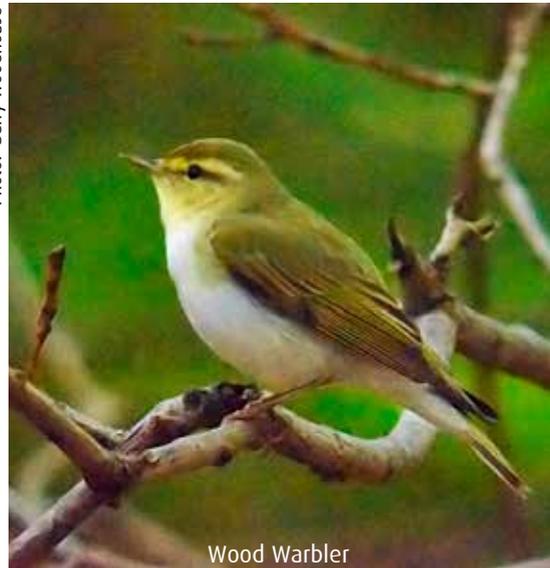
Whinchats were reported at LBO and Kingsfleet on the 27th.



Whinchat

Photo: Barry Woodhouse

Photo: Will Brame



Wood Warbler

At LBO two Common Redstarts were seen on the 10th and one still on the following day. Plenty of Black Redstarts were seen at known Suffolk sites during the month and a good fall of 40 Wheatear (Greenland Race) were seen at LBO on the 19th, plus a Woodlark.

At RSPB Minsmere Island Mere, a Savi's Warbler was confirmed on the 19th and presumed it had been present for three days. It remained till the end of the month at least. A Grasshopper Warbler was reported at Combs Ford on the 15th-16th and another at Lawshall the 15th. One was heard doing its distinctive 'reeling' call at Livermere Lake on the 16th, another was heard reeling at North Warren on the 17th and more than one on North Road, Southwold on the 28th.

A singing Wood Warbler was heard near the old railway platform at North Warren on the 27th. Still a very poor spring for Firecrests, just one at LBO on the 6th and one on the 12th.

Finally at Corton Clifftop on the 24th, an Ortolan Bunting was flushed by a dog walker at 9.50am; a rare Suffolk vagrant these days, it was a just a brief showing bird.

May 2017

We had a wet spell from the 17th to the 19th but it was otherwise a warm month with 20 days at 15°C or above, the highest being 25°C on the 16th.

Warblers

The Savi's Warbler remained at Minsmere all month, and was seen and heard from Minsmere's Island Mere hide. A Wood Warbler was along Gas House Drove at Brandon from the 25th. A Marsh Warbler was at RSPB Lakenheath from the 21st, 400 metres beyond the Fen Joist Watch viewpoint. A Great Reed Warbler was at Landguard 7th – 9th along with Wryneck, Ring Ouzel, Whinchat and Red-rumped Swallow. A Blythe's Reed Warbler was found at the Bawdsey picnic site on the 27th with a Red-rumped Swallow in the area too.

Raptors

The White-tailed Eagle was again seen during the early part of May, reported at Snape and over the Deben. Osprey sightings were reported over Hollesley on the 4th, Minsmere on the 6th and on the 11th over Kyson Point, Woodbridge, which would have been a lovely local tick for me, had I seen it! Minsmere saw a Montagu's Harrier on the 7th and then a Honey Buzzard on the morning of the 18th which was seen at Stratford St Mary the same day, with further sightings again at Minsmere on the 27th, then Middleton on the 28th and finally at Kessingland on the 31st. A female Red-footed Falcon was seen at RSPB North Warren on the 17th remaining until the 20th when it was seen to fly off late morning and reported later that afternoon at Minsmere. Probably the same bird was reported again over Hazelwood Marshes on the 23rd and then from 23rd a male and sub-adult male were both over the Deben Estuary where they remained until 26th.



