

September 2013 No.174



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

£3.25



Inside:

- **Man and Suffolk's birds' changing fortunes**
- **History of Suffolk birdwatching, Part 3**
- **Derek Moore's Autobiography - book review**

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Cover photograph - Eastern Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans albistriata*)

Photographer: Bill Baston. Landguard, on 27 April 2013: Canon D60, 500mm f.4 lens + 1.4 teleconverter, 1/400 sec at f5.6, ISO 100

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All material for the December 2013 Harrier should be with the editor no later than w/e 15 November.

Subscription rates (2013)

SOG: Adults - £15.00; Family £17.00

Joint SOG/Suffolk Naturalists' Society: Adults - £28.00; Family - £32.00

Website: www.sogonline.org.uk Email: info@sogonline.org.uk

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group Registered Charity No. 801446



The Harrier

September 2013 Magazine No.174

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Celebrating SOG's Ruby anniversary

Recently Steve Piotrowski's guest editorial (Harrier #172) made plain we would be celebrating this important anniversary. Now that the planning is virtually complete, we can announce that we'll be formally celebrating the anniversary at The Cut in Halesworth on the evening of November 18th.

Although all of the details are set out in the announcement that appears later in this issue of the Harrier (page 9), suffice to say that Derek Moore OBE, who is our joint guest speaker (with Waveney Bird Club), will be celebrating 'Suffolk's Great Ornithological events of the Twentieth-century' and casting as he does so some light on the origins of SOG and our early history. Given Derek's reputation, this promises to be both an illuminating and entertaining event. In addition there will be a special SOG quiz plus two raffles - one of them for some valuable birding optics.

Naturally, with The Cut's capacity of 220, we're hoping as many of you as possible will join us at the theatre but, even if you cannot make it, there will still be an opportunity to participate in the superb 'Grand Optics' raffle. Details of this and how to order tickets for the evening can be found in the page 9 announcement.

Provide us with your email address

While the details are already publicised on our web site, we will also be emailing the information to any members who have supplied us with their email address (if you haven't already done so and would like to receive SOG reminder and important news emails, then send your address to Matthew Deans: matthewjdeans@yahoo.co.uk).

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at this important SOG event - please make the effort even if you do not usually come to our talks, all will be most welcome.



Lesser Grey Shrike

Finally, enjoy your birding this autumn - Chris Courtney's photo (left) is just a taster of Suffolk's wealth of autumn migrants and vagrants.

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

Mick Wright our BTO representative introduces the new Atlas and man's combination of destruction and dedication to Britain's avifauna:

Mick Wright

Man and the changing fortunes of birds in Suffolk

The changing fortunes of birds in Britain and in our county of Suffolk, in the main, reflect how man is having a devastating effect on species diversity and population levels. The impacts on birds are not just confined to our shores, but also to the staging areas along migratory routes through Europe and on into the many wintering areas within the African continent.

Intensive farming practices sanitise and sterilise the countryside, which results in substantial degradation of habitats and an enormous decline in food supplies. Recreation is also having an impact, especially on ground nesting birds and, furthermore these days, our climate appears to be having an effect on range and population sizes. An absolutely abhorrent cause of losses to bird numbers is the shooting of vast numbers of migratory birds across Europe and the continuing poisoning of raptors in this country.

In order to address these many problems facing our avifauna it is vital we have up to date accurate data.

SOG plays its part

Members of SOG, along with many other birders from a variety of organisations, have successfully achieved an epic piece of fieldwork. Through commitment, skill and an enormous amount of personal time, they have compiled the largest ever data set of Suffolk avifauna. For Suffolk over half-a-million bird records were collected between the winter of 2007 and the breeding season of 2011.



The new Atlas shows changing fortunes

Since the last Atlas of 1989-1992 we have seen some astonishing successes, none more so than the Buzzard. There has been a spectacular increase in numbers, which has transformed the Suffolk countryside. This highly adaptable species has become one of the most common, and certainly the most visible, bird of prey in Suffolk. They mostly hunt alone in open areas, are known for scavenging and are opportunistic predators, feeding on insects, rabbits and a variety of bird species.

Winning



After an absence of too many years it is amazing to be able to watch Peregrine Falcons throughout the year. The very first breeding pair set up residence on the Orwell Bridge and others are now occupying industrial sites. One pair is at home in a specially built apartment in the tallest building in Ipswich! In the last eighteen years or so we have seen a massive expansion of Little Egrets too. They have become common on our coast and estuaries, as well as on inland waterways and wetlands. There are now at least six breeding colonies in Suffolk.

Other species with increasing populations include the Cetti's Warbler. At the time of the last Atlas there was only one site, but now their breeding and wintering numbers have increased significantly to a point where they have colonised the whole of the Suffolk coast and the flood plains of the estuaries. The Dartford Warbler has continued increasing in numbers and has rapidly returned to many of its former sites in the Sandlings Heaths. [Ed: Despite our recent harsh winters.]

We have known for many years, far too many years in fact, about the decline in farmland birds. We still have far too many species that are at an all time low. Many of these species are still declining or showing very little improvement in recovering. Too many of those species are Red listed as Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC).

Losing



The Turtle Dove map shows that this species is widespread [Ed: or was between 2007 and 2011] but numbers continue to fall, likewise Nightingale numbers are still declining and their range is contracting. The habitat requirements for these species need to be targeted before we can see any change in their status as Suffolk breeding birds.

In addition, we need better enforcement of EU laws on shooting and we need to discover more about any problems encountered on their migratory journeys and wintering grounds.

It's shocking to note that we have too many bird species suffering for one reason or another in all types of habitat. Marsh birds such as Snipe have now almost gone as a breeding bird from Suffolk; we are also seeing a serious population decline in the number of breeding Redshanks and the Ringed Plover, once a common breeding bird along our coasts and tidal shores, that has now all but disappeared.



Putting the results to good use

We are aiming to publish the Suffolk results of the 2007 - 2011 Atlas fieldwork (see the Announcement on page 31 of this issue), but with the fieldwork over, we now need to put the results to good use to seek a better future for our birdlife. We must lobby the Government to make Natural England and Defra more accountable and for them to do far more to create the necessary ecological resources, which will safeguard and increase our birdlife.

Steve Piotrowski now completes his history of Suffolk birdwatching by bringing us up to the present day and then delivering a slightly pessimistic vision of the future:

Steve Piotrowski

A history of Suffolk birdwatching

Part 3 – the near past, the present and the future

Twitching and bird information services

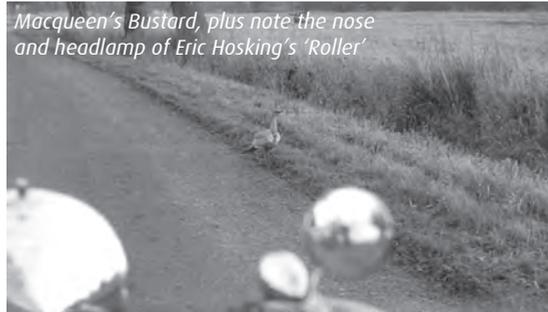
In the 1950s and 1960s, birdwatchers had no real desire to be immediately aware of rarity occurrences and were happy to read about such events in monthly journals or annual bird reports. The focus was then on the birdwatcher's own patch, with the more adventurous possibly visiting a bird observatory or field studies centre. Such venues were often at remote localities, which would have involved a long train or bus ride followed by a cross-country trek to reach the final destination, so prolonged stays of normally a week or more were desirable.

Nowadays, day visits, single overnight stays or weekend courses are commonplace. Birding holidays abroad were virtually unheard of before the 1980s and now there are hundreds of companies offering them with destinations to all six¹ continents!

Access to bird 'news' became easier during the 1960s when birdwatchers became more willing to trek further from their local patch to view others' 'finds', the latter due partly as a by-product of increased private car ownership. The presence of a Macqueen's Bustard at Hinton in 1962 caused feverish excitement amongst local and national birdwatchers, resulting in Suffolk's (and probably the country's) first 'twitch'. However, only about 100 people saw this great rarity following news of its whereabouts, although the 'crowd' did include some famous ornithologists of the day such as James Ferguson-Lees (David Pearson pers comm).

SOG members and others celebrated the Golden Jubilee of this 'twitch' at Hinton in November 2012, which allowed surviving original observers to reminisce amongst themselves and pore over photographs of the event. The story was superbly written up by SOG stalwart John Grant and published in the East Anglian Daily Times. The photographs that complemented John's article were intriguing to say the least, not only for their quality, but also for the array of vehicles present and the photographic equipment being used. David Hosking (son of Eric Hosking) recalled that he was five years old at the time and he watched the bird from the back of his father's Rolls Royce. Today, one would expect more than 3000 to be present within the first few hours of the news of such a rarity being released!

Macqueen's Bustard, plus note the nose and headlamp of Eric Hosking's 'Roller'



Optical aids and textbooks improved

As the emphasis switched from behavioural studies of birds to their plumage characteristics twitching became more fashionable during the 1970s. Optical aids and textbooks improved



¹ Or seven, if you treat North and South America as separate.

enormously and many ornithological papers concentrated on identification. For many years, the news of rarities was gleaned from local contacts and through elaborate telephone 'grapevine' systems [Ed: We all fondly remember Nancy's tea room at Cley, not just for the dire coffee but the compensatory morsels of tasty information!], which inevitably broke down causing much irritation amongst local birdwatchers. If you weren't in the clique, it would take some time for you to learn about the whereabouts of birds, even those on your own patch. For example, on 30th June 1991 an adult Franklin's Gull from North America was spotted at Burgh Castle having previously being seen on the north side of Breydon Water that day. The bird was located by a visiting group of birdwatchers from Ipswich, but the Lowestoft Lounge Lizards who included Burgh Castle as part of their patch, knew nothing about the record until they read the account in the Suffolk Birds report some 18 months later!

IT begins to kick-in

In 1986-1987, information technology (IT) caught up with the twitching scene and commercial bird information services were introduced. Initially, these were restricted to crude answerphone systems, which were quite costly to access, but soon information-specific pagers were developed, followed by mobile telephone answering services and Internet websites. Nowadays, no self-respecting 'twitcher' [Ed: as opposed to the birders who have less interest in rarities] would be without some means of contact, wherever he or she may be. The importance of up-to-date information to those regularly in the field is paramount and, although news of national rarities became more regularly available, news of county rarities and significant migration events were not.



