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The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) photographed by John Richardson

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The Harrier

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Editorial

Welcome to Harrier 186 – autumn is finally here. Migrants are arriving and BINS messages are beeping away as I write: Yellow-browed, Arctic & Barred Warblers. My summer birding highlights have been simple: taking part in the Turtle Dove survey and enjoying the Swifts and Red Kites and Ravens over our holiday home in Germany. I managed to miss all the recent Suffolk rarities, though I did twitch the Wryneck at Hollesley.

Inside you'll find a series of interesting articles from a wide variety of contributors and the wonderful photographs that accompany them are a joy to view. Ben Moyes, the inaugural winner of the Garrod award tells us about his patch and Eddie Marsh has written the Summer Bird Review. Robin Harvey has an appeal for volunteers to help with the Suffolk Wader Strategy and both Alan Miller & Steve Fryett have contributed fascinating observations for you to enjoy.

In the first of, I hope, several articles on the topic of re-wilding, we have a scientific article from John Morgan and Peter Hobson from Writtle University College about the philosophies of landscape conservation. The re-wilding theme will recur in the next edition although Dr. Adrian Cooper's article about Felixstowe's Wildlife Garden Project gives an instant example of the linkup of local sites to support biodiversity through grassroots participation, to the ultimate benefit of local flora and fauna. It's a great example of a workable template that has already been adopted in other counties.

We have part 2 of our SOG exile Stephen Rutt's account of life on North Ronaldsay, and Barry Woodhouse offers help and advice with digiscoping.

SOG Council are busy preparing the programme for 2017. If you have any thoughts on articles that you would like to read, speakers you would enjoy listening to and places you want to visit, then please let us know. Enjoy!

Upcoming Dates

Upcoming important dates for your diary including for two super talks and a training workshop. We look forward to seeing you there.

- 27th Oct 'Ecuador: Swordbills & Stinkbirds' talk by Bill Baston, Holiday Inn, Ipswich.
- 24th Nov 'Kakapo: Night Parrot of NZ' talk by Ed Keeble, Holiday Inn, Ipswich.
- 21st Jan Suffolk Wader Strategy training workshop in Iken.
- 31st Jan Nominations for the Garrod Award are due in.



The Garrod Award

This award was created to celebrate the warm welcome Ken & Jean gave to all – but especially younger – newcomers to SOG. In recognition of this support for younger people, the award is made annually to a young Suffolk-based bird and wildlife enthusiast for their contribution to these fields.

A nomination form can be found on the SOG website, or by phoning Gi Grieco on 07951 482547. The winner will receive a certificate, a SOG T shirt and a year's membership of SOG. They'll also have the opportunity to have an article published in *The Harrier* about their wildlife experiences. Please contact us by 31st January 2017 and the award will be presented at the SOG AGM in March.



Derek Moore

There will be a short formal ceremony at the Landguard Bird Observatory on Sunday 23rd October to mark Derek Moore's bequest of books to SOG. Babington's 'Catalogue of the Birds of Suffolk' and Ticehurst's 'The Birds of Suffolk' will be kept in the extensive LBO library. SOG members, with prior arrangement, are fully welcome to view these and Landguard's other publications.

Do You Want To Help Suffolk's Wading Birds?



Photo: Robin Harvey



The Suffolk Wader Strategy consists of a core group of organisations which have come together to reverse the decline in wader populations in Suffolk. The strategy focuses on three species: Lapwing, Redshank and Avocet and currently concentrates on coastal sites.

Both Lapwing and Redshank have undergone significant declines (nationally 50% and 59% respectively since 1975). Although Avocet numbers appear to be increasing (1,500 pairs in the UK in 2010), productivity varies significantly between years, often falling below the level required to sustain local populations.

Together, as organisations working in partnership, the strategy has the ability to influence land management both on nature reserves and more widely across the countryside. The partnership is made up of conservation charities (RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, National Trust), a government agency (Natural England) and the private sector (Stanny Field Centre, Iken).

The aim is to have a key set of reserves that complement each other on a landscape scale and which together support exceptional breeding wader populations, underpinned by a long term strategic plan for dynamic habitat management. These will be complemented by key sites away from reserves that support healthy numbers of breeding waders through first class agri-environment support.