Red-footed
Falcon

Photo: John Richardson

Assorted birds

After a great showing earlier in the spring, the last Waxwings were reported on the 1st May with 13 in Woodbridge. On the 7th two Dotterels were seen on Havergate and then on the 13th a single was seen to fly from Orford Ness onto Gedgrave Marshes with a further six found near Tinker's Marsh in Walberswick on the 14th. A Serin was seen at LBO on the 18th and 25th. A Roseate Tern was found by Sean Minns in amongst Common Terns early morning on the 19th off the southern tip of Orford Ness. A Golden Oriole was reported at Hintlesham Great Wood on the 24th and a first summer Night Heron was seen over SWT Carlton Marsh on the 31st. On the 22nd, a Bee-eater was reported flying north over Mountbatten Road in Lowestoft.

Big Birds (don't cry)

A first winter Glossy Ibis was seen at Micklemere from the 1st to the 7th then probably the same bird was at SWT Trimley on the 9th and reported from the 12th until the end of the month at RSPB Lakenheath. A Great Egret was reported on the 7th May at Tinker's Marsh, Walberswick and again on the 16th May at Lakenheath with a further two seen at Boyton on the 23rd. Seven Cranes were seen heading north at Tattingstone on the 7th and three were reported on the 10th over Walberswick and over Carlton Marshes. Two more were seen south over Minsmere on the 26th. The iffy White Stork was at Minsmere on the 3rd May and then Elveden on the 12th. Spoonbill sightings during the month included two together on the 13th at Minsmere and the 18th at Hollesley; then single birds at Benacre on the 21st, Hazelwood Marshes on the 28th and Aldeburgh on the 31st.

The Iken Cattle Egret was reported early in the month; possibly but not necessarily the same bird was seen at both Iken and Boyton on the 15th and then at Carlton Marshes at the end of the month.



White-fronted Goose

Eddie Marsh

Neck-banded Geese

Eddie Marsh contributed the data below from euring.org following reports of neckbanded White-fronted Geese in Suffolk during January and February this year.

Euring states that, as: 'birds freely cross political boundaries, so international cooperation is essential if they are to be studied. Euring.org is the organisation which ensures this cooperation for all aspects of scientific bird ringing within Europe'. It was furthermore 'founded in 1963 with the stated aim of organising and standardising European scientific bird ringing'.

Code: Neckband Lightgreen (lime) : U24, Legring (Metal only) : White-Fronted Goose