The BINS Boyz

BINS is founded

The founding of Suffolk's own Bird Information Network Service (BINS) by Roy Marsh and Lee Woods in September 2006 brought significant change and meant that birdwatchers could gain information by text messages on their mobile phones. This service is complemented by a superb website giving up-to-date news and photographs of birds seen each day. The message system is quite simple and relies on observers in the field texting in details of their sightings and for these to be collated and relayed to everyone paying an annual subscription.

BINS is the most reliable and foolproof method of disseminating bird information locally and Roy and Lee should be applauded for their most sterling efforts. It is normally the first service to report Suffolk rarities with birds such as the Audouin's Gull, King Eider, Sandhill Crane and Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll being classic examples of this. With the website having received over 900,000 hits so far, this is an incredible achievement for a local service.

However, no system is foolproof. First, there is a limit to the number of observers that can be accommodated on the system to keep the 'sent' message ratios high for its members. Additional devices could be sourced, but it would require the services of more volunteers to support the 'sending out' process. BINS doesn't have a manned office or work environment like other service providers, so messages are 'actioned' on the move by those willing to give up their time to do so. There are the inevitable delays in grouping the sightings together and, furthermore, if the key person is not available to swiftly pass on the messages, then there is the potential for delays of several hours. Such circumstances are rare, although delays may be tolerable to some, but others demand a more instant system of messaging! Many local birders now use a combination of BINS and Twitter.



Further advances in IT and the future

In recent years, the use of social-networking sites has progressed at pace and birders now regularly use Facebook and Twitter to circulate bird information, images and videos. The information delivered by Twitter is instant, so followers are aware of birding 'tweets' more-or-less as they occur. Photographs of rare or unusual birds can be beamed electronically down the lines to computers and mobile phones seconds after they are taken. It remains to be seen whether Facebook and/or Twitter is just a passing fad or whether a more elaborate electronic system will be developed. It's still work in progress for these most recent developments - so probably a case of watch this space?



A variety of aids are now available - here an MP3-based bird song/call player

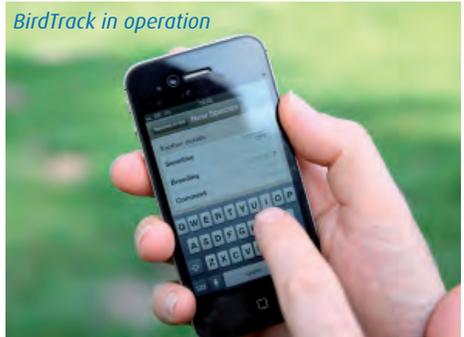
Advances in IT for birders are not just restricted to bird news services. 'Apps' for smartphones are now available to aid bird identification. They contain a wealth of information from plumage ID to songs and calls and, if observers really get stuck, they could log onto the Internet whilst out in the field! Voice recognition can't be far away, so in future perhaps we will point our device at a bird singing or calling and 'hey presto' the species will be announced. Social media sites will undoubtedly speed up bird identification with details including photographs sent down the line to all who may be interested.

An 'App' is already available that guides the observer to establish the identity of the bird being watched. All smartphones have a GPS facility, so the system would know the observation point, time of day and season. The programme is aware of the range of each species and its probability of occurrence and could be linked to a habitat map. All that is needed from the observer is the bird's size and shape and then a list of possibilities could be displayed. Currently, the list would display around 16 possibilities, but the system is still in need of tweaking, as often the bird being observed is absent from the list!



Advances in IT have meant that the submission of bird records can be fun and collation can be done swiftly - for a classic example we need to look no further than the online system used by BTO for the recent Bird Atlas Project (2007-2011). If data were submitted online on the day of the survey, then records could be plotted and maps viewed the following day, along with an array of other statistical information. The BTO's BirdTrack recording system has now been upgraded and its apps are available for iPhones and Androids, so records can now go direct from the field and into the BTO's central computer system at the press of a few buttons.

BirdTrack in operation



Nick Moran of the BTO now completes his marathon series of articles about BirdTrack with a brief review of its many benefits:

Nick Moran

Log it – and use it!

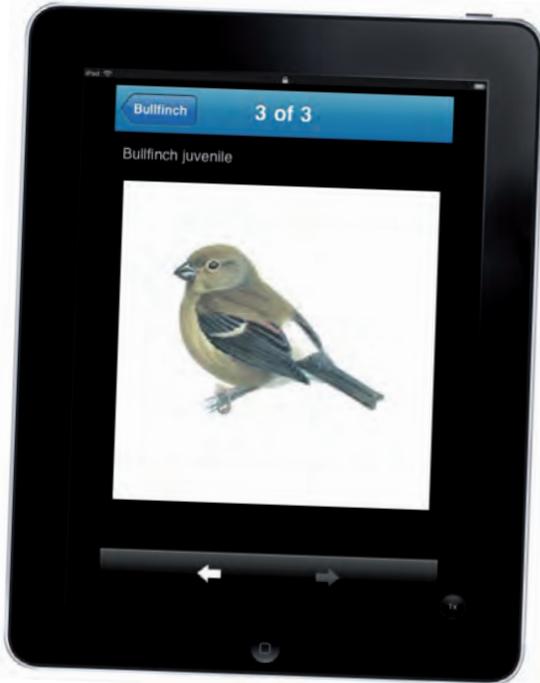
Throughout the series of BirdTrack articles in the Harrier, there has been a focus on how you can add your records to the system, and the personal rewards you can gain from doing so. A recent questionnaire of birdwatchers revealed that, of the many using BirdTrack, a significant proportion are motivated by 'altruistic' reasons – that is to say, the value their records provide to conservation science. It seems appropriate, therefore, to round off this series of articles with a quick look at some of the ways BirdTrack data are being used in conservation:



Distribution mapping projects

A whopping eight million BirdTrack records have fed into the most important British and Irish bird book of the last two decades, the Bird Atlas 2007–11 to be published later this year. Included in this total are all records from the Atlas winter (November–February) and breeding season (April–July) periods, and 'out of season' records with breeding evidence for many early/late breeding species such as Crossbill and Hobby. The value of this publication – and the many local atlases that in parallel have been/are being prepared – to inform policy-makers and indicate conservation priorities over the coming years speaks for itself.

For several years preceding the Atlas, the Bird Conservation Targeting Project (BCTP) fulfilled the role of collating and presenting bird records from various sources, including BirdTrack. The results were used to help target resources towards important bird sites, identified by mapping the distributions of farmland and woodland birds



Technology transforming birdwatching

The impact of technological advances has transformed birdwatching. For example, bird identification is now much quicker and easier, disseminating bird news is speedy and thus readily available to all. But there are some negatives including reluctance by many birdwatchers to take field notes, that could result in an overall decline in ID skills, and the on-going behavioural issue with some pushy, new-age photographers.

A vision for the future for the next Bird Atlas Project (2027–2031) could be that surveyors are given devices to take into the field that record bird song and calls in a particular area pinpointed by GPS. Voice recognition might then identify species present and indicate the numbers before submitting a return automatically to BTO's computer – so that's job done? But the vital ingredient will be the birds themselves of course! How many species will there be left – or will we be looking at silent fields?

of conservation concern. Not only did BirdTrack records form a key part of this essential dataset but the system also housed the verification tools for processing all the BCTP data.



Phenological change

There is concern that many of our existing estimates of phenological change are biased towards the first extreme event, for example the first sightings data of migratory species. Additionally for birds, estimates of arrival and departure are largely restricted to data collected at coastal bird observatories, which may not be representative of the patterns in this country on their breeding grounds. There is a growing opinion that such 'casual' records are likely to produce biased estimates that may be of limited value for phenological studies and hamper our ability to understand how, for example, climate change may affect different species. Using complete list data from BirdTrack and its recent predecessor Migration Watch, and broadly comparable data from the Inland Observation Point survey of the mid-1960s, the BTO's Stuart Newson, Phil Atkinson and Stephen Baillie are carrying out a piece of work that seeks to quantify the timing of arrival, departure and length of stay of UK migratory birds.



Status reviews

BirdTrack records have also been used to contribute to status reviews of several species. Whilst the status of our most numerous species are well understood from large-scale monitoring schemes, such as the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and the rarest species are well-monitored by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel via the network of local bird recorders, there is certainly a 'middle' group of species for which BirdTrack records can add a great deal of contextual information. The recent updates of both the Waterbird Population Estimates and the Population Estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom made reference to BirdTrack data for a number of scarcer species. BirdTrack data records also made a significant contribution to *British Birds* papers on wintering Bitterns and the changing status of Great White Egret.



Data requests

An increasing number of requests for BirdTrack data are being received, from a range of individuals and organisations. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust have used BirdTrack records of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese to help identify key winter feeding areas for these species, whilst the RSPB have accessed data on Crane, Hen Harrier, Spotted Crake, Turtle Dove, Twite and a range of potential UK colonists to advise their own conservation work. Environmental consultants frequently seek BirdTrack data to incorporate into Environmental Impact Assessments; where applicable, local bird clubs/recorders are given first refusal to supply these data. A wide range of student projects have drawn on the BirdTrack database, addressing such diverse topics as 'Herring Gull dispersal patterns in relation to anthropogenic activities' and 'climatic reasons for increasing numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers in Yorkshire'. On a lighter note, BirdTrack records were also used to help generate an appropriate species list for the Wales Coast Path opening day Bird Race!

The conservation science uses to which BirdTrack data can be put are many and varied. In the near future the BirdTrack partnership (BTO, RSPB, BirdWatch Ireland, Scottish Ornithologists' Club and the Welsh Ornithological Society) will hold a workshop to plan the development of further conservation science products and other research outputs based on BirdTrack, so watch this space!

Editor's note: Given the number and range of uses that BirdTrack data is being put to I think we can be sure our submitted records are proving invaluable. So, keep on 'BirdTracking', let's log it and not lose it!

To help you use BirdTrack at home, or the app in the field, in this issue we

enclose a free reprint of the BTO's Quick-start guide to BirdTrack.