The strategy aims to build on the recent success at several sites such as Hollesley Marshes where all three wader species had a highly productive season in 2014. SOG has a proud history of supporting surveys in Suffolk; these wader surveys are more 'bespoke' and usually limited to one farm or estate, although with more help these surveys can provide essential information, so please do consider taking part.

Accurate estimates of current wader populations and productivity are critical to the success of the strategy; the resulting data can help inform us of potential problems as well as successes, helping us to improve habitat management. There is a need for increased monitoring both on and off reserves and volunteers are sought to assist with this. We are looking for observers who can identify Lapwing, Redshank and Avocet and who preferably have some previous survey experience, although this is not essential if you attend the workshop. We would require volunteers to carry out a minimum of four field visits from April to July. The training workshop will be run at Stanny Farm on 21st January 2017. To register your interest please contact Robin Harvey on 01728 648072 or e-mail robin.harvey@rspb.org.uk



Photo: Robin Harvey

Help offered!

My name is Barry Woodhouse. I live in Bury St Edmunds, West Suffolk. You may have seen me birding at Lackford Lakes or ringing birds, but most of you know me through my digiscoping. Digiscoping is simply taking digital photos through a spotting scope, using the scope's magnification to get great shots.

My interest in birds began at the age of 14 but competitive cycle racing took over for a while until age persuaded me to retire, when I sold all my bikes and bought digiscoping equipment. Following initial help and advice from Danny Porter of Danny's Digiscoping, I have been digiscoping now for six years.

Digiscoping is a challenge. For me, it's all about practice. Start with the right settings on your camera, and over time you learn the relationships of exposure.

Personally, I use DSLR Nikon D3200 and D3200 camera bodies, a Celestron Ultima 100 ED telescope with the kit 27x67 zoom eyepiece. The Celestron Ultima scopes allow you to attach the camera to the eyepiece via the T thread on the eyepiece, whereas with Nikon DSLR bodies you can only use manual mode so I use ISO & SHUTTER SPEED SETTINGS only to control exposure. A lot of other digiscopers use mirrorless system cameras such as the Panasonic GH4, but I feel more confident using my DSLR. Ultimately it is up to each individual to decide what suits them and their scope best.

As a digiscoper, it's very satisfying to have your work acknowledged. My greatest achievements have been seeing some of my images on greetings cards; having my picture of a Two-bar Crossbill used in an official ID guide, and gaining several notables on BirdGuides.

Photo: B. Woodhouse

Digiscoping has been a real friend to me. Having given up cycling, I found that having a new hobby based around an old hobby really helped me to 'get straight back on the bike'. I started to meet other like-minded people who helped me to become the digiscoper that I am today.

I'm very happy to pass on my knowledge and advice to anyone keen to improve their skills – just get in touch.

My five top tips for anyone wanting to learn to digiscope are:

1. Ask for advice before you buy
2. Ask for help if you need it
3. Practise at home
4. Connect with other digiscopers on reserves
5. Practise, practise practise and don't give up!!

For any advice on settings or equipment just email me at barrybdwood@aol.com.

Two-barred Crossbill



A Year on My Patch

From the first time I picked up a pair of binoculars, to identifying my first species correctly, I knew I was hooked into the birding world. As my knowledge was gradually expanding, I was keen to explore the birdlife within my local area, no further than 10 minutes from my house. After a while, this became 'my patch.' Since this moment, I have spent four worthy years 'patching' the Needham Market area, searching every lake, woodland, river and grassland for 'the big one', yet to succeed.

One area I have grown particularly fond of over the last year or so is Pipp's Ford, a wetland area previously covered with gravelpits, now a beautiful scrape proving to be a stronger 'wader magnet' year by year. Covered by trees and thick scrub, Pipp's Ford has had more scarcities than you may think, none of which, however, has crossed my path: Woodchat Shrike, Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egret, Glaucous Gull, Marsh Warbler, Great White Egret, Wryneck and Waxwing to name just a few.

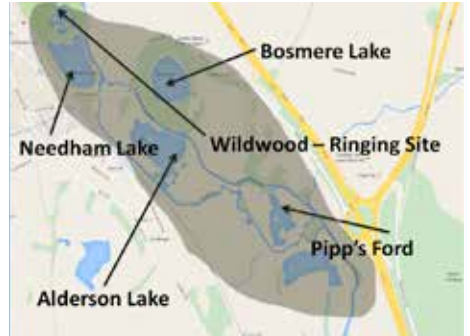
Personally, my best birds have to be Honey Buzzard, Osprey, Ring Ouzel, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Firecrest and Black-tailed Godwit – certainly not up to the standards of the previous list of rares that the patch has held, but it's a start!



