

Winter 2015 No.183



The Harrier



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

£3.25



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Cover photograph:

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) photographed by Lesley Starbuck @lesley_starbuck

Can you guess the prey species? Email your thoughts in please.

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

harrier@sogonline.org.uk

All material for the Spring Harrier should be addressed to the Editor and received by 4th March please

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Editorial

Welcome to Harrier 183. There's much for you to enjoy within. The Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project has now been running for 10 years, with considerable success. We had a great celebratory evening at The Cut compered by Kathy Piotrowski and there is an update inside on the breeding successes of Barn Owls in 2015. You'll see that the cyclical nature of the vole population affects their success rate, as well as the poor weather conditions of previous years. Numbers are on the up again, as are the numbers of their boxes throughout the county.

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust has supplied a fascinating article on its reserve at Carlton Marshes. It illustrates both their conservation work and the efforts they go to to involve the wider local community. There's a fundraising update from the Dove Step team and a lovely article from David & Margie Carter who have moved home and had to restart their garden bird list. We wish them well and look forward to hearing about it. The latest BINS update is Lee Wood's last, after a fantastic contribution over the years.

Our 'exile' this time is Mike Crewe now living in Cape May, New Jersey. Cape May is an incredible birding destination and was the subject of the first SOG talk that I attended. I was fortunate enough to visit there in 2011 and Mike's article eloquently describes the atmosphere during migration season, as well as the pressures of tourism

on the local breeding bird population. We also have an article from Peter Merchant showing the extraordinary lengths The Port of Felixstowe have gone to during their dock expansion works, in order to accommodate a potential breeding pair of Peregrines.

My autumn birding highlights have included the overnight SOG trip on Orfordness accompanied by my daughters: it's an enchanting place to stay. I also spent a couple of mornings with my son at LBO enjoying the migrants, whilst he helped the ringers by carrying the empty bags on the net rounds. Best of all, though, was hearing about the £170,000 subsidy penalty from the Rural Payments Agency suffered by the Norfolk shooting estate following the conviction of one of its gamekeepers for raptor persecution. A farm receiving subsidies has a requirement not



Photo: J. Richardson

to 'intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird'. Unlike Scotland there is no vicarious liability here, but it sends a powerful statement to those who potentially benefit from killing birds of prey.

You'll find enclosed the 2016 programme card listing all the indoor talks and outdoor trips. Please come along and join in. There's also a membership renewal form to return to Kevin Verlander, who has kindly volunteered to be Membership Secretary. You can pay as always by cheque, or over the internet.

Lastly, I hope you enjoy all the photographs inside. One of the joys of the role of Harrier Editor is seeing the many super photographs sent in for publication. We only ever have room for a fraction of them and my theme this edition, with Christmas in mind, is birds stuffing themselves with food. Can you guess which species is the Kestrel's prey in Lesley's cover photograph? Answers on a postcard please...

Merry Christmas and all the best for 2016.

Suffolk Bird Report

The Suffolk Bird Report 2014 is out now and available to purchase from the Ipswich Museum or through the Suffolk Naturalists' Society's (SNS) website. The Suffolk Bird Report is an annual publication, compiled by SOG and published by the SNS.

This edition is Nick Mason's 8th since he took on the role of editor in 2007, a role from which he is now standing down after nine years at the helm: a mighty achievement! The editorship is a key role at the heart of the annual documenting of Suffolk bird life, and involves close liaison with the three recorders as well as the authors of the sections of the report and other papers.

Nick's departure leaves the role of editor vacant and SOG are currently seeking a replacement. Potential candidates should know that Nick has kindly offered to work with the new editor over the coming year on the 2015 edition, as they learn the ropes. The post carries with it seats on both the SOG and SNS committees.



Image: Ed Keeble

For more information, or to apply for the position, please get in touch with any member of council or contact us through the website.

Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (SCBOP) update

The Project

SCBOP is dedicated to the conservation of Barn Owls. Its success has been much acclaimed and the project was very proud to receive Suffolk County Council's Greenest County Award in the Landscape and Diversity category early this year. The project's principal partners are Suffolk Ornithologists' Group, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and BTO, but a number of smaller independent projects also come under the SCBOP umbrella, including those administered by Dedham AONB and Stour Valley Project, Thornham Owl Project and Suffolk Owl Sanctuary.

The project as a whole has advised on the fixing of over 1,800 nest boxes throughout Suffolk: on nature reserves, farmland and on community spaces such as village greens and school grounds. In addition, the success of the project has resulted in requests for the fixing of nest boxes just across the borders in both Norfolk and Essex. By providing an extended connected network of good habitat and nesting opportunities, we can give Barn Owls the fighting chance they need to thrive.

SCBOP involves the community: the nest boxes are made by local organisations and then monitored by an army of trained volunteers each year. This system of raising awareness, creating nesting opportunities and managing suitable local habitat is having a positive effect on Barn Owl populations across Suffolk. This is a project which Suffolk people can call their own and SOG can be truly proud of its achievements.

This year, SCBOP is 10 years old and a lecture tour and workshops led by Steve Piotrowski, the project's director, have been running since January. September's joint

talk with the SWT at Stowupland Village Hall was a great success and the culmination of the series was a fundraising party at The Cut Theatre in Halesworth on October 19th, where a very well-received special lecture was given to a sell-out crowd by Colin Shawyer, founder and co-ordinator of the Barn Owl Conservation Network (BOCN) – the UK's leading authority on Barn Owl research and conservation and author of 'The Barn Owl', published by Arlequin Press in 1998.

Fluctuations in the Barn Owl population

Barn Owl populations are subject to dramatic fluctuations, which are linked to the annual abundance in the short-tailed vole population – the Barn Owl's favourite prey – which peaks and troughs every 3-4 years. For example, 2013 was a disastrous year for Barn Owls, but nest boxes were bursting at the seams with chicks the following year! This year saw a relatively high number of adult pairs occupying the boxes, although brood sizes were small. This is a result of vole populations being extremely high in 2014, with some areas recording numbers close to 'plague' proportions, followed predictably by vole populations subsequently crashing. Worst affected were areas of high Barn Owl density, where food supplies have been severely depleted. Early signs are that, throughout much of England, 2015 has been a disastrous year for Barn Owls with little or no breeding at all taking place in normally good Barn Owl counties such as Lincolnshire. However, Suffolk at least has somewhat bucked the trend in Eastern England, with box occupancy – particularly on the coast and in the main river catchments – having been relatively good. The shortage of



Image: Ed Keeble

voles has meant that Barn Owls have had to hunt harder and longer, and many have been spotted this summer quartering fields and meadows in daylight – not generally a common sight. Seeing Barn Owls hunting in

the middle of the day during the late spring and summer months may be a breathtaking experience for the observer, but it usually means that food is in short supply!

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Barn Owl Pellet	11	25	53	40	54	36	37	30	24
Barn Owl Adult	12	34	57	55	50	76	151	57	148
Barn Owl Egg	0	17	3	5	4	12	13	14	12
Barn Owl Egg Failed	9	19	23	13	16	19	10	9	21
Barn Owl Young	77	102	123	149	201	289	66	297	238
Barn Owl Young Failed	4	4	3	4	6	12	4	5	12
Barn Owl Total	113	201	262	266	331	444	281	412	455
Tawny Owl	8	13	21	25	22	21	11	22	12
Little Owl	1	16	18	16	11	12	8	15	21
Kestrel	12	23	24	25	17	20	14	21	20
Stock Dove	71	112	239	253	317	263	325	289	248
Jackdaw	63	83	141	177	189	206	176	266	270
Grey Squirrel	6	12	17	8	9	25	28	13	18
Empty	90	117	199	239	289	236	340	325	320
Not Checked	203	167	117	163	104	187	353	306	355
Other	4	0	11	9	7	4	9	4	11
Number of Sites	571	744	1049	1181	1296	1418	1545	1673	1730

An indication of how Barn Owls are faring is the number of chicks ringed. Last year nearly 1,000 were ringed by SCBOP, whereas this year it was just 417 (see table below).