Don't miss SOG's celebration of our Ruby Anniversary

On the evening of Monday 18th November, commencing at 19:30 in The Cut at Halesworth, we will be celebrating our 40th Anniversary - a 'not-to-be-missed' event.



Derek Moore OBE

Entertaining talk

In association with the Waveney Bird Club, we are delighted to welcome back by popular demand Derek Moore, who has kindly agreed to talk about *Suffolk's great ornithological events of the Twentieth Century* - which naturally includes the founding of SOG and some of its notable achievements.

Derek knows our county extremely well. He was born in Beccles and began birdwatching in the Waveney Valley some sixty years ago. This, coupled with his career with Suffolk Wildlife Trust, means he knows his subject. His nostalgic journey into the past will cover the key personalities involved, the most notable birds and influential weather events. His combination of a hilarious turn of phrase and insightful knowledge means we're all in for a funny and fascinating evening.

As the review later in this issue shows, Derek has just published his autobiography *'Birds: Coping with an Obsession'*, which he will draw on during his talk. Signed copies of the book will also be available.

Exceptional raffle prizes

Two raffles will be drawn during the evening. The first, our standard draw with plenty of prizes, will be open to attendees only. The second will be our 'Grand Optics' draw, offering high quality prizes: 1st prize a pair of Swarovski 8x30 binoculars (value £850), 2nd and 3rd prizes Viking EDS binoculars (value £299 each) and lots more.

This 'Grand Optics' draw will be open to members, whether you can attend or not. All can enter the draw by sending a cheque for £5 per ticket (to Kathy Piotrowski at 96 Beccles Road, Bungay, Suffolk NR35 1JA) who will ensure your ticket is in the draw on the night.

Excellent facilities

The Cut is easy to find. It is conveniently located a short walk from the Rail Station and there is ample parking nearby around the town. If you use sat nav. the theatre's postal code is IP19 8BY.

This venue offers an excellent range of facilities. The auditorium seats 220 and there is an upstairs gallery where there'll be a number of stalls on the evening, including an art exhibitor, Viking Optics (find out about the special SOG discount), Derek Moore's book signing, the SOG display and Christmas gifts. There is also the Café (where evening meals are served prior to an event - but an advance booking is required), as well as a licensed bar.

Easy booking

Tickets are only £5.00 and early booking is advised. You can either source your ticket direct from the Box Office by phoning 0845 673 2123. Or book it via The Cut's website - <http://newcut.org/events/entry/1075> - the booking process is straightforward.

Note that funds raised at this event will be in aid of farmland bird research.

So what are you waiting for? It promises to be a fascinating and convivial evening.
Book today and we'll see you for this fun night!

This quarter Lee reports on a remarkably productive summer:

Lee Woods

BINS Bumper Summer

June 2013

The month of June can always be a dark horse when it comes to quality birds and this year was no exception! The **Savi's Warbler** at Lakenheath remained until 7th often showing well to the hordes, while the long-staying male **Red-footed Falcon** from the same site was last reported on 5th. The elusive **Savi's Warbler** that was first heard at Minsmere in April was still 'reeling' sporadically from within the reed bed but was

never seen, also five **Spoonbill** were regularly seen on the levels and a **Great White Egret** was noted behind South Hide 1st-5th. Two **Common Crane** were noted high over the broad at Benacre 2nd, also **Honey Buzzard** over Old Martlesham on this date as well as two **Puffin** north off Thorpeness with a further bird north the following day.

An intriguing report of an **Iberian Chiffchaff** from Kensington Gardens, Lowestoft 3rd had locals searching for what would be a county first, no sign of the Chiffchaff but an immature/female **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was discovered instead! Two **White Stork** were seen over Sizewell 3rd heading north at 13:30hrs.

Red-breasted Flycatcher



A little flurry of **Red-backed Shrikes** occurred early month, with male birds being seen at Minsmere (Whin Hill) 4th, Breydon Water South Wall 5th, again Minsmere (North Wall) 7th and the only female noted at Gunton Cliffs 9-10th. Other birds of note around this time were; indefinite article **Montagu's Harrier** seen briefly over Minsmere 5th; **Bee-eater** that was heard only over the disused caravan park at Thorpeness 6th; **Osprey** north over the A12 at Blythburgh also 6th and finally an immature male **Golden Oriole** was noted in Theberton Woods 7th.

It's been a relatively poor year for **Marsh Warblers**, with only one bird noted during this period and that was from Southwold 9-11th. **Quail** sightings were also well down on previous years, with only two birds reported; with the first being a calling bird at Bowbeck, near Bury St. Edmunds, then one which was flushed at Redgrave Fen.

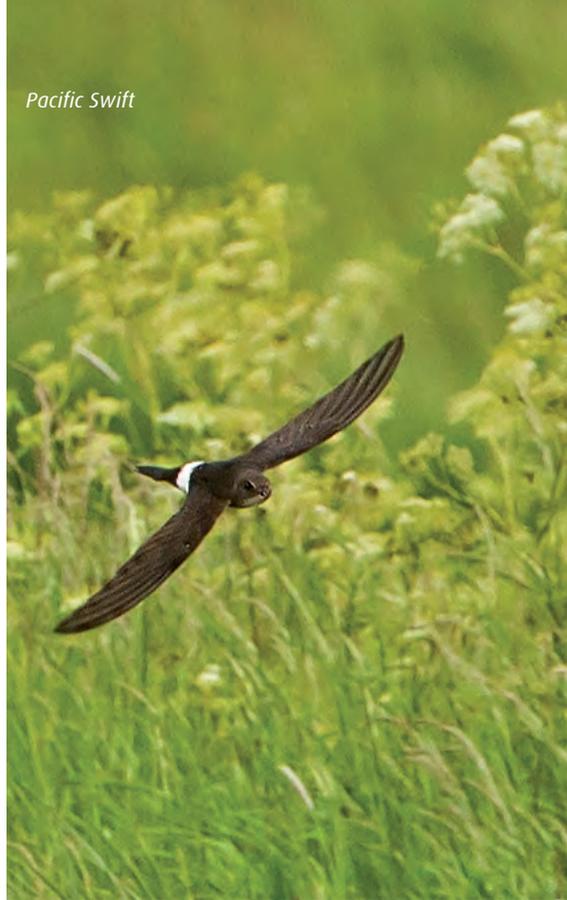
On a positive note, **Red Kite** sightings appear to have shot through the roof, with no fewer than 72 birds reported throughout the month with the highest count being 24 birds on the 14th. Also there were several reports of one or two **Ravens** in the Stour valley over a six-week period, which might indicate that breeding may have taken place, or certainly been attempted, in the general vicinity!

The 14th saw an adult female **Red-necked Phalarope** on the scrape at Minsmere for much of the day, and another **Phalarope sp** (probably Red-necked) was seen on the sea at Felixstowe the very same evening. The 25th saw another **Red-necked Phalarope** that spent the evening on the sea at Easton Bavents/Southwold 25th.

Red-necked Phalarope



Pacific Swift



Bird of the year?

No doubt bird of the year for many, not only for the locals but many from further afield, was the discovery of a **Pacific Swift** at Trimley Marsh SWT 15th. The bird was found at 10:48hrs over the reserve and miraculously stayed until 16:05hrs the following day, allowing many hundreds to add this mega to both county and life lists!

Great White Egrets are now to be seen more regularly in the county and this month was no exception with birds noted at Pippis Ford, Needham Market on two consecutive evenings 18-19th, Butley Mills 24th and finally Carlton Marsh SWT 29-30th.

Unseasonal sightings included a **ringtail Harrier** over the fields at Kingsfleet which, after seen well, was confirmed as a **Hen** 19-20th and a 3rd summer **Glaucous Gull** reported on the sea just north of Ness Point, Lowestoft 24th.

*Roseate Tern (right)
and Arctic Tern*



Roseate Tern's were seen at both Minsmere and Landguard 21st. A male **Red-footed Falcon** was seen between Cattawade and Manningtree on the evening 22nd. An **Osprey** was seen to come 'in off' at Minsmere late morning 27th then, what was presumed to be the same bird, may have been seen later over Havergate Island.

A rather unusual sighting concerned a **Nuthatch** that was seen at Landguard 26th and was the 3rd site record for this species. Two **Common Crane** were noted circling over the broad at Benacre 28th, a **Pacific Golden Plover** was present on Orfordness for five days from 29th in an area of no general access and finally a **Honey Buzzard** was seen over Hollesley Marsh 30th.

July 2013

The **Great White Egret** remained at Carlton Marsh until 5th before moving on to pastures new. Another ringtail **Hen Harrier** was noted between Kelsale and Sibton 5th. A **Roseate Tern** was reported south past North Beach Lowestoft 7th and nearby a **Caspian Tern** was seen distantly offshore from Gorleston heading north 7th. A **Bittern** was noted throughout the month along the river wall of the Deben upriver from Felixstowe Ferry. **Little Gull** numbers began to build up as the month went on with up to 54 birds being present at Minsmere 18th.

Some good birds were noted around Breydon Water which included: a male **Red-backed Shrike** which was viewable from the ruins at Burgh Castle 15th, **Great White Egret** seen both 15th

and 25th, **Osprey** 13th and finally a staggering count of 310 **Mediterranean Gulls**.

There was a small influx of **Two-barred Crossbills** in East Anglia on the afternoon 20th, and two immature/ female birds were seen for just 8 minutes (15:15-15:23hrs) by a lucky few who happened to be on Havergate Island at the time.

Had the birds hung around and been more accessible I'm sure they would have proved very popular, as the last county record was way back in 1894!

Singleton **Spoonbill** sightings came from Trimley 17th and Tinkers Marsh, Walberswick 18th. A **Pomarine Skua** was noted north off Thorpeness 20th with further 'Poms' (two adults) seen south off Ness Point 30th. A very unseasonal **Great Northern Diver** was observed heading north from Landguard 25th, nearby a **Great White Egret** was seen for an afternoon only on the reservoir at Trimley Marsh SWT 25th.

A steady influx of returning waders began from 23rd that included many **Spotted Redshank**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Wood Sandpipers**.

August 2013

Wader numbers continued to climb early month with a very noteworthy count of fifteen **Wood Sandpipers** at Minsmere 2nd, an adult **Roseate Tern** was also seen that same evening frequenting South Scrape and it or another adult **Roseate Tern** was seen along Lowestoft North Beach 6th and 11th.