Pipp's Ford

Photo: Ben Moyes

After a year of finding all the 'hotspots' for birds along the Gipping Valley, I found out about, and soon became a part of, Patchwork Challenge (PWC). PWC turns species into points: the rarer the species, the more points you can claim. If that species happens to be a national scarcity or rarer, you can claim bonus points if you find the bird first; these extra points can prove vital to very competitive patchers! Patches have to be within 3km and all parts have to be connected by a road or path. Once signed



Ring Ouzel

Photo: Ben Moyes



Black-tailed Godwit

Photo: Ben Moyes



Wheatear

up, you are then placed into mini-leagues based on geographical regions in the UK, for example my mini-league is Inland East Anglia. I took part in PWC for the first time in 2014. That year I only saw 100 species, resulting in 104 points – a feeble effort in my opinion, which needed serious improvement for the following year. A big effort ensued in 2015, resulting in 120 species, and 133 points, granting me 1st place in the comparative league for my area, and 5th place in the comparative league nationally. The comparative league compares your previous year's score to your current year's score, and looks at percentage increase.

My patch includes the Wildwood ringing site, where Nightingales breed and are occasionally trapped and ringed. This year, there are 3-4 pairs around Needham Market – if you know otherwise, do correct me when you see me! There are breeding Little Ringed Plovers in the Gipping Valley, but their success is usually determined by the weather during the breeding season. A lot of rain means nests can get flooded out, and fewer youngsters are produced. A more settled breeding season without much rain gives the LRPs a better chance of rearing some young.

Annually, we have visits from Wheatears on one of the fields behind Pippis Ford. This is



Little Ringed Plover

one of my favourite birds to see on a yearly basis. Not only is it a good sign of spring or autumn movements, but it also shows me that Needham Market can attract passing birds, so you just never know what you are going to find.

Green Sandpipers are regular around Pippis Ford and have been recorded in every month of the year. Numbers can vary from single birds, to peak counts of 10-14 birds. The higher counts tend to be when waders are on the move, and pass through the valley.

So do you have a local area near you where you are able to do some birding? It doesn't have to be a large reserve, or a place that is naturally a haven for birds. It can just be a small lake, or reed bed, or river or woodland where you can find a small range of birds. Patching can improve your ID skills, or even just help you discover what birds are near your home. Whatever it is, I'd encourage you to have a look: you never know, you may find that scarce bird skulking in the trees that brings birders from all over the UK to your local area to see your 'self found' bird. In any case, if you put the time in and visit your local patch regularly, your passion for birding will quickly grow, as you will no doubt discover something new every time you visit.

Ben Moyes was the inaugural winner of the Garrod Award. The award is made annually to a young Suffolk-based birder and wildlife enthusiast. SOG are currently seeking nominations for 2017. A form is available via the website and the winner will receive a certificate, a SOG T shirt and a year's free membership, as well as the opportunity to have an article published in The Harrier.

The closing date for nominations is 31st January 2017 and the Garrod Award will be awarded at the SOG AGM in March. We look forward to hearing from you.



Photo: Bill Baston

Steve Fryett

Topsy Blackbirds

Since the beginning of July a family of Blackbirds – both parents and two juveniles – have been camped in our Georgian conservatory where a 100-year-old grapevine continues to produce masses of black grapes every year. We use the conservatory for growing tomatoes and geraniums as well as for general storage, together with the tended vine. As the weather got warmer I started opening the door during the day although I suspect the birds first found their way in via a couple of missing glass panes in the side. Now that the door is open during daylight hours, the family tend to use this as their way to fly in and out, so we need to be mindful of this

and prepared to duck! I suspect they have roosted in the conservatory which adjoins the kitchen, from where I can watch them while having my breakfast before going to work. When they first appeared, both adults could be seen with a bill full of grapes ready to feed the juveniles somewhere up in the canopy of the vine; the vine is quite thick in places so the youngsters could be difficult to see. When we have to go into the conservatory they can get a little upset, after having spent a lot of the day consuming vino, and start clattering around at the top of the vine. We have also seen them trying to get out, failing to find the door and crashing into glass panes, which in one case resulted in a juvenile suffering a pronounced curve in its bill. They fly around in the conservatory trying to perch on insecure items such as pots and gardening equipment which we then find scattered over the floor; needless to say we no longer store glass vases in there. Of course it was not long before one of them flew through the wrong door and into our sun room/kitchen creating havoc before eventually being persuaded back out of the door. Twice it involved the juvenile (with the straight bill) and on a third occasion the same bird also found his way upstairs and into a bedroom.