Ringling date: 08.08.2016 Sex: Female, Age: Adult

Ring location: Kolguev

22.11.2016 Hardinxveld Giessendam Zuid-Holland NL 51 50 12 4 48 38 Henk de Groot

23.11.2016 Hardinxveld Giessendam Zuid-Holland – Henk de Groot

13.12.2016 Hardinxveld Giessendam Zuid-Holland – Henk de Groot

02.01.2017 Eastbridge Suffolk – at least 7 White-fronted, associating with Greylags

14.01.2017 Thorpeness Suffolk – David Fairhurst

17.01.2017 North Warren near Aldeburgh Suffolk – Richard Attenborough

23.01.2017 North Warren (RSPB) Thorpeness-Aldeburgh, Suffolk – David Low – female paired to U23

19.02.2017 North Warren, near Aldeburgh Suffolk – Mike Marsh – associating with lime U23

**Code: Neckband Lightgreen (lime) : U23,
Legring (Metal only) : White-Fronted
Goose**

**Ring date: 08.08.2016 Sex: Male, Age:
Adult**

Ring location: Kolguev

22.11.2016 Hardinxveld Giessendam Zuid-
Holland – Henk de Groot

23.11.2016 Hardinxveld Giessendam Zuid-
Holland – Henk de Groot

13.12.2016 Hardinxveld Giessendam Zuid-
Holland – Henk de Groot

02.01.2017 Eastbridge Suffolk – there were
at least 7 White-fronted, associating with
Greylags

14.01.2017 Thorpeness Suffolk – David
Fairhurst

17.01.2017 North Warren near Aldeburgh
Suffolk – Richard Attenborrow U24

23.01.2017 North Warren (RSPB)
Thorpeness-Aldeburgh, Suffolk – David Low –
Male paired to U24

19.02.2017 North Warren, near Aldeburgh
Suffolk – Mike Marsh associating with lime
U24

**Code: Neckband Black : AH4, Legring
(Metal only) : White-fronted Goose**

**Ring date: 04.05.2016 Sex: Female,
Age: Adult**

Ring location: Kologriv floodplains

04.05.2016 Kologriv floodplain Kostroma –
Petr Glazov, Bird Ringing Centre Moscow

07.05.2016 Kologriv floodplain Kostroma –
Petr Glazov, Bird Ringing Centre Moscow

25.11.2016 Werrich Wes. Eyländerweg
Nordrhein-Westfalen – Dieter Biela
Unringed?

26.11.2016 Xanten, Wesel Nordrhein-
Westfalen – Natascha Schütze

26.11.2016 Xanten, Wesel Nordrhein-
Westfalen – Natascha Schütze wieder in
Begleitung von Blässgans S16 (Halsband
hellgrün)

26.11.2016 Wesel-Werrich, Kreis Wesel
Nordrhein-Westfalen – Birgit Ritter-
Barthelmes

19.02.2017 North Warren, near Aldeburgh
Suffolk – Mike Marsh – 3+ probably paired
with lime S16 and with 3+ juvs

**Code: Neckband Lightgreen (lime) : S16,
Legring (Metal only) : White-fronted
Goose**

**Ring date: 04.05.2016 Sex: Male, Age:
Adult**

Ring location: Kologriv floodplain

04.05.2016 Kologriv floodplain Kostroma –
Petr Glazov, Bird Ringing Centre Moscow

07.05.2016 Kologriv floodplain Kostroma –
Petr Glazov, Bird Ringing Centre Moscow

25.11.2016 Werrich Wes. Eyländerweg
Nordrhein-Westfalen – Dieter Biela
Unringed?

26.11.2016 Xanten, Wesel Nordrhein-
Westfalen – Natascha Schütze

26.11.2016 Xanten, Wesel Nordrhein-
Westfalen – Natascha Schütze wieder in
Begleitung von Blässgans (Halsbandschwarz)

26.11.2016 Wesel-Werrich, Kreis Wesel
Nordrhein-Westfalen – Birgit Ritter-
Barthelmes

29.01.2017 Berkenwoude Zuid-Holland
Ganzerik

19.02.2017 North Warren, near Aldeburgh
Suffolk – Mike Marsh – 3+ probably paired
with black AH4 and with 3+juvs

Field Trip Reports

Val Lockwood

Eastbridge

Sunday 30th April

Leader: David Walsh

There was a good turnout for the meeting (19 members and the Leader), which had a relatively early start time of 7am. Those group members who arrived early heard Cuckoo from the car park. David ran through the H&S risks and described the planned route for those new to the area.

It was a breezy morning and the wind was cold, so most members put on warm coats before setting off. Even as we were leaving the car park a Great Spotted Woodpecker flew over and we heard a Tawny Owl and soon added Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Whitethroat and three tit species to the list. Some members at the front of the party were fortunate enough to see a male Bullfinch feeding on the rough heathland area at the top of Saunder's Hill – we commented on how unusual it was to see a Bullfinch on the ground. There were several other species seen from the hill; those of note were Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler, Buzzard, two Mistle Thrushes, and an elusive Nightingale was heard singing. As we walked towards the road a Med Gull was spotted flying over the brow of the hill and Skylarks and Meadow Pipits were flushed by gulls and corvids.

We pressed on to the other side of the road picking up several other species, and by now the temperature was rising. We saw our first butterfly of the day – a speckled wood. As we walked through the woods a member of the group asked a question about the significance of and need for tree felling on the heath. The Leader asked one of the group to explain this to us all, which he did, following which we spotted an RSPB sign detailing

pretty much the same information, resulting in giggles all round!

Those who had opted to wear warm coats earlier were beginning to regret their choice of attire when the breeze abated and the temperature rose, along with our expectations of seeing Dartford Warbler. Moving on to Dunwich Heath, those at the front of the party saw two Woodlarks fly up and disappear from view. This worked to our advantage as whilst we were looking for the Woodlark we picked up close views of a Dartford Warbler and Stonechat. A National Trust ranger asked what we had seen and stressed the importance of keeping to the paths especially during the breeding season and we were pleased to hear that there were 33 pairs of Dartford Warblers on the heath.