A small group of up to seven **Black Terns** proved popular as they fed off Links Hill, Lowestoft 2nd-6th. The **Little Gull** numbers at Minsmere peaked at 167 birds on the 5th. A juvenile **Black-necked Grebe** was present on Broad Water Lake, Great Livermere 3rd-6th where a **Wood Sandpiper** was

also present. Seven **Curlew Sandpipers** were on Tinker's Marsh, Walberswick 20th.

The first returning migrants of the autumn started to arrive early month with a **Pied Flycatcher** that found the net at Landguard 5th followed soon after by one at East Lane, Bawdsey 6-7th then a 'small influx' occurred with **Pied Flys** being noted at East Lane (five) and Landguard (four) respectively on 19th. The first **Whinchat** of the autumn was discovered in fields by the old sewage works, Corton 14th, then others followed from 20th.

An impressive count of 180 **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen in Wolsey Creek, Southwold 9th which also held 25 **Yellow-legged Gulls**. **Spoonbills** were seen over Carlton Marsh SWT 10th (one circling the reserve and then two birds over, heading east) and up to 12 were on Havergate Island throughout the month. A **Great White Egret** spent two days on Island Mere, Minsmere 10-12th.

The first **Cory's Shearwater** of the seawatching season was duly noted south off Thorpeness 11th, the same site also saw a **Roseate Tern** go south 13th which had earlier been seen off Southwold. Other notable seabirds during the month included juvenile **Long-tailed Skuas**, which were noted off Lowestoft 17th and 18th and from Kessingland 19th also single **Pom Skua** and twenty-one **Arctic Skuas**



Pied Flycatcher

were seen from Lowestoft 18th. Up to 80 **Little Gull** seen from Dower House, Sizewell 19th, however, probably the best seabird seen during this period was an adult **Sabine's Gull** that spent several minutes slowly drifting north then south off Bawdsey on the evening of the 19th.

A smart **Wood Warbler** was discovered at East Lane, Bawdsey 12-14th with another being seen at Landguard 19th. A **Marsh Warbler** was an unexpected find in the nets nearby at Hollesley Marsh RSPB 14th. Three 'unseasonal' **Jack Snipe** were noted on the winter flood at Trimley Marsh SWT 18th. An **Osprey** was seen intermittently throughout the month around Aldringham Walks. An **Icterine Warbler** was present on private land at Bawdsey 19th, with another on Orfordness 22nd.



Wood Warbler

After several weeks without any news, two **Ravens** were again seen in the Stour Valley just East of Dedham 20th. A very smart juvenile **Caspian Gull** was noted at the harbour mouth, Southwold toward the latter part of the month, near-by a **Great White Egret** took up residence in the reed-bed at Dingle Marshes 19th-23rd.

Classic fall conditions over the bank holiday weekend 24th-26th resulted in some great birding along our coast. Highlights over these three days included three **Greenish Warblers** in the Lowestoft area, no fewer than fifteen **Wryneck** reported, with five at Landguard alone, a short-staying **Icterine Warbler** was trapped at Landguard, **Wood Warblers** were at Sizewell and Bawdsey plus good numbers of both **Pied Flycatcher** and **Whinchat** were noted and a few **Common Redstart** thrown in for good measure.

Two **Dotterel** were seen briefly on the common at Landguard before heading off north on the 24th. A **Quail** was flushed from North Denes early morning 24th and wasn't seen again. Seawatching has been surprisingly quiet given the NE winds during the last week of the month, however

Pom Skuas were noted from a number of watch points, also two probable **Long-tailed Skua** were seen south off Bawdsey 24th. Two **Ospreys** were seen over the Orwell Bridge and Lakenheath 26th and twelve **Curlew Sands** were seen the same afternoon at Levington Creek.

Two **Red-backed Shrikes** took up temporary residence in Lowestoft, with one bird present on North Denes 27th - 30th, while the other was in the grounds of the wind turbine compound Ness Point 28th - 31st. A female **Red-footed Falcon** was seen over Felixstowe Ferry 27th as it flew south over the golf course.

The 29th was an interesting day; it all kicked off with a **Barred Warbler** which was seen all too briefly at Landguard, however this wasn't the case for the **Balearic Shearwater** that was tracked from north to south and therefore was 'picked up' at Ness Point, Kessingland, Southwold and Sizewell. A **Wood Warbler** was trapped and ringed at a private site in Hollesley, **Honey Buzzard** reported WSW over Needham Market and finally several **Ospreys** were reported with four birds being seen over Southwold, Minsmere,

Whinchat



Red-backed Shrike



Martlesham and Lakenheath respectively.

Long-tailed Skuas were noted offshore 30th with two being seen off Ness Point and three from the beach at Sizewell, along with 130 **Little Gull**. A nice selection of waders were present on Havegate Island 31st with the undoubted highlight being the adult **White-rumped Sandpiper** that was discovered on the scrape along with two juvenile **Little Stint** and eleven **Curlew Sandpiper** plus seventeen **Spoonbill**. The **Corncrake** that was flushed on Orfordness on the same day would have proved popular had it been more accessible.

September 2013

The month started off well with the discovery of a **Baird's Sandpiper** on the Orwell Estuary viewable from Levington Creek 2nd. **Great White Egrets** were present at Minsmere with four birds on Island Mere, Minsmere 3rd-4th which consists of a county high gathering for this species at any one site, with three birds remaining throughout the month, plus two birds, which were presumed to be from Minsmere, being seen west over

Hazelwood Marsh 5th, and the single bird at Dingle Marshes remained from last month until 2nd.

A **Wryneck** was noted at Bentley, which was a good inland record as it was seen to feed in stubble along Bentley Old Hall Lane 2nd; other birds were seen on the disused caravan site at Thorpeness on the evening of 5th, Landguard 13-15th and Easton Bavents 18th-22nd. Two **Ospreys** were present on the Blyth Estuary throughout the month, with others being seen around the county.

The bar was raised in terms of quality with the discovery of a smart 1st winter **Lesser Grey Shrike** in horse paddocks on Aldringham Walks 15th-23rd which proved to be popular during its eight-day stay; this sighting consists of the ninth record for the county with the last being at Trimley Marsh on 14th September 2009. Keeping with the shrikes theme, a juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** was present along the cliff-face at Thorpeness 15-18th.

The first **Yellow-browed Warbler** of the autumn found the net on Orfordness 21st; this was

Lesser Grey Shrike



soon followed by other individuals at the Bowling Green in Sparrows Nest, Lowestoft 22nd, one by the Customs House, Felixstowe 23rd and singles at Hubbards Loke, Gunton and on Skillsman Hill Southwold 24-25th. A smart **Pectoral Sandpiper** was found on Trimley Marsh SWT late in the day on 21st and remained until 23rd at least. While a rather confiding **Lapland Bunting** was present on the beach at Landguard 22nd-24th.

Other notable birds found during the month included; **Honey Buzzard** south over Rushmere Heath 5th, **Grey-headed Wagtail** at Landguard 6th, juvenile **Montagu's Harrier** south over Trimley 8th, **Lapland Bunting** Trimley Marsh SWT 12th, a putative **Roseate Tern** off the rigs at Sizewell 9-17th, **Balearic Shearwater** south off Thorpeness 7th, **Grey Phalarope** south off Corton 21st and finally several **Long-tailed Skuas** were reported off our coast throughout the month.



Lapland Bunting

Phil Brown

Red Kites breed in Suffolk

At last it's official. Red Kites have again bred in Suffolk¹, this time on a private estate in the west of the county.

The Red Kite's steady progress eastwards can even be seen in the Cambridgeshire Atlas from 2007 to 2011 (see page 31) as nesting attempts steadily move east approaching the Suffolk border. So their arrival has been slow, but inevitable (as the June BINS report demonstrated).

Amongst the early spotters of this particular Suffolk breeding pair was yours truly, along with my fellow villager and SOG-member John Owen, when in April while we were conducting a Nightingale recce.

We hope to be publishing more information about this long-awaited 2013 return in a later issue.

Meantime, it is worth repeating that in 2012 there had been a previous possible breeding attempt on another west Suffolk estate but, as the landowner concerned denies access on principle to ornithologists to the estate, it proved impossible to confirm the nesting site at the time.

Look out east coast, the Red Kites are coming - but slowly!

¹ The first time, since pre 1830, and then the NE Suffolk pair in 1996-7]

Field Trip Report

Jonathan Lawley and Adam Stuart

Phew what a scorcher!

STANTA

13 July 2013

Leader: Paul Holness

SOG's annual raid onto the Battle Area on the Norfolk-Suffolk border was undertaken on a "stinking hot" day². Even at 10:00 it was already exceedingly hot as SOG members arrived at West Tofts camp on the edge of the STANTA military training area. It was also a busy day at the Camp as the Household Cavalry were holding their annual open day, the base commander was about to hold his leaving party and special forces training was still underway on the Battle Area (which necessitated some adjustments to our standard trip).



Still life with military memorabilia

Owing to a couple of late withdrawals SOG numbers were down this year, so a diminished but enthusiastic party boarded the bus to be briefed, first by our leader Paul Holness (who knows every inch of the vast area and all its birds) and then by the new RSM Caleb Smith who was going to be with us all day.

While waiting for the bus to leave West Tofts Camp several Siskin and a party of Goldfinch flew over.

Spectacular view

First stop was Frog Hill where, as usual, we all marvelled at probably the best view in eastern England - a vista of over 20 miles or so across unspoilt English countryside. Here we heard Jay, Nuthatch, Coal Tit and Skylark then saw Wren and Yellowhammer, plus an Ash tree, possibly succumbing to Ash Dieback, before walking down the hill for Redstart and Stonechat - but no luck initially, until distant views of Stonechat were obtained.

Some water birds

We then re-joined the bus for a short but rough track journey to Fowlmere. Although this small mere had practically dried up, nevertheless we saw Pochar, Tufted Duck, Coot, Little Grebe and Mute Swan on it, plus Green Woodpecker, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Dunnock, a family party of Redstart and Song Thrush around it. We then followed a circular route back to the bus that took us past bushes where we now saw a Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff and then, on a small pond adjacent to Fowlmere, we saw a Moorhen with chicks and a good drift of Great Yellow Cress.