This year was unusual in that there is a double first-egg-laying period: many laid their first egg around the usual time of 20th April with another batch laying in the second week of June.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Adult Barn Owls	3	16	25	26	14	23	40	21	26	32	215
Chicks	40	179	179	193	297	410	590	106	906	417	3237
Re-trap/Controls		3	20	35	44	38	65	45	42	58	339
TOTAL	43	198	224	254	365	475	695	172	974	507	3791

What do Barn Owls need?

To sustain good Barn Owl numbers there must be enough prey. Short-tailed voles need a particular type of habitat: rough, tussocky grass with a deep litter layer or thatch at its base to allow them to move through in tunnels. It also provides both food and breeding habitat. This habitat, in close proximity to correctly positioned nest boxes, provides the ideal conditions for Barn Owls to hunt.

Currently, much of the county's grassland is 'managed' by grazing or frequent cutting. The project is committed to offering advice that provides the grassland that Barn Owls favour across the county – with the benefits extending well beyond Barn Owls and voles. This habitat is scarce and precious and it

holds up entire ecosystems, from diverse flora to species of invertebrate that use it for over-wintering.

Could it be that Barn Owls in Suffolk are able to diversify more than those found elsewhere? When food is plentiful, Barn Owls will continue to take food to the nest and form larders. This food caching in times of plenty allows the Barn Owl to brazen out hard times such as periods of rain, when they are unable to hunt. Early season larders were few and far between this year, but those that were found showed a good selection of prey, such as long-tailed field mouse, bank vole, common shrew, pygmy shrew and the far less common water shrew.



Photo: Gavin Durrant

The Future

Adding the word 'Community' to our project name worked very well for us and we must thank all those involved for their support. This truly is a 'Community' project, with every Suffolk parish being involved.

For the future, we are looking at sustainability, not only of the boxes, which have suffered wear and tear, but also of the project's supporters. To survive, the project needs new recruits. To this end, additional training sessions have been organised and applications for grants forwarded to appropriate funders. The next training course is programmed to take place at Heveningham Hall in February 2016 ready for monitoring work next season. Please contact Steve on 01986 893311 if you wish to attend the training session, which is free of charge.

Funding

As well as protecting our most cherished areas of countryside, the Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONBs have been able to support projects such as SCBOP through their Sustainable Development Fund. We are grateful and delighted to announce that the project has been awarded £2,000 from each AONB, with an additional £1,000 from Touching the Tide Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme. This money will allow us to repair or replace dilapidated nest boxes in the two AONB areas. In addition, a further £1,000 has been raised by Waveney Bird Club for nest box repair and renewal in the Waveney Valley. Project monitors are currently out and about assessing the condition of boxes, with work on nest box replacement scheduled to start this winter.

Acknowledgments

The project is grateful to all the people of Suffolk, south Norfolk, north Essex and elsewhere who have put their heart into saving the Barn Owl for future generations.

As well as the funders already mentioned above, we must also thank other principal supporters such as Chadacre Agricultural Trust, who have supported the project from the very beginning; Suffolk Environmental Trust and the SITA Trust. The input of local people should not be under-estimated. There have been a number of Barn Owl parties, garden open days and evening lectures arranged to raise funds for the project. This funding has provided a significant contribution to the project, not only in terms of financial input but also by getting people involved and allowing them to see Barn Owls and their chicks close up: an experience of a lifetime.

Since the birth of SCBOP, Colin Shawyer and his Barn Owl Conservation Network have been supportive and inspirational. Thanks are due to him for his guidance and for keeping us up-to-date with the national perspective.

The tables were compiled by Alec Hillier, who is now retiring as SCBOP recorder after eight years. We are immensely grateful to him for all his hard work and skill. If you would like to discuss taking on this role, please get in touch through the website.



Image: Ed Keeble



Photo: Danny Porter

Peter Merchant and Eddie Bathgate

Peregrines at the Port

This article has been compiled from reports submitted to the Port of Felixstowe's Environmental Department by Peter Merchant in conjunction with Natural England, in order to assist them in making informed decisions in line with current legislation, regarding the ongoing needs of the resident Peregrine within the busy and developing workplace.

2012

In March 2012, two Peregrine Falcons were observed in courtship and carrying out adjustments to an old Crow's nest within the Felixstowe Docks complex. Peregrines had previously been seen in courtship over the area but none had ever lingered. Three birds had been seen a few days prior to that, probably having flown in off the North Sea, and these two occurrences marked the start of what was to be a saga of nesting attempts.

It soon appeared that the adult male preferred to perch on Crane 2 whilst the female adjusted the disused Crow's nest on Crane 1. Observers were delighted that there was a possibility of them nesting, though it was quickly discovered that both cranes were due for demolition as part of port expansion plans. Peregrines however, as a Schedule 1 species under the Countryside and Wildlife Act, cannot be disturbed without special licence and so, on advice from Natural England, the Port of Felixstowe granted a delay of demolition – to the sincere gratitude of wildlife enthusiasts.

The birds' first nesting attempt was interrupted by a young female bird which, for some reason, possibly a trauma, had only undergone a partial juvenile moult. The outcome of the territorial dispute was that the adult female left the area in favour of this new young bird, who was disappointingly too young to breed; females only reach maturity in their third year.

During a survey on April 20th a Peregrine carcass was discovered on the nest. The bird, which had been ringed in Antwerp Docks in 2010, had been predated by the young female which was still in attendance. Another survey on May 22nd confirmed that no breeding had taken place and further surveys over the summer revealed that three Peregrines were in the area. The young female, judging from her aggressive behaviour, looked intent on staying. Two of the birds were noted as ringed: one female having a red ring on the right leg and a metal one on the left; the male with a metal ring on his left leg. Her configuration indicated a Dutch female and his subsequently proved him to be a Belgian male. This male was

commuting over from Parkstone Quay in Essex trying to encourage the female to return with him.

The birds' preferred feeding perches were on the cranes and lighting towers. By examining the numerous prey carcasses underneath, it was established that 60% of their prey were wading birds and 30% Feral Pigeons, with the remainder being small gulls and the occasional duck. One of the males was even observed feeding on worms.

2013

In February 2013, the female was seen once again adjusting an old Crow's nest on the remaining crane. Hopes were raised that she might find a partner. However, during a regional Peregrine survey, an emaciated male Peregrine wearing a ring had been found dead on the Harwich dockside weighing only 432g instead of the expected 600g minimum. A post mortem showed that its gullet was blocked by a rubbery piece of flesh it had swallowed. Its leg ring identified it as a Belgian bird caught at Adinkerke on 9th September 2011, making it only the third Belgian Peregrine recovery in England. Concerns that the female would not have a mate were allayed when a new male was noted sheltering on a crane a few days later.

In order to encourage the female to nest away from the crane, the Port of Felixstowe's maintenance team erected a nesting platform on a nearby lighting tower, a nest box having been ruled out due to concerns over wind loads. The birds continued to use the redundant crane as a plucking and feeding point. She occupied this new, basic, shingle-filled tray in mid-March. Three eggs were laid and the male was observed delivering food, but there was no sure sign of feeding. The nest was deserted in early May and the eggs were removed for analysis and found to be infertile.