As not much had been reported and time was moving on, we decided to postpone the sea watch until after we had visited East Hide and the public viewing platform. Birds of note that we were pleased to see included Common, Sandwich and Little Tern. Kittiwake and Bar-tailed Godwits were resplendent in their summer plumage and the highlight was being able to compare a beautiful Red Knot with one of the Bar-tailed Godwits as they fed together side by side. The Grey Plovers were also worthy of mention, especially one which was in magnificent summer plumage. Sea watching proved hard and fruitless work so we turned our attention to Lucky Pool and those who hadn't seen Swifts from East Hide were rewarded with even closer views than had been had previously as they sped over the pool with Swallows and Sand Martins. A



Grasshopper Warbler was heard reeling in the reeds at the edge of the pool but unfortunately remained elusive, although 16 Whimbrels flew over our heads.

We made our way towards Eastbridge adding a Hobby to our sightings, again a first of the season for most of the group. As we approached a bramble bush, "black adder" was excitedly called; this was quite bizarre as a member of the group had commented earlier that he would love to see one. Unfortunately that member wasn't in the near vicinity when the adder was called and it had slithered away into the brambles before he and a few others approached. That is one of the wonders of watching wildlife: you never know what you will see next. The downside we have all

experienced is the things you miss.... After deciding that the adder was not going to put in another appearance, we carried on our walk and shortly "pale raptor" was called, which on closer inspection was found to be a very pale Buzzard.

Along by the river and roadside an orange tip butterfly, two peacock butterflies and two green-veined white butterflies were seen as well as a hairy dragonfly and a freshly emerged, large red damselfly.

Total bird species count for the day was 91. All agreed it had been a thoroughly enjoyable day and well worth the early start. Thanks to David for a most enjoyable and informative trip.

Steve Fryett

Shingle Street & Hollesley Common

20th April

Leader: Steve Fryett

A rather nice, sunny morning greeting the 14 members attending this field meeting for spring migrants. A few Swallows were noted heading north whilst we tried to locate a Lesser Whitethroat singing from a bush by the car park. Moving south, a couple of Northern Wheatear stopped off around the tennis courts en route to their breeding grounds and a few local Linnets put in an appearance. As one would expect, Common Buzzards were soon noted passing high overhead but little else was recorded before we located Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler in the vicinity of the allotments, and a distant calling Cuckoo was also noted. Continuing a loop round to the beach and back to Battery Cottage, we located a male Ring Ouzel in the garden of this cottage just made for migrants. Several more Northern Wheatears were recorded as we made our way back before moving on to Hollesley Marsh. Here, the weather decided to change, with a downpour leaving some of the group sheltering whilst

others sought out and located a Greenshank. Other noteworthy species here were Pintail, Ringed Plover, Male Ruff and a brief glimpse of a Yellow Wagtail.

Finally, we moved on to Upper Hollesley Common for lunch. A pair of Kestrels displayed above the car park causing a brief identification panic; then as we made our way into the heathland noting the first of several Woodlark sightings. Crossbills called overhead before alighting in a nearby pine tree giving excellent views through binoculars of two males and two females; a calling Siskin was also noted. A further three Woodlarks and a single male Stonechat were observed next and as we neared the end of the walk we noted at least two Dartford Warblers and a pair of Stonechats with a single female Northern Wheatear, which hopefully was setting up a nesting site somewhere nearby. A day for quality rather than quantity as we recorded some excellent species at all the sites visited.

STANTA

10th June

Leader: Paul Holness

As in previous years we met Paul Holness at West Tofts Camp, boarded our 15 seater bus and headed for Frog Hill to enjoy one of the longest and best views in East Anglia. As we took in the special environment, a Buzzard soared, a Kestrel hovered and a Cuckoo flew over before we walked back up the road to hear or see amongst others, a Yellowhammer, a Treecreeper, Coal Tit, Blackcap and Goldcrest. Back at the bus it bumped across country then stopped and we walked over the short grass towards Fowlmere, along the way seeing numerous common and blue-tailed damsel flies, a four-spotted chaser and several butterflies including brimstone, painted lady and common blue. At the mere we enjoyed the sight of Little Grebe, Coot, Pochard and Tufted Duck before taking a roundabout route back to the bus via singing Skylark and Woodlark.