The Blackbird family do not exclusively eat our grapes and can often be seen feeding around the garden. Their audacity has been bewildering and their behaviour as tenants atrocious: they also invited a family of mice, three Robins, a Dunnock and a Wren into the conservatory, where they have continued to pillage our grapes till the end of August. Thankfully they do not appear to like our tomatoes! Now in September, the adults have moved on, their whereabouts unknown, but the juveniles have moulted into 1s male (with a curved bill) and 1s female, and they are both still present as I write.

Alan Miller

Chiffchaff survival strategy

Walking along the footpath of the SWT Church Farm, Thorington reserve on 11th April 2016, I became aware of a small bird flying low towards me on the other side of the fence, heading for a patch of bramble and closely followed by a fox.

I stopped before the fox saw me and it approached the bramble bushes where the bird had entered. I had noticed where the bird had gone and the fox was within a couple of metres of it when it caught my scent and quickly ran back in the direction from which it had come.

I turned my attention back to the bramble to identify the bird – initially assuming it was



Photo: Bill Baston

Wren, having only seen it from the corner of my eye and given its low flight – and was surprised to see a Chiffchaff hanging upside down in the bramble, mimicking a leaf. The bramble had a mix of leaves, some old, some new, and so there was a variety of colours from brown to green and the Chiffchaff blended in perfectly with its head pointing down. It remained in this position perfectly still for a full minute before deciding it was safe and then regained an upright position and flew off.

In fifty years of bird watching, that's the first time I have witnessed such behaviour and have not found anything so far in any literature.

Gi Grieco

CARP update - Hen Harrier Day 2016

The Hen Harrier is a superb bird of prey that is in dire need of our help. Although a protected species, the Hen Harrier is still suffering from a decline in breeding numbers, particularly in England where only three pairs attempted breeding in 2016. It is thought that there is the potential for 300 pairs on suitable available habitat (see Mark Avery's website for further information). One of the major factors resulting in their low population is illegal persecution on driven grouse shooting moors.

Readers of The Harrier will be familiar with the work of CARP, the Campaign Against Raptor Persecution, a joint initiative by the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group and the Waveney Bird Club which has been running since 2014 to highlight illegal raptor persecution and to work with the public, organisations and land-owners to report any suspicious activity and wildlife crime.

Another initiative supporting the birds is Hen Harrier Day, again focused on awareness raising, stopping persecution and celebrating this 'skydancer' raptor. Jon Evans and his partner Sue representing CARP attended the most recent event over the weekend of 6th and 7th August at RSPB Rainham Marshes, one of 12 locations across the UK, where they were photographed with the vocal campaigner and supporter of Hen Harrier Day, Chris Packham.



Photo: Bert Axel

Here in Suffolk, although the Hen Harrier is not a breeding species, their decline as a wintering species has been noted. Areas of breckland were previously well-known as hunting or roosting sites and birders would gather at dusk to watch the birds come in for the night, but sadly this is a very rare sight these days.



Rewilding: A necessary step change or a 'field of dreams'?

Conservation of biodiversity: Drivers of change and holding the line

Modern day conservation has emerged from cultural practices of land management that have been part of the human story and have shaped much of the terrestrial surface of the planet in the last 10,000 years (MEA, 2005; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015). The rapid loss of biodiversity linked directly to human-induced activities has set the pretext for modern-day conservation but has also played a part in forging the philosophy and practices driving the conservation movement. Notwithstanding the advances made in science and their application in conservation, culture retains a strong influence in policy and practice for species and habitat protection across Europe (Vera, 2009).