2014

By the end of 2013, the resident female had established a new relationship with a male bird which carried the leg ring configuration of birds

raised in 2010 at the Orwell Bridge nest box. They continued hunting successfully into 2014 but the clock was ticking with extensive quay development due to start. After consultation, the Port relocated the nesting tray away from construction activity. They also moved the redundant crane that the birds had been using as a feeding post further back from the dockside, rather than demolishing it. These alterations moved them further away from the dock development whilst keeping the relative positions similar to those of the previous year. Coupled with the addition of a further nesting tray to a lighting column, the changes were all completed by early January and the birds were seen feeding and in courtship around the new location almost immediately. By mid-March the first nesting tray was being used and the female was observed sitting on at least two eggs. The male was doing the hunting and delivering food to her. The male continued the brooding whilst she took off for the crane to feed. He, being smaller, was more successful supplying small birds, mainly waders and thrushes.

Peregrines normally lay on alternate days and commence sitting only after the penultimate egg is laid, from which date the incubation period is 32 days. During this period, the pair had to see off another Peregrine that was causing them considerable aggravation. On April 24th the male was seen preparing dead prey on the top pulley block of the old crane before delivering food to the female on the nest at two hourly intervals. On subsequent days this frequency gradually extended to three or four hours. But on the 29th he was seen delivering unprepared prey instead. Whilst she left the nest to feed, the male was observed clearing the tray of a dead chick: this type of clearing behaviour is typical. She returned with prepared food, tearing it into small pieces, but was not seen to feed herself, indicating that at least one chick was still alive. By the 30th however, both birds were feeding away from the nest and it became obvious that their nesting attempt had failed. No remaining eggs or chicks were seen when

the tray was inspected in May. It is likely that two or three eggs were fertile and hatched but the chicks died after ten days. It can also be supposed that the male was not a sufficiently efficient hunter and had been unable to supply the required food to keep the clutch fed. The pair continued to be seen hunting and feeding around the beach and cranes throughout the rest of the year.

2015

Early in 2015 the pair were seen in courtship once again and preparing a nest in the old tray. The female was at the tray for long periods on March 18th although periodically

leaving to hunt, indicating that egg laying had commenced. However on March 23rd, she was observed on the other, new tray, with the male bringing her food, returning once again to the old tray on April 2nd.

Subsequent inspection of the trays confirmed a scrape with no eggs on the first tray (although crows may have cleared any abandoned eggs) and one infertile egg but no scrape on the second. The most likely conclusion is that a disturbance caused her to desert the first nest, although she did sit for around 30 days in total between the two.

ELSEWHERE IN SUFFOLK

Ipswich Mill birds

A pair of Peregrine Falcons have been around Ipswich since 2011 but their breeding success was impeded by an ex-falconer's Gyr-Saker-Peregrine hybrid that harassed the pair, repeatedly stealing their food. Their nest-building attempt failed on The Mill building in 2011, with the male retiring to the Sproughton Sugarbeet factory, but they subsequently fledged two chicks successfully in Sproughton in 2012. The hybrid bird was seen again interfering with them in 2013 and their nesting attempt failed, but the hybrid has not been seen since and the pair fledged a second pair of chicks from The Mill in 2014. The Ipswich pair appears to prefer hunting over the town, where they are not in competition with the Orwell Bridge pair, which hunt over the river.

Orwell Bridge birds

The Orwell Bridge pair also successfully fledged two chicks in 2014. In 2015 the young persisted in perching on the bridge parapets close to the traffic. A scaffold board was mounted under the carriageway by Peter Merchant in an attempt to give them a preferred perch away from danger. The young had to be continually flushed away from the traffic as they were gaining confidence in their flying ability and they eventually started to use the plank below.

On 26th May 2015, a member of the public notified Peter Merchant that two carcasses of birds of prey were on the tideline at Freston and a photograph identified them both as Peregrines. One was recovered, and a full body X-Ray carried out at Highcliff Veterinary Practice revealed the cause of death as a broken neck, possibly following a collision with a high-sided vehicle on the Orwell Bridge. No foul play is suspected.

Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds

A pair in Lowestoft fledged a chick in 2013 but the female was found dead on the roadside in 2014. A new female was present in 2015 and breeding was confirmed, with three young fledged. In Bury St. Edmunds a pair is also thought to have bred in 2014. There are also a number of other immature birds regularly seen around Suffolk, especially near to the coast.

Peter Merchant has worked closely with the SWT on the Orwell Bridge Peregrine project and he monitors the Sproughton site. He has been a DEFRA-registered raptor rehabilitation keeper since 1983.



Dove Step update

On the 2nd of August this year I met Titan. Titan is a Turtle Dove and a unique one, being the only UK Turtle Dove to be successfully satellite tagged. This tagging was done by RSPB scientists in Suffolk last summer. He has now made the return trip to and from sub-Saharan Africa, providing vital data and hugely increasing our understanding of the migratory route taken by 'our' Turtle Doves each year.

This meeting had layers of importance for me. First, it is always a pleasure to see a Turtle Dove: for a species which has suffered a 91% decline in breeding birds across the last twenty years, any sighting is most welcome. Added to that, the attractiveness of the species in its own right – both on sight and sound – makes any encounter memorable. The fact that Titan has added so much to our understanding of Turtle Doves' migration places him at the forefront of migration science. Titan is additionally the only survivor out of a total of seven tagged birds. The reality that only he has made it to and from Africa is an acute demonstration of the mortal peril faced by this species. To then overcome the 'needle in a haystack' issue of finding a single bird in dense coastal scrub makes the encounter hugely gratifying.

Aside from these physical issues, which all had to be resolved in getting us both face to face, there was for me an emotional attachment to the meeting. I have spent the last few years wholly dedicated to Turtle Doves, pushing myself beyond my physical limits to raise funds for Operation Turtle Dove. As well as the journeys undertaken, we have carried out as much awareness-raising activity as possible, ensuring the

plight of our ailing Turtle Dove population is kept towards the top of the conservation agenda. With so many worthy causes and species threatened by extinction, this is no mean feat.

Across the last two years, friends and I have drawn a self-propelled line from Saltholme RSPB reserve in the north-east of England all the way to Bayonne on the French-Spanish border. One thousand miles of endurance completed in just 27 days. We call our journey Dove Step and it seeks to mimic the migratory route of our breeding Turtle Doves. In doing this our aims are twofold: to raise both funds and awareness for Operation Turtle Dove. I should point out that neither my friends nor I are athletes capable of naturally undertaking back-to-back marathon journeys each day. It is granite mental resolve and our belief in what we are doing which allows us to push ourselves to the limit and beyond. I could not personally have achieved the feats of endurance of the last two years without this mental resolve.

In covering much of the English range of Turtle Doves – and the whole of France – we have followed a route comparable to that taken by Titan. When overlain – our route vs Titan's – the lines intersect and we also have a very clear steer on where our journey must lead next. To date, we have walked 300 miles in England, from Suffolk to the north-east; kayaked a Channel-equivalent distance in the North Sea; cycled 570 miles from Calais to Bordeaux and walked the remaining 140 from Bordeaux to Bayonne. Well over 1,000 miles of self-propulsion, all for Turtle Doves and all undertaken in just 27 'Dove Step days'.