From Fowlmere we then went on to Smokershole where we spotted Whitethroat, Stonechat, Linnets, Pied Wagtail, Swallow and House Martin.

² Sadly this was the selfsame day that three Terri's (TA members) succumbed to heat exhaustion on the Army's Brecon Beacons military training area.

Next stop was Tottington for more Redstart, Buzzard, Kestrel, Pheasant, a largish accipiter (probably a Sparrowhawk - though several hoped for Gossie), Rook, Goldcrest and Mistle Thrush.

The crystal Wissey

By now hunger and thirst kicked in and we headed for lunch at the bridge at Langford. This is a beautiful spot where the crystal-clear Wissey winds its way through water meadows to the bridge and surrounding Willows offering much needed shade to the party. It was there that we found nesting Grey Wagtail and had outstanding sightings of an adult bird in a Willow tree, plus yet another Buzzard, Reed Bunting and Reed Warbler, while in the river were Pink Water Speedwell and Common Water Crowfoot.

After lunch we carried on to the Harrier Strip renowned for its rare wild flowers. The best were immediately beside the landing strip and included Spiny Restharrow, Greater Knapweed, Common Centaury, Sickle Medick, Viper's Bugloss, two types of Knapweed Broomrape and Kidney Vetch - all typical Brecks species. Fluttering around them were several butterflies including Common Blue, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Tortoiseshell and a Skipper sp. On the avian front Woodlark, Stock Dove, Skylark and another Common Buzzard joined the day's birding list.

Stonies at last

Up to this point there had been no talk of Stone Curlew but it became clear that Paul had something up his sleeve as we drove to a strip of rough ground where he said he had recently seen individuals. But, as happened last year, no luck. So we moved on to an area new to SOG, the northern extension of the training area between Ickburgh and Hilborough.

At the first stop someone spotted a raptor some distance away, not too high, and heading towards us. In moments a Red Kite was right above us with its chestnut wings showing wonderfully and at the same time we clearly heard it calling - perhaps to a mate. For some of us it was their first Red Kite in East Anglia. As we carried on down the road and rounded a corner we put up a covey of Grey Partridge.

Next was the highlight of the day, a family of Stone Curlews - two adults and two recently fledged young on a stony piece of set-aside. The birds were incredibly well camouflaged but, in the course of about five minutes, we managed to spot all four of the birds a mere 30 yards from us. It was an outstanding sighting especially as a hunting Buzzard prompted the young to adopt their typical defensive measure of lying completely prone in the plough before the whole family retreated to higher ground.

Back in the minibus we then returned to West Tofts Camp for the final spot of the day, a possible Honey Buzzard. While these were distant views, the bird was scoped and seen to have softer grey upper wing coverts, barring underneath and kept its wings flat.

Despite the weather and the time of year, it had been one of our best days at STANTA. Besides the birding members of our party, particularly Adam Stuart and Chris Courtney, had impressed and stimulated other members with their wide knowledge of the area's many varieties of butterflies, moths, dragonflies as well as its floral offerings. Many thanks also to Paul, RSM Caleb and the British Army.

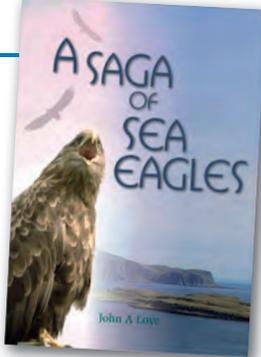


Prone Stone Curlew chick

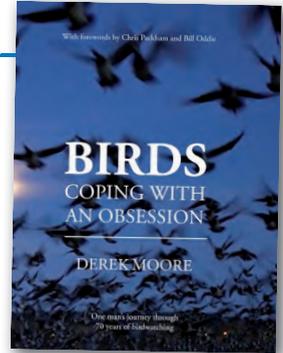
Book Reviews

David Tomlinson

***A Saga of Sea Eagles,*
by John Love
(Whittles
Publishing,
£19.95)**



***Birds: Coping with an Obsession,*
by Derek Moore
(New Holland,
£14.99)**



Should Sea Eagles have been introduced (or, arguably, reintroduced) into East Anglia? I was disappointed that opponents of the project were able to peddle half-truths and misinformation in their successful bid to stop it.

Sadly, there's hardly a mention of the East Anglian project in John Love's *A Saga of Sea Eagles*, a fascinating and detailed history of not only the return of the Sea Eagle, but also its history in the British Isles.

The story of the Sea Eagle's extermination from the British Isles makes sad reading, but their return is a huge triumph for conservation. As you will discover from John's book, the reintroduction was not nearly as simple as you might think, and it faced considerable and highly vociferous opposition from those – mainly crofters – who believed that it should never have taken place.

What was frustrating was how long it took for the released birds to breed successfully. It was known that these big eagles are very slow to mature, but even so it was ten years after the initial release before the first chick fledged. That nest was on Mull, which remains the best place to see the re-established population today, though there are now close to 70 pairs breeding, or attempting to breed, in Western Scotland, while the new population in Eastern Scotland (based on releases that started in 2007) enjoyed its first breeding success this year. This came too late to be included in this book.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter in the book is Chapter 12, *Living with Sea Eagles*. Here the author discusses in detail the most controversial

of subjects, lamb killing. We read that "more is known about the diet of reintroduced Sea Eagles than any other raptor population in Britain", while you won't be surprised to learn that in John Love's view "accusations of lamb-killing have been constantly misrepresented". I'm convinced that East Anglia's pig farmers would have had nothing to worry about.

One man who would have liked to see Sea Eagles (or as he refers to them, White-tailed Eagles[Ed: Correctly]) introduced into East Anglia is Derek Moore, and there's the sneaking suspicion that if he'd still been living in Suffolk when the project was debated, it might have gone ahead. Derek is a forceful character who enjoys a good argument, and has a fine record of persuading people (and landowners) to do things they might not have ever considered. In his entertaining and often amusing autobiography, *Birds: Coping with an Obsession*, Derek remarks witheringly "the birding fraternity was deafening in its silence" on the subject of the planned introduction.

As our county's former bird recorder, BTO rep and director of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Derek will be known to most people reading this review (the majority of whom will have already read the book to see what he has to say about them!) Perhaps disappointingly, his comments on his former colleagues and contemporaries are somewhat

muted - though this may have been on the advice of his publisher's lawyers. Derek makes both friends and enemies equally easily, and not everyone agrees that his time at the SWT was a success. He even faced an internal coup at the Trust, with senior members of staff demanding his resignation. He survived this [Ed: Later sharing the characteristic comment "If you're going to shoot the king, make sure you don't miss!"], and went on to work with the Wildlife Trusts at head office for three years. This wasn't, he admits, a happy time: he found "morale among the staff at rock bottom", not to mention a dire financial situation.

Derek is a great storyteller, and this book is at its best when he writes about Suffolk characters. Tony Marshall was one his favourites, and he notes how Tony named the pairs of Mute Swans at Abberton after people he knew, according to their temperament. One pair was known as "Bert and Joan [Axell] because they were dominant and belligerent". Bert was, of course, the warden of

Minsmere, and Derek draws a perfect pen-portrait of him, telling us that "Bert was an impressive, self-opinionated, obsessive and extremely driven man", a description which, come to think about it, would equally well fit Derek. Sadly, there are no accounts of Derek hitting anyone, though as Bill Oddie notes in his foreword, "and then I hit him!" is a phrase familiar to all of us who know him.

Much to everyone's surprise, Derek moved to West Wales, "to take on another challenge". Twelve years on he is still there [Ed: Though he also spends time in SW France], but don't be surprised if he eventually moves back to his beloved home county. *Birds: Coping with an Obsession* is a handsomely produced volume, and well illustrated with the author's impressive photographs. I put it down wanting to read more, and my only complaint is the unnecessary use of clumsy bird names such as Common Cuckoo and Eurasian Bittern.

Philip Murphy

Looking back – July to September 1963 and 1988

Selected highlights from the 1963 and 1988 Suffolk Birds reports for the period July to September.

50 years ago

Seawatching from the Suffolk coast was not a regular pastime 50 years ago, but we read that "*Watchers on the coast between Lowestoft and Aldeburgh recorded a spectacular movement northwards between Sept. 25 and 29 of skuas, terns and gannets. On the latter date three great skuas and between thirty to forty arctic skuas were seen off Minsmere and Walberswick, while sixty-five gannets were also counted off Minsmere in three hours. This was probably an abnormal food movement due to the presence inshore of shoals of sprats and herrings.*" Also noted on 29th September was the year's only Manx Shearwater that flew north off Walberswick.

A totally unexpected report was of an adult Bewick's Swan with Mute Swans on the Alde Estuary, 13th to 15th September.

September was also good for scarce crakes with up to three Spotted Crakes, 8th to 13th at Minsmere where two Corncrakes were present, 13th and another at Walberswick, 12th.

It was an excellent autumn for scarce waders. During this period, three Kentish Plovers were reported from Minsmere and another on Havergate Island; a Dotterel on Felixstowe Ferry Golf Course, 18th September; single Temminck's Stints, nowadays almost unknown in autumn, at Minsmere in late August and on three separate dates in September; Pectoral Sandpiper on Havergate Island, 9th and 10th August (one of five in Britain at that time); plus Suffolk's fifth 20th-century record of Broad-billed Sandpiper at Minsmere, 31st July.

Equally noteworthy were the totals of commoner waders that generally exceeded those we have come to expect in the 21st-century. In August, Minsmere attracted up to 30 Wood Sandpipers (a record county total which was to be equalled, also at Minsmere, on 3rd September 1965 during the "Great Fall"), 30 Green Sandpipers, 55 Spotted Redshanks and 25 Little Stints. September witnessed a strong passage of Curlew Sandpipers with up to 25 on Havergate Island, 21 at Minsmere and twenty at Blythburgh.

A gathering of 40 Avocets at Iken, 23rd August was an excellent total for 1963. Inland, 11 Whimbrel flew south over West Row near Mildenhall, 20th August. Unlike in 2013, Stone Curlews were still fairly widespread in the coastal belt in the early 1960s; reports included five, Wickham Market, 9th September and five, Waldringfield, 21st September.