Broadly speaking, two philosophies underpin conservation, namely 'compositionalism' (where the standpoint is from a biogeographical / community perspective consisting of interacting hierarchies of individuals, populations, etc.) and 'functionalism' (where the focus is on ecological processes, such as

thermodynamics and nutrient cycling) (Callicott *et al.*, 1999). The consequence of such a dichotomy can be seen in the goals of conservation practice, with that of the compositionists to maintain or recreate species assemblages through active management with perhaps an entity (rather than a functional) focus; whilst for the functionalists the emphasis is on maintaining or restoring ecosystem processes. 'Protected areas' (PAs) are a central tenet of conventional conservation strategy. However, views of nature and conservation have changed over the last 50 years, particularly with the recognition of drivers of change, the development of ecosystem approach and landscape-scale conservation, and over the last decade, of the importance of resilience and adaptability in an era of rapid environmental change (Mace, 2014). In addition, there has been a concomitant shift from a focus on species, habitats and wildlife ecology, towards a broader multidisciplinary arena, embracing both social and ecological science (Mace, 2014).



Ecosystem and landscape-scale approaches to conservation have come very much to the fore in strategic conservation thinking, both at global (CBD, 2000; Secretariat of the CBD, 2004), and regional (e.g. PEBLDS, 1996; EC, 2011) scales. The UK response is a broadening of strategic approaches to conservation (DEFRA, 2007, 2011; HM Government, 2011). These approaches commit to the implementation of the Nagoya targets for biodiversity conservation (CBD, 2010); support the 7th Environmental Action Programme to 2020 objectives to enhance natural capital and undertake 'urgent concerted action' to improve ecological resilience (EU, 2013); and contribute to targets of the European Biodiversity Action Plan to 2020 (including the restoration of 15% of EU's degraded ecosystems) (EC, 2011).

In 2011, the UK Government published a White Paper on the environment (the first for 20 years), entitled *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature* (HM Government, 2011). A main theme of the White Paper was a commitment to address the challenge of net biodiversity loss by 'supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks', supported by a clear institutional framework including the creation of new Nature Improvement Areas to enhance and reconnect nature on a 'significant scale'. These elements build on the recognition that large-scale terrestrial linkages, buffer zones and improved permeability

within landscapes, which may improve overall connectivity, can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functions at the bioregional scale (Bennett, 2003; Bennett & Mulongoy, 2006; Catchpole, 2007). In addition, the detailed review by Lawton *et al.* (2010) entitled *Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network*, called for a 'step change in nature conservation [...] need to embrace a new, restorative approach which rebuilds nature and creates a more resilient natural environment for the benefit of wildlife and ourselves.' The review also specifically noted that several undertakings are required to enhance the resilience and coherence of England's ecological network:

- Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management
- Increase the size of current wildlife sites
- enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'
- create new sites
- reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

Delivery of the White Paper's recommendations were outlined in the document *ThinkBIG*, published by the England Biodiversity Group (EBD 2011), supporting the necessity for landscape-scale conservation and a coupling to the ecosystem approach.



It is therefore apparent that over the last two decades there has been a call for the broadening of conservation strategy, not least through the 'ecosystem approach' advocated by the CBD (CBD, 2000). Hence, we argue that this supports a paradigm shift from a purely compositionalist view towards one recognising the importance in ecosystem 'function' operating at all spatial and temporal scales. The loss of biodiversity alters the way ecosystems function (Norris *et al.*, 2011), and ultimately impacts on the ability of ecosystems to provide goods and services required for society to prosper (UK NEA, 2011; Cardinale *et al.* 2012; Watson, 2012). Although complex, there is compelling evidence that biodiversity and ecosystem services are coupled (UK NEA, 2011; Mace *et al.*, 2012; Harrison *et al.*, 2014), and that the enhancement of biodiversity by ecological restoration can result in a concomitant enhancement of ecosystem services (Benayas *et al.*, 2009).

Despite the setting of a new global vision and direction for biodiversity policy in Nagoya (Japan) in 2010 (CBD, 2010), the current trends indicate that the most of the 'Aichi targets' will not be met by 2020 (Secretariat of the CBD, 2014). Within Europe, biodiversity loss has continued (EEA, 2015; EC, 2015), consistent with global trends. These global and bioregional patterns mirror those seen in the UK: The 'Watchlist Indicator' (which considers the overall trends of 155 species listed as UK Biodiversity Action Plan priorities) indicates

a decline of 77% since 1970 (with a decline of 18% between 2000 and 2010) (Burns *et al.*, 2013). Only half of the 50 measures used to assess UK biodiversity indicators have shown improvement over the long-term, with only 17 showing improvement over the short-term (DEFRA, 2016). These trends suggest that a reliance on a compositional approach and static model paradigm of PAs has not been a wholesale success in safeguarding biodiversity, despite their role in acting as buffers to threats to biodiversity (Gaston *et al.*, 2008).