After a lift from the bus, we walked down the hill to Smokers Hole via 'Stonechat Alley', where we saw several birds perched on the low gorse bushes. Next on the programme was a stop on the 'Harrier Strip' where on the short grass we admired colourful stands of viper's bugloss as well as broomrape, kidney vetch and mignonette.



'Harrier Strip'

Photo: David Walsh

We also saw Curlew, Lapwing and a Tree Pipit in song flight. Beyond the strip we looked for Stone Curlew where we had seen adults and young last year, but with no luck. Now it was time for lunch and we headed for the lovely clear Wissey where under the bridge the Grey Wagtails were nesting again.



River Wissey

Photo: David Walsh

Beside the river, Garden Warblers and Sedge Warblers were singing and we saw Whitethroat, Swallows and House Martins, Linnets and Goldfinches. Kestrels had nested by the church and were being mobbed by a pair of Lapwings.

After lunch we drove several miles across the totally unspoiled countryside where, at a place used to collect sand for sandbags, numerous Sand Martins have dug their nests in the sheer side of the pit. Further along the road we debussed again to see a family of Redstarts, a priority sighting for several SOG members.

It was a lovely but breezy day and once again thanks to Paul Holness for leading us round this very special bit of England, and to retired RSM Trevor Gedge for his guidance and for accompanying us as well as to the Army for allowing it all to happen. Many thanks too to David Walsh for compiling a list of sightings.

Poetry Corner

Most of the poems I have explored in 'The Harrier' can be found in 'The Poetry of Birds', edited by Simon Armitage and Tim Dee ISBN 978 0 141 02711 1. I recommend purchasing this text, not only because the choice of poems is insightful, enjoyable and thought-provoking, but also because the anthology contains an essay by Armitage where he explores aspects of why people enjoy birds, as well as Dee's subjective and entertaining notes on the specific birds mentioned in the collection.

Why, asks Armitage, have so many poets (and there are thousands of bird poems) chosen to write about birds? He suggests (as does Dee in some of his writing) that, unlike a great deal of wildlife, birds can be seen and heard on a daily basis like it or not. Peter Reading's poem 'Parakeet' explores the different ways birds are enjoyed by people.

Bird Lady

Under a pine in Vondelpark
the Bird Lady has fashioned
an impromptu feed-table,
arrives each morning laden
with bags of sunflower seeds
and kibbled maize and proceeds
to feed the feral Rose-rings
(*Psittacula krameri*,
40 centimetres,
general plumage green,
yellowish underwing,
in male, rose collar encircling
hindneck, nape suffused
bluish) and Alexandrines
(*Psittacula eupatria*,
58 centimetres,
a group of pristine males,
occiput and cheeks
suffused with bluish-grey,
black stripe through lower cheek,
pink collar encircling hindneck,
red slash on secondary coverts,
massive vermillion bill,
call - a skreeching *kee-ak*),
which, were it not for her
genial dottiness
would not survive the severe
calorie-wasting winter,
and we would be undernourished.
Peter Reading



Photo: James Hume

There are two questions that you might be inclined to ask: firstly, why is this a poem? It's weird. It doesn't rhyme (much) and secondly, hasn't he just nicked the descriptions of the birds from a bird guide book so *he* hasn't *written* it at all?

Let's take it step by step. Much to some readers' horror, poetry doesn't have to rhyme. It does, however, have to use line length. That is essentially what makes this a poem and not just a piece of prose or an extract from a bird guide. Reading has observed an event (the lady feeding the birds in the Vondelpark in Amsterdam), reflected upon it and written about it in such a way to make us all reflect on the different ways birds can be enjoyed.

You could just read the poem, say 'whatever' and then move on to something else but I think you miss out if you do that. Poems need a little bit more work. They are (usually) made of words but here we need to think about how the different language types Reading has selected show us that birds are enjoyed by people in different ways.