The totals of Great Skuas in autumn 1963 were described as being "the highest so far recorded in the county"; they included peaks in September of seven off Minsmere and three off Walberswick which would probably not cause too much excitement amongst Suffolk's modern-day

seawatchers. An adult Long-tailed Skua was off Minsmere, 19th September, only Suffolk's second 20th-century record. A very early Little Auk was off Walberswick, 23rd September.

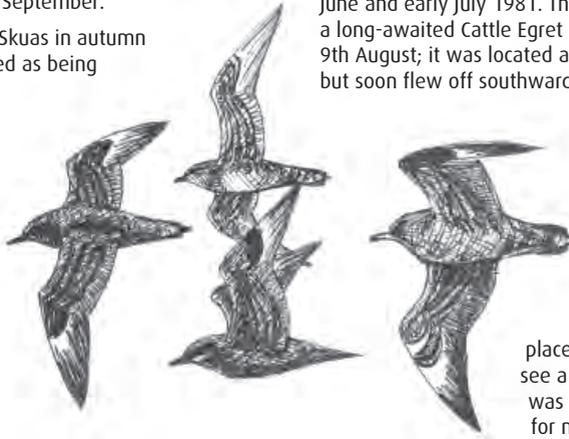
Lowestoft hosted Suffolk's sixth Alpine Swift on 6th September. At least seven Wrynecks graced the coast between Aldeburgh and Lowestoft in September during which month a Bluethroat visited Minsmere, 3rd. Up to five Fieldfares had been present at Lakenheath in mid-June and what was presumably one of those five was noted in the same area on 21st July.

The first Snow Buntings and Lapland Buntings of the autumn were at Walberswick on 21st

September but more intriguing was a male Red-headed Bunting trapped at Minsmere on 12th September; it showed little abrasion on the wings and was described as being "very wild" – this is the fifth county record but it languishes, as with all previous and subsequent sightings, on Category D of the Suffolk List.

25 years ago

Two species were added to the Suffolk List in this period – one was totally unexpected, the other long-awaited. The former was a Red-eyed Vireo, an American passerine, which managed to find Britain's most easterly woodland, Warrenhouse Wood, on the North Denes at Lowestoft, on 29th September. In doing so it became the first American passerine to have been located in Suffolk since the Lark Sparrow at Landguard in late June and early July 1981. The second addition was a long-awaited Cattle Egret on Minsmere Scrape, 9th August; it was located amongst roosting gulls but soon flew off southwards.



The majority of Bee-eaters seen in Suffolk over the years had been located by fortunate observers who just happened to be in the right place at the right time – to see a Bee-eater in Suffolk was an unfulfilled dream for most of the county's birders. Accordingly, when

one of these amazing birds decided to linger at Reydon between 12th and 16th July there was a mass surge of birders to the site – and the bird performed magnificently!

Additional rarities of note involved Suffolk's eighth to tenth records of Cory's Shearwater off Covehithe and Southwold in July and August, Suffolk's ninth 20th-century record of Night Heron at Minsmere, 20th July, an overall total of five Pectoral Sandpipers noted at Benacre, Walberswick and Minsmere (three), Caspian Tern, Minsmere, 29th July and single White-winged Black Terns south off Minsmere, 8th July and away from the coast at Beccles, 19th to 22nd August.

Much effort was devoted to seawatching off Covehithe and Southwold by a dedicated group of observers. As well as the Cory's Shearwaters mentioned above, notable sightings involved 16 Sooty Shearwaters in August, 17 Manx Shearwaters north, 14th September (at the time, a record county movement), 71 Arctic Skuas, 14th September, six Long-tailed Skuas (at the time, a record county annual total) during 25th to 28th September and four Sabine's Gulls (part of a record county annual total of nine).

An unexpected midsummer sighting was of a redhead Smew on the River Stour at Flatford, 12th July; there must be a reasonable chance that it was the same bird as that present at Flatford in May 1987. Four Bewick's Swans at Lackford Lakes, 30th September were exceptionally early arrivals.

An Osprey that remained in the Hadleigh/Aldham area, 1st to 21st September, became somewhat notorious owing to its predilection for the goldfish that it managed to procure from garden ponds.

The only scarce waders, in addition to the Pectoral Sandpipers mentioned above, were all noted on Havergate Island – Kentish Plover, 18th August, Red-necked Phalarope, 10th August and Grey Phalarope 16th to 18th September.

It was an impressive autumn for commoner waders especially on 1st September when southerly passage off Landguard included 523 Knot and 406 Bar-tailed Godwits. Also on September 1st, Havergate Island hosted 60 Knot and 60 Bar-tailed Godwits and a superb gathering of 104 Curlew Sandpipers graced Minsmere Scrape. Additional notable waders included 80 Spotted Redshanks, Minsmere, 11th August (at the time, this equalled the county record total) and 25 Green Sandpipers, Bramford GP, 26th August.

Inland, Lackford Lakes recorded an impressive set of waders during this period which included as many as seven Grey Plovers, 16th and 17th September, Knot, 28th September, seven Curlew Sandpipers, 2nd to 4th September, four Black-tailed Godwits, 13th to 15th August, three Spotted Redshanks, 7th September and twenty Common Sandpipers, 8th August. A passage Golden Oriole was noted at Sudbourne, 13th August.

It seems almost unbelievable now, but post-breeding gatherings of Turtle Doves included 110, Long Melford, 27th July and 67, Alton Water, 4th August. A Hoopoe was inland on Stradishall Airfield, 8th August and five Wrynecks in September included singles at Ipswich and Sudbury. A juvenile Nightjar was hit by a car at Hollesley, 11th September and taken into care; after developing a taste for cat food, it recovered and was released on Sutton

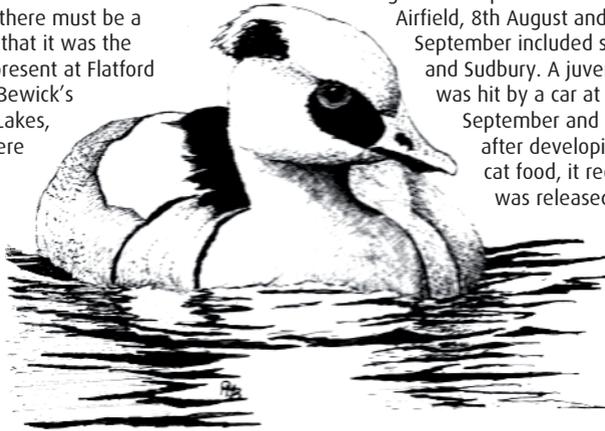
Common, 20th September.

A superb southerly coastal passage of hirundines on 11th September involved

45,000 House Martins and 5000 Swallows at Southwold and 1400 Sand Martins at Covehithe. Landguard recorded a southerly passage of 10,000 Swallows, 5th September.

It was to be another record year for Yellow-browed Warblers in Suffolk that commenced with two at Lowestoft, 17th and 18th September. Other scarce warblers involved four Icterine Warblers, a Barred Warbler and eight Wood Warblers including four at Landguard. Willow Warblers at Landguard peaked at 50 on 16th August. Single Red-breasted Flycatchers were at Minsmere, 15th and 16th September and Lowestoft, 29th September to 2nd October.

A notably early Brambling was at Earl Soham, 9th September and the first Snow Bunting of the autumn was at Ness Point, Lowestoft on 16th September.



Progressive greying on adult Whitethroat captured at Minsmere

On 9th June 2013, Waveney Bird Club ringers involved with ringing demonstrations at RSPB Minsmere captured a family party of Whitethroats that included an aberrant adult showing a number of white feathers.

The inner-most primary on the right wing, four primary coverts on both wings and two of the left outer-tail feathers were pure white. Birdwatchers often describe such birds as partially albino, but a recent paper published in *British Birds* (Hein van Grouw, 2013) states that there is no such thing as a partial albino bird and the white feathers are caused by progressive greyness.

Van Grouw states that *“albino birds are rarely found in the wild as the absence of melanin in the eyes makes them highly sensitive to light and gives them a poor depth of vision. Most die soon after fledging.”*



Whitethroat wing

It is suggested that progressive greying is caused by a form of food deficiency as birds are unable to extract enough tyrosine from its food resulting in pigment loss. The condition is said to be non-hereditary as demonstrated by the family group trapped at Minsmere, the offspring of the aberrant adult showing no white feathers.



Whitethroat back

Progressive greyness is an ageing process and more white feathers could appear each time the bird moults. I suppose we could compare birds with ourselves – as we grow older our hair turns grey, but when birds grow older some feathers become white following each moult?

Acknowledgement: Thank you to Adam Rowlands (RSPB Minsmere) for alerting the ringing team to the paper published in *British Birds* that discusses this condition.

Reference: Van Grouw, H. 2013. The causes and recognition of common colour aberrations in birds. *Brit Birds* **106**: 17-29.

Adam Gretton, Jonny Rankin & Phil Brown

Swift Weather?

What were the chances of two mega-swifts turning up in the UK within less of a fortnight of each other this June?

Slim would probably have been your gut reaction. But you'd be wrong because, counter intuitively, there is good reason to say it is surprisingly likely (leaving aside the fact that it has already happened). In short both species have not only the capability, but also the inclination to undertake such long distance journeys.

Born to fly

First, and superficially, swifts' aerodynamics and physique fit them perfectly for an aerial existence. Also, they not only feed exclusively on the wing, but have the capacity to sleep as well, hence their ability to be on the wing all year round. So flying considerable distances is not a problem.

Second, these two species (the Pacific Swift and White-throated Needletail) are actually known for their long-distance flying. Even the Common Swift is reported to undertake mass movements around North European depressions, often entailing a round trip approaching 2000 km, just to feed. Long-distance flight is thus common.

Third, in habitat terms the swifts are generalists. Wherever insects occur they can exist and, as a consequence, the swift family is very widely distributed.

Fourth, possibly because they can so easily roam, swifts display a proclivity for vagrancy (after all it's how the family populated so much of the planet), not uncommonly pitching up thousands of kilometres away from their home territory in response to variable insect prey abundances and/or adverse weather conditions.