To meet Titan, having spent so much time preparing, pushing so hard and travelling so far, felt almost like closure: a chance to reflect upon the successful completion of this year's journey. We have a couple of equipment sponsors to whom we are immensely grateful. Every other aspect of Dove Step is self-funded, as is all the training. This time last year I had only been sea kayaking once and had never touched a road bike. I have now completed a 25-mile expedition at sea and cycled 570 miles in just six days! In pursuing the whole country-crossing this year, there was a lot of potential for failure. We relied upon a weather window to launch the kayaks; and cycling on public roads and for 100 miles a day comes with its own dangers, not least that of riding in proximity to traffic for hours at a time. Finally, having kayaked and cycled for eight consecutive days, the walking section (although more familiar) was still always going to be subject to fatigue, given what had come before it. In addition, with annual leave from our employers limiting the available time, the journey could easily have unravelled at any point. Making the finish line in Bayonne allowed immediate relief. It was only whilst watching Titan that I started to translate that relief into genuine happiness and pride. I could not be prouder of what we have achieved – both as a team and for Turtle Doves.

To date, our efforts coupled with your support have raised £8k for Operation Turtle Dove. Funds from last year's journey allowed for 9ha of Turtle Dove seed mix to be sown in the East of England, providing food for Turtle Doves on their return from Africa and again later in the season, when they have young to feed. The funds from this year are going towards plugging the last

remaining gap in scientific understanding of the lifecycle: what is affecting Turtle Doves on the wintering grounds? To this end, funds will be used to support research over the upcoming winter period. RSPB scientists are launching an expedition to study birds in Senegal in wintering congregations. This tangible application of our support makes it easy to continue with our journey. It helps me believe that the population could stabilise and we could retain the Turtle Dove as a UK breeder. The presence of Turtle Doves is also indicative of that of other farmland birds, as well as other migratory birds using the Afro-European flyway, with all its legal and illegal hunting and habitat pressures. Whilst Turtle Doves are my favourite, I of course care deeply about all our birds and these wider issues.

The route Titan has taken on migration tells us exactly where we must go next: Spain – specifically, a crossing of the western side of the country. We will make this journey completely on foot and leave in early 2017: over 700 miles of back-to-back marathon distances – our biggest challenge to date.

You can find out more about Titan and follow his migration via the RSPB website and follow our progress towards our next journey on the Dove Step 3 blog.

Never Give Up!



Photo: Jonny Rankin

Taking Forward Carlton and Oulton Marshes

History

Since the late 1970s, Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) has had an involvement in the Lower Waveney Valley. Back then, conservation organisations were much smaller than today and most of the organisation's work was focused and moved forward by a group of committed and dedicated volunteers. In those years, SWT's involvement in Carlton Marshes was alongside the tenanted farm owned by Suffolk County Council and small parcels of derelict fen meadows at Oulton Marshes, owned by the Oulton Poor's Trust.

Botanically, the land had great potential and was a real stronghold for species such as Cetti's Warbler, as well as being well-placed: right on the doorstep of Lowestoft, with the potential to bring wildlife experiences and education to a large audience of local people.

As conservation activity grew in the 1980s, so did SWT's involvement, and when the opportunity arose for SWT to purchase Carlton Marshes and agree a long-term lease on the land owned by the Oulton Poor's Trust at Oulton and Carlton Marshes, the complex of nature reserves now known as Carlton and Oulton Marshes was established.

Habitat management developed over the years and in 1990 an Education Centre was opened at Carlton Marshes.

In 2008, SWT purchased a further small area of abandoned fen meadow at Oulton Marshes and a small parcel of grazing marsh at Carlton

Marshes, which, after further land acquisition at both locations, grew to the over 160ha area it is today. The two sites were robust enough in area to become one large nature reserve site, split only by the Oulton dyke. By 2009, most of the land purchase was complete, although purchases have continued up until this year.

Increased habitat management has necessarily had to follow – in particular with regard to public access – in order to try and balance the pressures of the recreational activities of around 80,000 people on the doorstep of the reserve with the promotion of wildlife conservation.

Habitat Restoration

Often referred to as 'the Broads in miniature', the reserve today indeed offers some of the best examples in the UK of certain habitats including: grazing marshes, fen meadows, reedbed, species-rich grassland, arable reversion, open water and wet woodland.

Dyke Restoration

Restoration began with large expanses of dyke restoration at Oulton over a 5-6 year period. This involved reprofiling dyke edges, creating wide shallow margins to improve the grazing marsh areas for waders and wildfowl. The process also allowed the Broads Environmental Services Limited (BESL) to gain material to build the banks up on the River Waveney – a project started in this area in 2009 and which has proved to be a mutually beneficial partnership. Further river wall work has helped to create large expanses of open water at Carlton and enhanced the appeal to a greater variety of birds than was recorded on these sites previously.

Fen Meadow

Another project was the restoration to their former glory of large areas of fen meadow after 30 years of neglect that had left them covered in willow scrub, suppressing the diverse fen meadow vegetation below. These areas had their scrub thinned out and a rotational cutting regime was introduced, ensuring that young scrub remained around the site for years to come, providing habitat for Cetti's Warbler, Grasshopper



Photo: Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Warbler and Willow Warbler as well as a variety of invertebrates. These areas have responded amazingly well and are now studded with flowers such as bog bean, ragged robin, marsh cinquefoil and marsh pea. Another piece of the fen meadow jigsaw at Oulton Marshes is currently undergoing restoration with help from the Broads Authority and Veolia funding.

Turf Ponds

Peat-digging carried out historically in the Broads inadvertently created an important habitat for pioneering rare species, only for it to be lost again when the peat-digging industry ended. Dotted like squares on a patchwork quilt, new, small-scale turf ponds – some only a metre wide – have been created, following the Fen Audit across the Broads and a great deal of research, and facilitated by funding from the SITA Trust. This work has included subsequent monitoring of the ponds, which has shown a long list of rare aquatic invertebrates, some of which were firsts for Suffolk. These findings reiterate the importance of such interfaces (ecotones) between different habitat types.

Dyke Network

Much of the dyke network on the Grazing Marsh of the Carlton and Oulton Marshes complex had not been managed for many years. An ongoing program of sensitive dyke restoration was started in 2009 to ensure that the whole successional range is accounted for across the reserve.

Using existing dyke systems, areas of shallow water (scrapes), from a few metres to several acres in area, have been created by restoring footdrains. Features on the grazing marsh systems are designed not only to provide open water, but also to create those muddy edges so important for species such as Snipe, Lapwing and Redshank to feed. This habitat creation work has been rewarded by record breeding numbers and successful fledging of Lapwing and Redshank over the last three years, as well as by the influx of Lapwing from neighbouring land coming to feed on the invertebrate-rich muddy edges.

Much work has been done with local farmers to explain what SWT wanted to achieve and how the farmers might help. Grazing is a valuable conservation management tool, without which it would not be possible to replicate the natural management regime of these habitats; so farmers

were encouraged to tweak their grazing regimes in these areas, and even to move their animals into less favourable grazing areas, in order to improve the habitat structure.

Environmental Education and Public Access

Alongside all the important habitat management work comes an equally important responsibility: to educate local people about the wildlife and habitats that surround them and especially how to enjoy these areas with minimal impact on nature.

At Carlton and Oulton Marshes, as elsewhere across the county, SWT runs an environmental education programme and Carlton Marshes Education Centre is busy with school groups through term-time and family activities during the holidays.

As well as these environmental education activities, SWT runs guided walks and talks throughout the year on the reserves to promote the importance of both the reserves themselves and the lower Waveney Valley.

Efforts have also been made to educate visitors to the site, for example by a scheme of Dog Ambassadors, which aims to minimise the negative impact on breeding and over-wintering wildlife caused by dogs.