Let's begin with the Bird Lady. She is the Bird Lady not a bird lady. He wants us to see her as a real, very particular person. He uses capitals to give her a title, suggesting she is a figure other people who use the park will recognise. But more than this, she is someone we all recognise. She comes 'every morning'. She clearly adores the birds and probably adores their dependency on her. I have come across people who spend a small fortune on bird food but don't really know what birds they are feeding, don't realise they are encouraging rats and bird diseases, don't realise that in spring whole peanuts on the ground aren't a great idea and so on. They just want to feed the birds. Reading tells us she comes 'laden'

with 'sunflower seeds' and 'kibbled maize'. So this isn't just a handful of seeds. She is bringing specialist food and a great deal of it to feed the feral Rose-rings.

Not everyone loves the feral Rose-rings though. The ones in the poem are in the Netherlands where in 2010 there were estimated to be about 10,000 birds across the four cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and the Hague. I have also read negative articles about their invasiveness in London where their huge numbers create a mess, their noise can be overwhelming and perhaps more importantly have a possible negative effect on native biodiversity and the environment. But that's not the point that Reading wants to make here.

He moves into what is sometimes called 'found poetry'. He takes the scientific, precise, specialist language of a bird guide book description and sets it out in a particular way. If you read poetry regularly, you begin to see and hear language differently. The words at the beginning of the line and at the end of a line tend to draw your attention – either because they rhyme, or because they make you very slightly pause and thus notice them.

Reading draws attention to the fact that he is adding something extra to the story of the Bird Lady by using brackets. The description of the two birds follows the convention of using italics for the bird's Latin names. Not everyone enjoys getting their tongue in a twist round the Latin names but I love it. I love the sounds of the odd juxtaposition of vowels and consonants – it sounds alien, special and different but it also allows all scientists to ensure they are labelling a bird precisely. This is followed by descriptions of the two birds and there is no attempt to explain the bird terms.



Some of the language does not require very specialist knowledge.

Plumage, underwing, nape and hindneck aren't a problem but occiput and secondary coverts probably aren't general knowledge. I

suspect the phrase 'a group of pristine males' may leave some readers wondering. But the line length makes us read the words slowly and carefully and picture the stunning colours of the plumage. The *krameri* colouring changes from 'green' to 'yellowish' (-ish?), its collar is 'rose', its nape 'suffused bluish' and then the *eupatria's* 'black stripe', 'pink collar', 'red slash' and 'vermillion bill' mean we can see that they are Darwinian wonders.

What would Joe Public make of the 'massive vermillion bill' I wonder? It is a brilliant way to describe its size and power in relation to the bird's body.

The second bracket closes the 'found' section of the poem and we move back to the Bird Lady's 'genial dottiness' which gently captures her eccentricity. He conveys his gratitude to her because, without her food, he suggests that the birds would not survive the 'calorie-wasting' cold of the winter. Reading extends this need for food reference into the final line where the loss of birds means 'we would be undernourished'. His point is clear. Whatever we think of these birds, all birds are significant to the general well-being of human beings. They feed the soul, they sustain a sense of wonder in us – the loss of any species would be detrimental.

Lastly, here's another poem about what we lose if we lose a species of birds. It is good fun and knowledgeable about the behaviour of sparrows.

Sparrow

No longer
country clubber,
barn bouncer,
hedgerow flasher,
bran dipper,
puddle bather,
dust bowler,
stubble scrounger,
dew nibbler,
creeper sleeper,
dung dobler.

No longer
city slicker,
curb crawler,
gutter weaver,
brick clinger,
dotty mobster,
sill scruffer,
traffic dodger,
drain clogger,
putty pecker,
car bomber.

No longer
daily greeter,
scratch singer,
piebald shitter,
bib bobber,
cocky bugger,
boss brawler,
gossip spinner,
crowd pleaser,
heaven filler,
wing dancer.
No longer.

Andrew Motion



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Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Who we are

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

What we do

Networking

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

Media

- Strong web presence - www.sogonline.org.uk
- Active Twitter feed - @suffolkbirds1
- Quarterly magazine - **The Harrier**
- Annual review - **Suffolk Birds** report

Trips and talks

- 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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