Whilst there is recognition that terrestrial linkages and networks, coupled to PAs, can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity (as noted earlier), a fully integrated strategy linking PAs to wider biodiversity safeguarding measures is yet to be implemented effectively. Perhaps rewilding could be an innovative way of engineering broad principles into practice.

Does nature conservation require a paradigm shift? The case for rewilding.

The term 'rewilding', which has emerged from the general framework of restoration ecology (Sandom *et al.*, 2013), was used originally in the context of restoring 'big wilderness', based on the regulatory roles of large predators (Soulé & Noss, 1998). Soulé & Noss (1998) identified three key features of what was termed 'contemporary wilderness', namely large, strictly protected core reserves ('the wild'), connectivity, and keystone species (in particular, carnivores).



However, a more progressive interpretation of the concept is used to encompass a range of ideas, including 'Pleistocene rewilding / taxon replacement', 'passive rewilding / productive land abandonment', and 'translocation rewilding / naturalistic grazing / reintroduction' (Jørgensen, 2015; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016; Jepson, 2016). Consequently, 'rewilding' may join a plethora of normative terms which lack consensus on a clearly demarcated definition (e.g. see Callcott *et al.*, 1999) and one in which the context of its use is critical.

Reintroduction is seen as a central tenet of the rewilding idea (see Sandom *et al.*, 2013), with a particular focus on charismatic flagship species (Seddon *et al.*, 2005) and trophic cascades (see Lormier *et al.*, 2015). However, in Europe the concept has been couched particularly in terms of abandoned traditional agricultural landscapes (Navarro & Pereira, 2012), aligning with the idea of 'passive rewilding', i.e. passive management of ecological succession to restore natural ecosystem processes and reducing human control of landscapes (Gillson *et al.*, 2011); such land abandonment (coupled with protective legislation) can lead to population recovery of large carnivores (Chapron *et al.*, 2014). We advocate that, despite a lack of an agreed consensus on the use of the term 'rewilding', ultimately it is underpinned by the goal of altering ecosystem dynamics and trajectory of ecosystem function, to one which influences the overall resilience / adaptability to environmental change. In essence, the idea of 'rewilding' is to remove the resilience 'debt' which underpins managed / manipulated sites / landscapes, and in so-doing restore the ecosystem function of landscapes, thereby making them more adaptive and resilient to the unpredictable forces of climate change. In short, rewilding can be viewed as representing an 'ecosystem release', with its

trajectory coupled to legacy and current and future environmental impacts.

Hence, the emphasis is geared towards self-sustaining ecosystems, natural ecological processes and provision of a range of ecosystem services (Cramer *et al.*, 2008), which, in the context of conservation management, we would argue describes a 'mimicking of nature'. Consequently, of course, such 'free-willing' of nature may involve the inclusion of new biotic elements (Hobbs *et al.*, 2009), with a development of their own cultural associations (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015). Nature itself does not operate to deterministic patterns of ordering, but takes advantage of indeterminate 'release events', in order to reassemble more complex structures to avoid ultimate entropy (i.e. a disordered thermodynamic state) (Kay 2000, 2008; Hobson & Ibsch 2010). Nature thrives on dynamics, but is still able to grow resilience as an emergent property (Fath *et al.*, 2004; Hobson & Ibsch 2010; Norris *et al.*, 2012). The 'rewilding concept' brings challenges, since it is underpinned by the recognition that ecosystems are dynamic and patchy, with a focus very much towards function rather than specific species assemblages or habitats. This is epitomised in the statement from Rewilding Europe (2012): '*rewilding as a concept that does not aim at fixed conservation of particular species, habitats or a priori lost landscapes, but rather opens for the continuous and spontaneous creation of habitats and spaces for species*'.