Carlton and Oulton Marshes Nature Reserve and the lower Waveney Valley now play host to a wide range of notable species including fen raft spiders, Barn Owls, water voles, Grasshopper Warblers, Lapwing, Redshank and Cetti's Warbler, as well as a number of rare aquatic invertebrates and Broadland plants, making it truly 'the Broads in miniature'.



Photo: Suffolk Wildlife Trust



Photo: Gavin Durrant



Photo: David Borderick



Photo: Gavin Durrant



Photo: John Richardson



Photo: Tim Oakes



Photo: Lesley Starbuck



Photo: Gavin Durrant

Home is where the heart is

I grew up, and cut my birding teeth, in the ornithologically rather mundane environs of Oxford (no offence meant!) and, though this area has some interesting wetland complexes that have been known to attract some pretty good birds, I always felt the lure of the East Coast. As a child, I remember Shell producing a wildlife calendar, whose September picture was of greatest interest to me firstly because my birthday falls in that month, but secondly – and more importantly – it featured a coastal scene, clearly East Anglian, with Bluethroats lurking under hedges and showing other Scandinavian migrants that I could only drool over.

My dream was realized when I finally first moved to Suffolk in 1981, eventually settling there in 1985; and though I have wandered since then, I still think of Suffolk as home. Why? Well, I just had the greatest of times there, for it was in Suffolk that I became a father, passed my driving test, started seriously chasing rare birds (and finding them for myself!) and became a bird ringer – among so many other things. But best of all, it was in Suffolk that I discovered and got hooked on migration and this has

remained my main birding draw ever since. My obsession with migrating birds was a great influence in my decision to move to the USA in 2009; well, that and the fact that I now have an American wife! Since that date, I have been working at Cape May Bird Observatory, first as a store manager, latterly as Program Director. A number of Suffolk birders have discovered the delights of Cape May, but for those who haven't, here's a quick resumé...

Cape May forms the southernmost tip of the state of New Jersey, in north-south terms being about level with Portugal's Lisbon. It fronts the Atlantic Ocean and sticks out into the Delaware Bay and thus somewhat resembles a giant Landguard Point. The one thing that Cape May has is birds. Lots of birds. In fact, it seems almost to be the perfect place on the planet for them. The Suffolk coast can do spectacularly for windblown migrants on the rare occasion that all the pieces fall into place exactly right; Cape May gets lots of birds as standard. The default winds in autumn blow from the northwest and drift southbound migrants to the coast, after which they get funneled to Cape May by the



Autumn migration brings a phenomenal rush of birds, including such treats as the wonderful Blue-headed Vireo.

Photo: Mike Crewe

geography of the Delaware Bay and other land features. And the arrival of birds can be truly spectacular! Estimates of a million birds at the point are not that unusual and many local birders still tell fond tales of the day that three million American Robins passed through! Yes autumn, or 'fall' as it is so fortuitously called in the US, is when Cape May diamonds really sparkle, but year-round this is a place to drool over – so here's a walk through the seasons which should help to illustrate how it is possible for a reasonably active birder to notch up over 300 birds in a year, just in Cape May County.

January typically begins cold, very cold for us Brits. There's no Gulfstream amelioration here and Cape May has more of a Continental climate, with bitter winters and sweltering summers. Winter can often see the Delaware Bay freezing over and parties of Bonaparte's Gulls hunt over the pack ice that creaks and groans against the pilings with every turn of the tide. As back bays freeze over, large rafts of seaducks shelter among the boats in the marinas and can often include in their number a few Red-necked Grebe, while Black-crowned Night Herons hang out on the wooden pilings. Great Horned Owls can be easy to spot at this time of year and gatherings of Bald Eagles make for an impressive sight. About one year in every eight or so, Snowy Owls

may wander down from the Arctic and one recent winter saw us enjoying some 15 of these fabulous birds in our area. Late winter echoes to the sound of Long-tailed Ducks caterwauling in the inlets, with the occasional Harlequin Duck to be found among them and before long, it's the time for Black Scoter to start their ethereal whistlings.

Spring comes late here and March can be an eternal month but, by month's end, the first Pine Warblers will have returned and American Woodcocks (known to country folk as 'timberdoodles') will be making their strange 'peent' calls on the field edges. As the trees finally leaf out and small caterpillars start to abound, the floodgates open and someone paints a rainbow in the trees – a rainbow that is known collectively as American wood-warblers. Though spring arrivals are less eventful than autumn ones here, spring migration is still pretty amazing. Some 25 species of wood-warbler regularly come our way, from the Ovenbirds that walk on the forest floor with their heads going back and forth like small Moorhens, to the incredible pirouetting acrobatics of stunning male American Redstarts. Black-and-white Warblers run up and down trees like Everton mints crossed with Nuthatches; stunning Black-throated Green, Prairie and Magnolia Warblers hunt in the oak canopies and the

Barnegat in Ocean County provides the best opportunities for photographing these stunningly beautiful Harlequin Ducks.



Photo: Mike Crew



A southerly airflow in spring brings not only warm air from the tropics, but some very special visitors, such as this Swallow-tailed Kite.

swamp woods attract the mind-numbingly beautiful Prothonotary Warbler. On top of all this, there are Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Rose-breasted and Blue Grosbeaks, and many more. Out on the Delaware Bayshore, the remarkable Atlantic Horseshoe crabs will be stirring, and the second half of May sees them peaking in number as they come onto the sandy beaches to lay billions of eggs. This glut signals the arrival of tens of thousands of shorebirds to feed at their single most important stop-over point between South America and the High Arctic. Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstones (yes, get used to those names – they’re actually quite good!) and Semipalmated Sandpipers are the main feeders, but the back bays also abound with Dunlin, Least Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers.

And with all this mass movement come the rarities. Again, spring is a little tamer than fall, but you can’t complain when a male Painted Bunting or Scissor-tailed Flycatcher turns up in your own backyard!! Late spring passes into summer and the woods of Belleplain State Forest resonate to the haunting tones of Wood Thrushes, the staccato punchy notes of Hooded Warblers, the ‘hiccuping’ of Acadian Flycatchers and

many more. Chuck-will’s-widows and Whip-poor-wills compete with cicadas and treefrogs for our attention at night and Clapper Rails and Eastern Willets call or sing from every available piece of saltmarsh. Summer can be sweltering and the horse flies and mosquitoes can be a localized problem, but it doesn’t stop me being out and enjoying a staggering variety of plants, dragonflies, butterflies and more. But summer is also tourist season and some of the more reclusive birders secretly wish they would all go away so we can have our birding spots back. The tourist season in Cape May is massive business for the local community, but it comes at a very heavy price for the wildlife. All species of beach nesting birds are in big trouble here as the vast majority of their vital habitat is considered sacrosanct to the tourists; American Oystercatchers, Least Terns, Black Skimmers and Piping Plovers try in vain each year, with the latter species in particular having all but gone from the county in the short time that I have been here.

But the end of summer signals autumn – fall migration is on its way, and this is where Cape May comes into its own. This is, of course, a drawn-out process, with



Spring migration peaks in May with spectacular numbers of shorebirds arriving to feed on the abundant Horseshoe crab eggs along the Delaware Bay beaches.

the first returning shorebirds hitting the ponds in late June and the last migrants not leaving town until early December. Generally though, July sees peak migration for adult shorebirds, with juveniles mostly coming through in August. A wide array of species may be found – pretty much all of the ones found in the eastern USA, but the prizes include Baird’s, Buff-breasted and Upland Sandpipers. Late August sees an impressive build-up of several hundred Eastern Kingbirds that gather to feed on sassafras berries; while southern breeders such as Yellow-throated Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush and Summer Tanager generally ship out in August too. Into September and the floodgates open up wider, for this is the month when wood-warbler migration peaks. Though some species are somewhat drabber in their juvenile plumages, it is a surprise to most people to learn that most adults retain their breeding dress all year once they are old enough to have acquired them, so there is still a kaleidoscope of colours to be enjoyed. There are times in September when 14 species of wood-warbler can be seen in a single tree, 30 Baltimore Orioles wing over your head while you count 35 Northern Flickers scanning for Merlins from dead snags, and Common Nighthawks dance

Bitterly cold winters bring their own reward when Snowy Owls are seen on rooftops around town.