Pacific Swift



Distance no object

As previously noted, the nominate races of Pacific Swift and White-throated Needletail have both been dubbed “long-distance migrants” by the ‘*Handbook of the Birds of the World*’ (HBW). Both species also winter in the south around Australia, returning north and east in the spring to a joint breeding area that stretches from India in the west through to China and Siberia in the east. Normally they’d complete this journey between April and June, depending how far north they’d travelled, so both of these potential overshoots could have begun their journey at about the same time towards the end of May. In fact, according to Ian Newton, overshooting tends to be common amongst spring migrants.

Swifts are known to migrate speedily - for example Alpine Swifts have been recorded covering 500 km in a single day (and the Common Swift in excess of 400 km). So both of these swifts could have begun to overshoot their spring migration routes in mid to late-May and realistically covered the intervening 6 - 10,000 km in time for the Needletail to turn up on the Hebrides by early June and the Pacific be seen at Trimley by the 20th, via Spurn on the 12th and possibly even earlier at Bawdsey (in late May).

Weather the trigger?

But adverse weather could have had a part to play too. In Harrier #167 it was speculated as to whether the Boyton Sandhill Crane had been spirited across the Atlantic courtesy of the tail-end of Hurricane Katia. In the same issue it was also conjectured that the earlier Finnish/Estonian Sandhill may have been a victim of Hurricane Irene, that preceded Katia, when it skirted the US eastern seaboard in late August³.

Weather could well have had an impact on the two swifts as well. Rather than flying due west across much of the Eurasia it would be more logical for the birds to have continued north from Siberia and take the shorter trans-Polar route to northern Europe (while the trans-Polar route might at first sight be seen as ‘more attractive’, as it is approaching 4000 km shorter than the flight westward across the Asian/European land mass, the presumed dearth of feeding opportunities en route may however have deterred its use).

So this concurrence of swifts in the north and east of the UK was perfectly possible but could there have been a trigger event that led to it? This following research by Adam Gretton is highly suggestive:



White-throated Needletail

³ Ian Newton has attested to the capacity for eastward-moving depressions (the usual aftermath of hurricanes/tropical storms) to carry North American birds to Europe.

There has been much speculation on whether both eastern visitors may have been brought to the UK on the same weather system, as the needletail could have arrived ten days or more before we [i.e. Mark Cocker and Adam Gretton] connected with it, simply going unnoticed in the huge unwatched areas of the Highlands & Islands. Both nest in central Siberia and further east, so they may have been brought here by similar weather conditions. Neither Jonny [Rankin] nor I have the expertise to analyse the [Siberian] weather charts from late May/early-mid June, but if any readers can help we would be very glad to hear from you.

What I have been able to deduce from information online is that there was some exceptional weather in west Siberia in early June 2013. On 2nd June there was heavy snow in Kemerovo, a city only 55N, which is used



Field comparison - Pacific (right) note the tail (in other shots deeply forked), longer wings, slimmer and more scythe-shaped and paler shade of brown

to warm summers. Events in Nadym, further north, made the BBC weather round-up two weeks later. On 12th June the temperature reached 28C, but just two days later an Arctic cold front reduced this to zero, with heavy snow. Could this very unusual circumstance have played some part in pushing these two

strays westwards, perhaps in combination with other factors? The exceptional Siberian summer continued in July and August, with huge fires followed by floods in east Siberia.

To be honest we will never be certain what triggered the birds to make for the UK, but appear they did. So enjoy these two accounts of their arrival on either side of the country:



Pacific Swift over Trimley

Act One, Trimley, 15-16th June – Jonny Rankin

I was delighted when fellow West Suffolk birder Adam [Gretton] got in touch and asked if I was up for co-authoring an article for the Harrier. It was great to put a name to the 'other West

Suffolk birder' who found the Needletail. Firstly, I would like to extend my congratulations to both Adam and Mark Cocker on the finding of such a mega. Secondly I'd like to make it clear that as sad as its demise is, it is a common fate of many vagrant birds and, further to this, wind turbines are just one of many man-made obstacles to wildlife. Accordingly I have little sympathy for those only concerned that they missed another 'tick' as opposed to wild birds' welfare.

So, concentrating on the positives, what an exhilarating find! I can relate to Adam and Mark's experience following my own of finding of a (albeit slightly less) mega swift at the other end of the country, in Suffolk.

The finder's account for this Swift has been published a couple of times, once on the Birding Frontiers website (<http://tinyurl.com/kv63bpw>) and thereafter a more sober account in the August, 2013 issue of Birdwatching Magazine. To summarise: with the girlfriend in Ipswich for the day I took the opportunity to do one of my favorite walks in the county; Levington Marina to Trimley Marshes SWT and back. There are always birds to be seen and it's a great walk for both the dog and me. I think most Suffolk birders were on 'swift alert' at this time following a record of a 'white-rumped swift' at Bawdsey at the end of May, the resulting blurred photo was inconclusive but certainly exciting! Some observers are now apparently confident that the bird at Bawdsey was a Pacific Swift, having got better views than those captured on the images.

Whether the earlier bird was the real deal or a convincing aberration, it was rewarding to locate

the real deal a couple of weeks later, on Saturday 15th June to be exact. The rest is, as they say, history. The Pacific Swift was well watched, photographed and discussed. I believe most Suffolk listers connected over its two-day stay and I have Twitter friends from Yorkshire and even Scotland who connected on the Saturday the news broke! I am genuinely pleased so many were able to connect and the finding still has a really celebratory feel about it, I am proud I was in the right place at the right time and able to give affirmative identification.

In terms of drawing parallels between the findings of the two-mega swifts consecutively with West Suffolk birders key to each, well I am sure it is just pure luck. Weather is something that certainly played a part in my finding the Pacific as strong winds ensured the gathered Swifts were low over the floods and reed beds allowing for easy checking. This doesn't give any insights to how or when the bird arrived on these shores, but we do know it was sighted in both Yorks and Lincs before settling in Suffolk for the weekend. I understand it was last seen in Spain!

Luck and diligence

Putting luck and the weather aside the only commonality is the West Suffolk connection; perhaps the inland patching engrains more of a 'finders' aptitude? Coastal birding at the known 'hotspots' is easy with so many eyes and pre-determined scrapes and washes to check and bird headland bird observatories are the avian equivalent of moth trapping, with birds coming to the observer and even in the hand.

My many hours spent at Livermere for example do mean I work for birds, repeatedly scanning flocks, covering the same scrub and returning at different times of day. Unless you have something stand out like an Egret [or a Needletail!], careful checking is the only way to pick out the Med Gull from the Black-heads and find that Lesser Whitethroat in the bushes. But I am sure it is just luck really.

So, with Pallid, Alpine and Pacific all nicely available in the county over the last few years, the next small matter to tidy up is a Suffolk Needletail! [Note that the first in the UK was not far from Suffolk, at Great Horkesley, Essex in 1846 where it was shot]. I pledge a pint to the finder for starters... Happy birding!

The Needletail



I came across a fine adult White-winged Black Tern with them, which Mark quickly got on to. The weather was now taking a turn for the worse, with pretty continuous rain for the next three hours or so. We drove up via the west side of the island, eventually arriving in Tarbert at about 3.15pm.

We were walking down by the ferry terminal just after 3.45pm

Act Two, Tarbert, Isle of Harris, 25-26th June – Adam Gretton

I must begin by admitting that I failed to see the Trimley bird (sorry Jonny!), and thus am not in that very select group (inc. Josh Jones of Birdguides) who managed to connect with both these fine swifts. I fully agree with Jonny's comment above on it being 'just luck' – my main conclusion from recounting the events below is that I was simply in the right place at the right time, but hugely glad to have been so! Although Jonny suggests above that 'his' bird was 'slightly less mega', the BBRC stats up to 2011 have seven Needletail records, but only six Pacifics (with all but one of these since the last Needletail in 1991 so more recent listing opportunities).

Mark Cocker and I had been in the Outer Hebrides for about a week, slowly working our way up through Barra and the Uists, before arriving on Harris on 25th June. Our attention up to that point had been focused on the machair wildlife as a whole, including the wonderful breeding wader spectacle, as well as species such as Corncrake and Red-necked Phalarope. We had seen no particularly unexpected birds up to that point, but little did we know that all this was soon set to change. Before travelling north I had contacted Richard Rafe (previous SOG chairman and ex-Harrier editor, now living in Ullapool) who told me there were few birders in the west Highlands, but that one day his efforts "will pay off with that mega which will have all (the) eastern based birders rushing over to the west coast; I live in hope." [Ed: Typically Rafean prophetic words!]

Some fifteen minutes before the Berneray ferry arrived in Leverburgh (Harris) I was scanning a group of Arctic Tern and did a double-take when

when Mark suddenly grabbed my arm and said "what was that??" as a large swift disappeared behind a roof top. We got a second split-second glimpse a moment later, of the bird going away, before it again was lost behind a building.. Mark was pretty sure it was a large swift, and briefly mentioned the possibility of Alpine Swift, or (in some disbelief) Needletail.

We had only been looking for a couple of minutes when the bird flew over our heads in good light, some 30-40 feet up. As soon as I got the bins on it, I knew what it was and called 'Needletail', with Mark immediately concurring. As well as the bulk and power of the bird, the feature that stood out first was the white horseshoe under the tail, as well as the white throat. After a few pats on the back and choice expletives had been exchanged (with Mark saying "you wanted a rarity, now



Mark Cocker points to where the lucky pair first saw the Needletail

that's what I call a rarity!"), we immediately tried to relocate the bird, at first without success. As I didn't have the Birdguides/RBA numbers on me, I called Steve Piotrowski, who kindly agreed to put the news out immediately (whilst recalling how much he'd enjoyed the Shetland bird in 1984). With no further sign of the bird, I soon had calls from Birdguides and RBA, as well as Tim Cleeves, whose first words were "how jammy are you two?" and he immediately set about re-arranging his travel plans, as he had been due to leave the islands the following day. After what seemed a long time, at 4.38pm we re-located the bird just SE of Tarbert, but still visible from the town. For the rest of the afternoon, the bird moved between that area (towards Loch Direcleit) and Tarbert town, with some five sightings, but proving hard to keep in view for more than 1-2 minutes at a time.

Returning the following morning, we found an anxiety (my proposed collective noun for birders who haven't yet connected with their target) of fifteen to twenty birders gathered together half way between the town and the loch. Thinking we had a better chance at the top of the hill, closer to the loch, that is where we looked. After an anxious wait, the bird eventually appeared about 10.20am, triggering a stampede from those

further down the hill. It then performed very well for the swelling numbers, at one point causing concern when it flew very close to an oncoming car on the loch-side road, in a strange foretaste of what was to come the following day.

As Mark Cocker put it in his Guardian Country Diary of 8/7/13 'one friend [went] from gibbering anxiety to exultant delirium' in seconds. At one breathtaking point, the bird passed within five or six metres of a few of us,



Adam Gretton where the bird flew directly over them and they clinched its ID - or perhaps he's hailing a taxi?



The Needletail performing

prompting the comment that it felt a bit like being buzzed by a skua (such was the awesome power of the bird). In the afterglow of seeing one of his 'most wanted's Tim Cleeves compared the bird to a small aerial orca!

The tragic end

Having had great views, we headed to Stornoway and the west coast of Lewis. I had a couple of appreciative texts from those who had seen the bird, with the last at 15.25hrs, saying it had been 'relocated further south' after having gone off the radar for a couple of hours. That was the last we heard on 26th June, as we were out of mobile reception on the far west coast of Lewis, until the morning of 28th, when I picked up a text from Richard Rafe saying 'Thanks for great bird - pity about ending'. At first it was hard to take in the news (as for so many others also), but then we were left with a deep sense of sadness that this fabulous bird had flown so far, to end up in a million to one collision with the only wind turbine in that area.

The sad story was widely covered, and made the front page of the Scottish Sun under the headline 'Life's a Twitch' (upstaging both Gwyneth Paltrow and Andy Murray and prompting a statement on wind power from the Scottish Government!). Although the fact that such a supreme flier could still collide with a turbine does raise some worrying questions, in my view it should not trigger a knee-jerk anti-wind power reaction.

Apart from great sadness at the bird's tragic ending, I am left feeling very fortunate that we were simply in the right place at the right time, and to have been able to share the bird with those who were able to get there within 24 hours of our first report. Having been to south-west

Siberia six times (at first searching in vain for nesting Slender-billed Curlew), and never seen a Needletail, it is astonishing to have connected with the species so much closer to home. I am left wondering how many such birds may go unseen or unreported (particularly in the more remote parts of the UK with few birders). If Mark and I hadn't been held up that morning by bad weather and had just driven through Tarbert, would the bird have been picked up by others – and how long might it have already been on Harris for?

A clear lesson from this experience is to always check every sighting carefully, and follow up on unconfirmed reports, however implausible the species might appear to be.

References

Norman Elkins *'Birds and weather'*, Poyser 1988

Josep del Hoyo et al *'Handbook of the Birds of the World'* vol. 5, Lynx 1999

Ian Newton, *'Bird Migration'*, New Naturalist 113, 2010

Katherine Puttick

Lakenheath Cranes' developments

It is sad to report that this year the cranes have had a disappointing breeding season.



'Peg-leg' in flight

One pair, 'Little and Large', failed at the egg stage on their first attempt as the eggs were predated. They then moved location, re-laid and hatched chicks towards the end of May but, unfortunately after about a week, the chick or chicks were also predated.

The other pair have been very confusing, and after many hours of watching, Norman Sills suspects that our original 'Pair A' have been replaced by a different pair! The new pair attempted to nest in the same area that 'Pair A' have for the past five years, leading us to initially think that it was business as usual. However, Norman had noted differences in bustle colour to the original pair. Whether the pair have just swapped partners or our original pair have been completely ousted we can't be sure. Unfortunately this new pair failed to fledge any young after two nesting attempts.

There have been sightings of other birds around, including a pair and a single bird with only one leg! 'Peg-leg' as we call it, has been around for most of the summer and seems to cope quite well with its single leg.

Announcements

SOG field trips

This is a correction to the details on the Events Card: The trip on November 17th should read Lodge Farm, Westhorpe TM040703.

This is a chance to see the excellent work on this farm for wildlife. The farm has been awarded Winners of FWAG's Silver Lapwing Award 2009 and Farmers Weekly Countryside Farmers of the Year 2010. There will be some bird ringing on site and refreshments will be available afterwards.

Mivk Wright

Suffolk Atlas data soon available

With over half a million records on around 200 species to contend with, this is a massive and time-consuming undertaking.

Despite our workload we are still aiming to publish the first tranche of Suffolk results of the 2007 – 2011 Atlas fieldwork on a website this year (there will be a link to it from sogonline to the Suffolk site concerned - we'll email its availability and/or publish news about progress in the next Harrier). These results will be in map-form showing the distributions to tetrad level for both the winter and summer periods for all species.

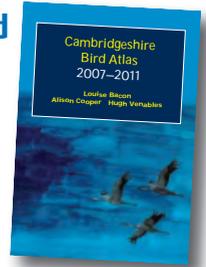
For selected species we plan to include maps on change and, subsequently, abundance. Ultimately a CD of the full results will be produced.



Cambridgeshire Bird Atlas 2007–2011 published

Louise Bacon, Alison Cooper & Hugh Venables

This paperback provides a comprehensive overview of the distribution and abundance of birds in the county. There are 500 detailed maps that show where 167 bird species can be found breeding or wintering.



Facing the maps are expert species accounts interpreting the maps and placing them in historical and national context.

The atlas has been compiled from data collected for the BTO's Bird Atlas 2007–2011, but species have been mapped at a closer level of detail – at the 2 km square level.

The Atlas highlights the changing fortunes of Cambridgeshire's birds. There have been some winners: Peregrines, Marsh Harriers, Hobbies, Buzzards and Red Kites are all flourishing. Among the rarer breeding birds, Bitterns have returned to a number of the county's nature reserves, which also now have breeding Cranes, Avocets, Little Egrets and Bearded Tits. The washlands of the Ouse and Nene continue to hold very important numbers of wetland wintering and breeding birds.

The Atlas shows patterns of decline among species of conservation concern. The scarce birds of ancient woodland – Hawfinch, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodcock – barely hang on; and Tree Pipit, Redstart and Willow Tit have been lost. Once typical farmland birds – Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove, Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail and Yellowhammer – continue their free-fall decline both in the county and across the UK as a whole.

Published by the Cambridgeshire Bird Club, July 2013
ISBN 9780902038271 @ £15.00 Send a cheque (£17 incl.) to CBC, 4a Cavendish Avenue, Cambridge CB1 7US

The atlas is also available from Amazon: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0902038273>

or from the NHBS:
http://www.nhbs.com/_bkfno_207682.html
<http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk>

Puzzle Solutions

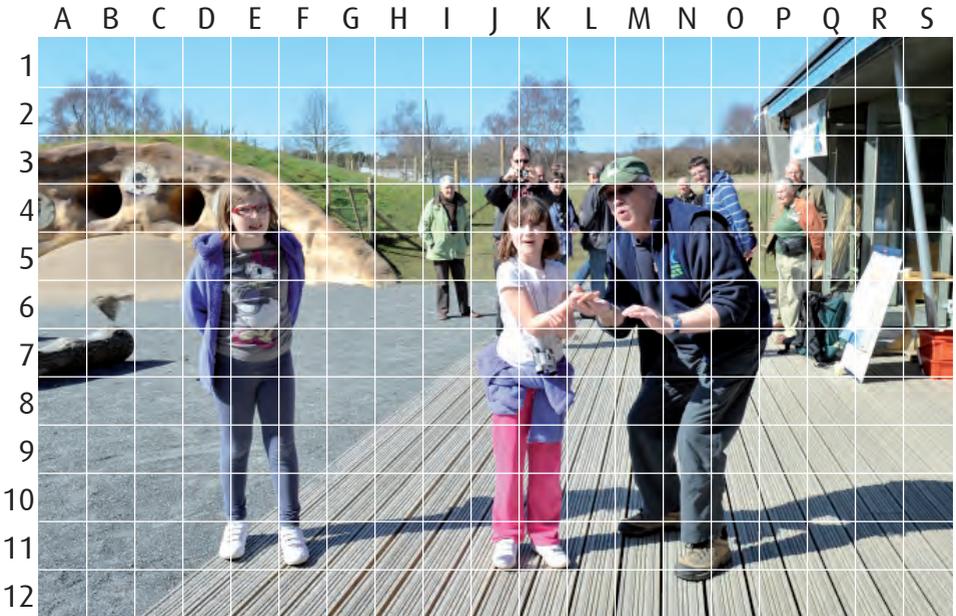
Brain Teaser: Tile Wall

Here is the solution - not so difficult after all, but only one correct answer was received:

Great Bittern	Black Kite	Rock Dove	Little Bunting
Great Bustard	Black lark	Rock Pipit	Little Egret
Great Shearwater	Black Redstart	Rock Sparrow	Little Gull
Great Tit	Black Wheatear	Rock Thrush	Little Tern

Spot the birdie

Alas no responses at all were received to 'Spot the birdie' - too trivial? Too hard? No prizes, so no interest? No matter, whatever the reason for your silence, here's the solution, B6:



As was classically the case with the famous spot the ball competition, I doubt anyone would have guessed correctly where this bird actually was. Any ideas as to what it was?

Photos:

Rob Barton (pages 4, 6, 7 & 8); Bill Baston (front cover, pages 2 & 3); Andrew Bennett (page 23); David Borderick (page 14); Les Bunyan (page 30); BTO (page 2); CBC (page 34); Mark Cocker (page 29); Chris Courtney (pages 1, 13 & 17); Tim Cowan (page 18); Jon Evans (page 10); James Fletcher (page 32); Adam Gretton (page 28); Eric Hosking (page 4); Tim James (page 30); Josh Jones (pages 24, 25, 26, 28 & 29); Allan King (page 16); Nick Moran (page 7); 'Gadge' Nichols (pages 3 & 31); Danny Porter (page 12); John Richardson (pages 11, 13, 14 & 16); Lenny Townsend (page 11); Lee Woods (page 5)

Illustrations:

Peter Beeston (pages 16 & 22); Su Gough (page 21)

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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](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, the Nightingale and Woodcock surveys and WeBS
 - Provides surveys for environmental waste companies



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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