Photo: Mike Crew

their way south – even at 11 o’clock in the morning!

The re-orientation movements of night migrants during the first few hours of daylight are recorded annually at Cape May and provide interesting insights into population levels. Counters stand on a high bank known as the Higbee Dike and count birds passing overhead with an accuracy that Europeans rather churlishly don’t credit American birders for. Every ‘chip’ and ‘tic’ overhead manifests into a bird species, and photography confirms the exceedingly high rate of ability of the counters as they record the birds. On some days it can be mundane, but on one or two days a year it becomes almost insane. Recently, we rather manically tallied over 56,000 wood-warblers passing the dike – with 90% of the birds being logged in the first 40 minutes of daylight! Open a UK bird guide and every North American songbird that you see in there as a vagrant will be a regular through Cape May at this time. Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos, Scarlet Tanagers, Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos, Indigo Buntings, Veeries, Grey-cheeked and Swainson’s Thrushes plus – yes, you guessed it – much more!



Photo: Mike Crew

Cape May isn’t just about birds. Southbound Monarch butterfly migration in 2010 produced the unforgettable sight of half a million heading out across the Delaware Bay.

For UK birders, late September is probably the best time for variety, but October usually produces **even more birds!** The famous massive falls at Cape May do tend to happen most often during October, when the species variety is a little less, but the entire breeding population of the Northern boreal forests is shipping south. This is the time for spectacular arrivals of tens of thousands of Yellow-rumped Warblers and hundreds of thousands of White-throated Sparrows. With the latter come Chipping, Savannah, White-crowned, Fox and Song Sparrows, with rarer delights including Clay-colored, Lincoln's, Le Conte's, Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrows. Hermit Thrushes and American Robins join the movement with the robins often forming vast sheets of birds seeming to stretch to the horizon. Cedar Waxwings bomb through in tight bunches, or feed quietly on berries in gardens at the point; Bobolinks, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, even Blue Jays meander aimlessly around the Cape May lighthouse, sizing up the Delaware Bay before deciding whether to cross or not. In years of boreal crop failures (mostly of pine seeds), Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches may abound in October and, in some years, are accompanied by movements of Red and White-winged Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks.

And then of course, there are the raptors: I've barely mentioned these. September sees peak numbers of Peregrines, American Kestrels and Merlins, then the Red-tailed, Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks, Northern Harriers and Golden Eagles come. Through it all sweep great numbers of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks and the Cape May Hawkwatch notches a few Swainson's Hawks and Northern Goshawks most years. This is a photographer's dream too, as the birds are often remarkably close and present great opportunities. Your head may be spinning by now, so I shall spare

you any more. Autumn glides gradually into winter – which comes late here, like spring – and November is, perhaps surprisingly, considered peak month for rare vagrants, though lost souls can and do turn up pretty much any time of year. Though such species as Whiskered Tern, Northern Wheatear, Northern Lapwing and Eurasian Wigeon have been recorded here (the latter annually), prevailing weather patterns mean that most of the rarities actually come from western North America rather than Europe. Species such as Western Tanager and Western Kingbird are annual and to be expected, while rarer fare over the years have included Say's Phoebe, Smith's Longspur, Townsend's Warbler, Allen's, Broad-tailed and Calliope Hummingbirds and California Gull. Droughts in the southwestern USA may also be responsible for some remarkable recent records of Crested Caracara and Zone-tailed Hawk, while older records of Rock Wren and Lark Bunting may also be due to local drought conditions in their natal areas.

I hope this gives a small insight into the remarkable birding that can be had at Cape May throughout the year; in 2014 I went mad and had a crack at a year list, just in Cape May County. I finished up with 327 species – and could have fairly easily had another five or so with a little extra luck! That year was an exceptional one for rare birds, but even so it illustrates what an extraordinary place this is. From Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies to Ivory Gulls, it seems to me that, if you wait long enough, you can pretty much see anything at Cape May!

Finally to the title of the piece: home really is where the heart is and, by the time you read this I will most likely be back in the UK and hopefully seeing you at Minsmere some time.

BINS Autumn Update

September 2015

The month got off to a good start with **Barred Warbler** being seen on the North Denes at Lowestoft and a juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** (Minsmere north wall) being found on the 1st, the latter staying until 4th. The Thorpeness **Wryneck** remained until the 1st.

A moulting adult **Honey Buzzard** was seen over Hollesley Marshes on the 2nd. Further **Honey Buzzard** sightings came throughout the month, including birds over Capel St. Mary 3rd, Eastbridge 8th, Martlesham 9th, three reported over East Bergholt 15th and finally south over PIPPS Ford, Needham Market 19th.

Sea-watching never really got going this month, however a probable **Cory's Shearwater** was seen north off Kessingland on the 3rd, a **Balearic Shearwater** south off Corton on the 9th, and **Long-tailed Skuas** (2) were seen off Minsmere and Thorpeness 9th, Southwold 10th, Thorpeness again 15th and finally a **Black-throated Diver** was seen off Southwold on the 9th.

A **Long-eared Owl** spent the day on the 3rd showing to all-comers as it sat on the 'Icky Ridge' at Landguard; the same day a **Raven** was noted over Bucklesham. A **Great White Egret** was seen on the marshes at Boyton on the 4th. A **Barred Warbler** was found in dense vegetation along Ferry Road, Southwold on the 5th though it was rather elusive.

A 1st winter **Barred Warbler** was found by the old pump at Minsmere on the 9th where it remained until the 13th; a **Red-necked Phalarope** was also present at Minsmere, seen on the scrape 9-11th.

The 9th saw a **Raven** over Brightwell, a probable **Icterine Warbler** at Bawdsey Quay and a very early **Snow Bunting** at Landguard.

Suitable weather conditions from the 10th resulted in grounded migrants being seen in good numbers, notably **Pied Flycatcher**, **Common Redstart** and **Whinchat**.



Photo: John Richardson

The first **Yellow-browed Warbler** report of the autumn came from Warren House Wood, Lowestoft on the 12th. The same day also saw an **Icterine Warbler** at Landguard, albeit briefly.

A juvenile **Red-necked Phalarope** was present on the scrape at Hollesley Marshes 10-18th and was then joined by a second bird 12-13th.



Photo: Dave Borderick



Photo: John Richardson

Wrynecks were seen at Corton radar lodge on the 10th, Whin Hill, Minsmere 10-14th, Tuddenham Road, Ipswich 14th and Hollesley Marshes 17th.

Spoonbills sightings included four at Hazelwood Marshes Aldeburgh on the 11th, two at Trimley Marshes 17th and then three south off Landguard on the 18th.

A **Phalarope sp** was seen to circle Tinkers Marsh on the 17th before flying off eastwards. A **Great White Egret** was briefly seen at Minsmere on the 18th before flying off south the same day and a **Purple Heron** was reported on Oulton Marsh 17-18th.

A probable **Corncrake** was flushed at Corton sewage works 19th and then vanished! A **Lapland Bunting** was trapped at Shingle Street 20th.



Photo: Dave Borderick

A **Great White Egret** was briefly seen on North Field, Walberswick on the 22nd then on Island Mere 22nd-24th before flying further south and settling on Hazelwood Marshes 24-28th.

A **Wryneck** was present on the beach at Thorpeness 26-28th showing well at times and a Long-eared Owl was seen to come in off at Corton on the 26th.

The 27th saw an influx of **Yellow-browed Warblers** into the county with up to fifteen being reported from many coastal locations, the highest count being from Thorpeness of five birds on 28th.

A first-winter **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was trapped on Orfordness on the 27th and there were up to eight **Spoonbills** on the NT reserve the same day. The first **Redwings** of the autumn were seen on the 27th as was the **Ring Ouzel** that was noted at Bawdsey MOD.

October 2015

An immature **Red-footed Falcon** was seen at Minsmere on the afternoon of the 8th and subsequently two **Penduline Tits** were there 18-19th and one was heard again 29th. Also at Minsmere from 22nd was a **Shorelark**. Another **Shorelark** was at Gunton on the 13th.

Other highlights were a **SIBERIAN STONECHAT** at Orfordness on the 10th, **Serins** at Landguard 9th and Southwold 20th and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** at Felixstowe Ferry 25th.

Numerous **Great Grey Shrikes** were seen in the county from mid-month, with birds being seen at: Lowestoft, Landguard, Southwold, Dingle Marshes, Minsmere, Falkenham and Castle Marshes.



Photo: Ian Goodall

What a good year for **Pallas's Warblers**. These Asian gems were noted at: Orfordness 11th & 18th, Sizewell 17th, Landguard 26-27th and finally Gunton on the 27th. A late **Wryneck** was at Lowestoft on the 12th and an early **Iceland Gull** was at Thorpeness on the 16th.

A ringtail *harrier* *sp* thought to be either a **Montagu's** or **Pallid Harrier** was present at Bawdsey Marshes 15-16th, though it had moved on before certain confirmation of its identity was agreed!

A **Richard's Pipit** was briefly seen at North Warren 12th. **Rough-legged Buzzards** were seen over Easton Bavents, Thorpeness, Minsmere and Alderton.

It was a good sea-watching day on 10th October. The murky conditions and favourable winds produced two **Cory's Shearwaters** past Southwold and one past Lowestoft. **Leach's Petrels** were seen at Lowestoft, Southwold, Bawdsey and Orfordness.

Throughout the month good numbers of **Yellow-browed Warblers** were noted at many coastal locations.

November 2015

November can sometimes bring a surprise to the birding calendar and this was no exception. The month started off with a **Great White Egret** that was present at Hen Reedbeds and remained there all month with further Great White Egrets also seen at Hazelwood Marshes 1st, Lakenheath on and off all month, Island Mere, Minsmere 6-15th and finally Dunwich shore pools/Dingle Marshes 8th and 28th respectively.



Photo: Ian Goodall

The only **Pallas's Warbler** of the month was noted north of Dip Farm in Corton Woods 2nd. A female **Long-tailed Duck** took up residence at Lackford Lakes from 4th until the month's end.

Suffolk's third **PIED WHEATEAR** was discovered mid-morning on the beach at Landguard on 3rd and delighted many as it performed well throughout the remainder of the day. The bird (a male) was possibly seen the previous day, but this was not confirmed.



Photo: Ian Goodall

A **PALLID SWIFT** was reported just prior to dusk on the 5th over the plantation south of Sizewell power station. The 5th also provided **Great Grey Shrike** near Island Mere, Minsmere and **Grey Phalarope** south off Landguard.

A first-winter **Red-necked Phalarope** was a surprise discovery on the scrape at Hollesley Marshes; the bird remained 8-12th. Alton Water held a **Red-necked Grebe** 9-30th and a **Slavonian Grebe** was seen intermittently.

A **Long-eared Owl** was seen at dusk 13th and at dawn the next day on Westleton Heath. An obliging Long-eared Owl was present on the Icky Ridge at Landguard 18th. Two **Spoonbills** were seen mid-month on the scrape at Hollesley Marshes.

Three very late **Long-tailed Skuas** were seen passing Southwold 13th and the same day a **Puffin** was noted off Slaughden. A **Siberian Chiffchaff** was seen at Lackford Lakes on the 15th.

A **Great Northern Diver** was seen on the Stour Estuary from Stutton Ness 16th-22nd and several were seen offshore during the month. Two **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were reported on North Marsh, North Warren on the 19th.

With favourable sea-watching conditions over the weekend of 21st-22nd attention was drawn to the sea. News from various watch-points indicated that a good number of wildfowl were on the move, along with a steady passage of **Little Auks**.



Photo: Tim Oakes

The peak count of **Little Auks** came from Southwold with twenty-one being seen on 21st; however the highlight of the weekend for those stationed out sea-watching was the first-winter **Black Guillemot** that was tracked north offshore on 22nd from Slaughden through Sizewell and Southwold and finally noted off Ness Point!

An extremely late **Whinchat** was seen by the Bailey bridge at Walberswick 25th as was the juvenile **Little-ringed Plover** seen again the following day nearby on North Field.

A small influx of **Waxwings** occurred late month with a single bird being trapped later at Landguard 26th; five were briefly seen at Goseford Hall, Falkenham on the 27th and what was possibly the same five individuals seen at Copdock 28th. Further Waxwing sightings were forthcoming from Santon Downham 28-29th, Lowestoft cemetery 28th and finally a single bird along The Drive, Reydon on the 29th.

Photo: Dave Borderick

Finally, four **Pink-footed Geese** were seen on the marshes at Boyton on the 26th, three **Jack Snipe** on the managed retreat at Trimley the same day and a **Glaucous Gull** (probable second-winter) noted north off Felixstowe Ferry 28th.



SOG Outdoor Field Trips

SOG has had another great selection of trips this year. We all have our memorable highlights although on some we've battled the elements. A huge thank you as always goes to the trip leaders, without whom the trips would not be possible. Particular thanks go to John Grant, a longtime volunteer leader, who has decided to take a break next year.

Thanks also to everyone who has attended – it has been a pleasure to see new people join us. Please do come along again next year – all are welcome.

Finally please note the new number on the Events card for field trip enquiries: 07951 482547.

Field Trip Reports

Steve Fryett

Shingle Street & Upper Hollesley Marsh

19th Sept 2015

Leader: Steve Fryett

It was a cool start to this meeting at Shingle Street, however the sun was out and the assembled members eagerly set off expecting a great day in the field. Above Oxley Marsh good numbers of migrating Swallows and House Martins were passing through with several Meadow Pipits along the roadside as we approached the tennis court. We stopped short, as there were clearly many birds amongst the bushes next to the court with Whinchat (3), Stonechat (2), Reed Bunting and several Linnets noted. As we moved to the other side of the court we located juvenile Common Redstart, Common Whitethroat and a splendid fresh-plumaged Lesser Whitethroat. Moving on to the allotments, two Chiffchaffs were noted before a Pied Flycatcher that provided excellent views. A surprising sighting was a Greenshank calling as it flew past the allotment; it was later found on the flooded pools further south. Raptors always feature at Shingle Street and the highlight



Photo: Bill Baston

today was a female Sparrowhawk sparring with a couple of Crows. Rarely does a SOG meeting fail to record Common Buzzard here, therefore it was no surprise that five appeared in the distance. The garden of the most southerly house at Shingle Street has a typical seaside habitat perfect for migrants. We noted four Chiffchaffs and a single Willow Warbler before heading back to the car park. Also noted at Shingle Street were Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Common Darter, Holly Blue, Small Heath and Red Admiral.

The meeting then moved to Hollesley Marshes where we hoped to encounter some of the good species recently reported at this site. Scanning the lagoons from the mound, a good selection of waders was present with Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff (2), Ringed Plover, Snipe and Dunlin. The highlights had to be four Little Stints, with close views, and a juvenile Little Ringed Plover. A Water Rail called briefly as another new wader was located: a

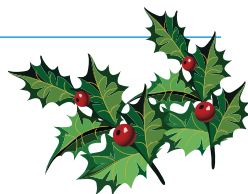
Green Sandpiper with Common Snipe. Two Northern Wheatears proved an interesting find on the grassy bank of the main lagoon before some of the party left; the rest of us continued towards the river wall. Here we propped ourselves up on the concrete wall to get a different perspective of the lagoons, finding Redshank and Avocet. Just sitting, we waited for something to arrive and very soon two or three mewing Common Buzzards passed overhead; a Hobby caused havoc across the lagoons as one came in for a low level pass with possibly a second bird present overhead; a female Sparrowhawk flew over; another Wheatear was found and a Yellow Wagtail dropped in. At Hollesley Marshes we also recorded significant numbers of dragonflies on the wing with Migrant Hawker and the less common Willow Emerald Damselfly as well as a single sighting of Painted Lady. The meeting ended with the members happy that they had had their expected good day with a nice selection of autumn migrants.

Gi Grieco

National Trust Orfordness

26-27th September 2015

Leaders: John Grant & Gi Grieco



Following the success of last year's trip, a small group gathered at Orford Quay at 5pm on 26th for the short boat trip over to Orfordness. This group of 10 included three younger SOG members, looking forward to the adventure and a bit of birding, before the remainder joined us the following day. This advance party seemed to have enough bags to last weeks!

Once landed, we transferred the sleeping bags and food supplies to the National Trust truck to be taken by Steffi and Kevin to the dormitories, while the rest of us started

birding. With about two hours until sunset, we concentrated on the 'Airfield' and the scrub near the old ministry buildings. There were quite a few pools, so wetland birds predominated with Ruff, Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Golden Plover, Teal and Shoveler. Quartering the fields were two Marsh Harriers, three Kestrels, two Barn Owls and a fine Short-eared Owl that flew exceptionally close in the fading light. A party of six Spoonbills flying north as the sun was going down was a wonderful sight. There were very few birds in the scrub however, with three Stonechats being the most notable.

After a pleasant evening meal we had a short walk to admire the night sky, with a myriad of stars clearly visible thanks to minimal light pollution. We retired for the night, ready for the next day.

The following morning we headed down to the quay to meet the rest of the group, who were joining us for the Sunday. Again, similar species were noted, with Little Stint added to the waders. Although this diminutive bird proved difficult to pick out as it moved amongst the vegetation, eventually all got to see it. The scrub was again quiet: up to five Stonechats, some Goldcrests and a Redstart were seen by just a few. We got to see some Meadow Pipit in the hand with the bird ringers – Gill Stannard, Dave Crawshaw and Mike Marsh – on site. Similarly, the seawatch, as we ate our lunch, was quiet. There was a small southward movement of Brent Geese in small groups, along with the odd Red-throated Diver and Guillemot.

Heading back, with a viewpoint from one of the buildings, we saw the Spoonbills on a pool and, across the river, some Buzzards. A few SOG members including David, and Ben with his father Colin, decided to go for

an exploration and they alerted the rest of the group to an Osprey over the river. It had previously been seen further up the Ore, so we were all lucky to admire this large raptor. Birds of prey turned out to be the stars of the weekend and other species encountered were Peregrine, Kestrel and Marsh Harrier. Other highlights included sightings of a Hobby performing aerobatics as it hunted dragonflies and a Merlin hunting low over the grazing marsh chasing Meadow Pipits. It would occasionally land on the deck or a small rise or post, allowing excellent views.

Just as we were about to leave, we had a surprise: the ringers rang to say that they had trapped something special. As we waited we tried to guess what it could be, with most plumping for Yellow-browed Warbler, although one of the trip leaders guessed correctly: Red-breasted Flycatcher. This was a new species for some of those present and was a great way to finish off the day.

A great weekend, some excellent birds, good fun and a pleasure to see newcomers to SOG. My thanks go to John Grant for co-leading the trip.



Photo: David Walsh



Moving West to East...

We have recently moved from Brettenham into Stowmarket and in doing so have crossed the border into East Suffolk. We had lived at our previous address for over 40 years and had amassed a decent garden list of over 110 different bird species. Garden sightings over the years have included: Wryneck, Yellow-browed Warbler (on two separate occasions), Black Redstart, Firecrest, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Waxwing.

Brettenham is situated in the centre of Suffolk and is the third highest place above sea level in the county, which could explain the number of raptor species we have recorded. We looked out over open farmland with woods in the distance and have seen Osprey, Honey Buzzard, both Marsh and Hen Harrier as well as Red Kites, Buzzards and this year a Montagu's Harrier fly over.

Tawny, Barn and Little Owl have all been seen in the garden as well as more exotic species such as Peacock, Guineafowl and Ring-necked Parakeet.

A natural pond in the garden attracted Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail, Teal and Mandarin.

Our other sightings included Snipe, Woodcock, Whinchat, Redstart and Stonechat.

What will we miss the most? That's easy: the Spotted Flycatchers that came every year and nested on the house or nearby.

However we now look forward to establishing a new garden list here on the outskirts of Stowmarket and have already had regular visits from Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Marsh Tit and even a Grey Wagtail that dropped in briefly.



Photo: David & Margie Carter

Council for 2015

Officers

Honorary President: **Steve Piotrowski**
Chairman: **Gi Grieco**
Vice Chairman: **Roy Marsh**
Secretary: **Edward Jackson**
Treasurer: **Matthew Deans**
Membership Secretary: **Kevin Verlander**
Communications Officer: **Vacant**
Publicity Officer: **Eddie Bathgate**
Projects Officer: **Chris Keeling**
Harrier Editor: **Eddie Bathgate**
Suffolk Bird Report Editor and SORC Link: **Nick Mason**
Outdoor Events Coordinator: **Gi Grieco**
Indoor Events Coordinator: **Adam Gretton**

Members

Robin Harvey (to 2016)
Vacant Post (2016)
Adam Gretton (to 2017)
Nick Mason (2017)
Kevin Verlander (to 2018)
Ed Keeble (to 2018)

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean Garrod
Mike Hall
Robin Hopper
Mike Jeans
Mike Marsh
Philip Murphy



Bird Recorders

North-east Area Recorder:

Andrew Green, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: 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

West Area Recorder:

Colin Jakes, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN
Tel: 01284 702215 Email: 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
- Active Twitter feed - [@suffolkbirds1](https://twitter.com/suffolkbirds1)
- Quarterly magazine - **The Harrier**
- Annual review - **Suffolk Birds** report

Trips and talks

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



Protecting birds

- Actively lobbies to protect habitats and birding amenities
- Provides a county-wide field force of bird surveyors (50+)
- Organises and promotes bird surveys
- Inspires and undertakes conservation projects
- Bursaries available
- Numerous conservation achievements:

- Contributed to several species breeding successes (Barn Owls, Peregrines, etc.)
- Undertakes monitoring and ringing
- Involvement on community and education projects
- Organises and hosts dawn chorus walks
- Assists with fund-raising for bird hides
- On-going participation in key bird surveys for the BTO, such as BBS, the Bird Atlas, various species surveys and WeBS
- Provides surveys for commercial organisations, such as environmental waste companies etc.



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

For birds & for birders

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

www.sogonline.org.uk