The consequence is that outcomes are less predictable and deterministic (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015), resulting in 'non-historical' configurations (Hobbs *et al.*, 2009) and non-analogue ecosystems (Jepson, 2016), and they cause changes in biodiversity that result in 'winners and losers' (Navarro & Pereira, 2012; Queiroz *et al.*, 2014; Regos

et al., 2016). Since underpinning rewilding is a willingness to accept uncertainties and ecological surprises (Sutherland, 2002), it is understandable why the concept may be an anathema to many reserve managers (Jepson, 2016), where a focus may be on reducing or preventing biotic and abiotic change (Hobbs *et al.*, 2009). However, as stated in Principle 9 of the CBD, change is inevitable, and this must be recognised by management in order to cope with long-term changes such as climate change. As such, policy intervention is likely to be needed (Jepson, 2016) not least because of legal requirements of EU Member states to maintain compositional character of NATURA 2000 (e.g. Article 6 of the Habitats Directive) and the requirement, under the somewhat ageing Habitats Directive (CEC, 1992), that the conservation status of habitats and species be maintained in 'favourable condition'. Fundamentally, therefore, conservation legislation for Europe is underpinned by a compositionalist approach (Hobson & Bultitude 2004; Lorimer & Driessen, 2014).

Defenders of the 'traditional paradigm' would no doubt argue that key sites are critical since they act as ark sites / refugia of former widespread elements of biodiversity, whether this be a particular habitat, community or species, and many require continued concerted management intervention to ensure they are not lost. Their role as refugia is recognised (e.g. Lawton *et al.*, 2010) and must be valued. However, such sites need to be viewed in the context of the broader landscape in which they are embedded. Sites are not immune to influences of the broader landscape, which can impact on ecological

processes which may affect biodiversity (Knight & Landres, 2002); influences do not stop at site boundaries. In addition, there is increasing emphasis on the importance of ecosystem services (MEA, 2005; UK NEA, 2011), embracing issues such as natural assets and carbon storage, and the recognition that ecosystems need to function in a manner whereby they have the resilience / adaptability to respond to environmental change. A key contributing element is to focus on a coherent and resilient landscape (Lawton *et al.*, 2010), and to underpin this with the notion of 'mimicking nature', to which 'rewilding' is wedded.

Our view is not a call for the wholesale abandonment of traditional conservation practice but for a realisation that change is needed urgently. Change may not be easy, particularly if it challenges a traditional idyll. As we are in an era of rapid environmental transformation, should the goal be about 'preservation' (i.e. maintaining the *status quo*) or about 'conservation', where there is a commitment to working with the 'grain of nature' (incidentally a strapline to DEFRA (2002) which laid out principles and guidelines for ecosystem management) to which rewilding aligns? Since the current high rates of extinction suggest that a mass extinction is underway (Ceballos *et al.*, 2015), and the impact of human influence is such that a planetary-scale critical transition may be being approached (Barnosky *et al.*, 2012), not least through changes in biosphere integrity (Steffen *et al.*, 2015), is the time for deliberation not over?

Please contact the Editor if you would like details of any of the papers referenced in this article.

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Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve

Introduction

Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve project encourages gardeners and allotment owners to allocate at least 'three square yards' of their land to wildlife-friendly plants, ponds and insect lodges. The result of this project is that we are developing a Community Nature Reserve, composed of many pieces of private land, between which insects, birds and other wildlife can travel and develop sustainable biodiversity. Even window box owners are encouraged to take part! After all, they can grow herbs, crocus, snow drops and much else: no one is excluded. Perhaps our story will encourage readers of The Harrier to establish a Community Nature Reserve in their own town or village.

Getting started

The original idea was born out of my own frustration with politicians during the 2015 General Election debate, none of whom even mentioned the catastrophic decline in bee and other wildlife populations. Clearly, local grassroots action was needed.

After the election result was announced, I started talking and listening to people from both local government and the Felixstowe community, and by October that year had gathered a small team of volunteers. Most people understood that wildlife populations in Felixstowe were falling, and they wanted to help, but they simply did not know how. It also became clear that getting hold of a single plot of land for any kind of nature reserve project in the Felixstowe area would take too long, and would be too complicated. To make participation in this initiative as simple as possible, I decided to re-define what a nature reserve could be. Instead of it being a single area of land, I

suggested to local people that each of them only had to allocate 'three square yards' of their garden and/or allotment and if we aimed for 1,666 people to take part, the combination would give us a total area of 5,000 square yards – the area of a football pitch – an image which everyone could imagine.

Casting our net wide

By the end of October 2015, it was clear that enough local people understood what I was trying to do. My partner Dawn Holden and I started a Facebook page (see below) to advise local people about wildlife-friendly plants. Three times each week, a new plant was recommended to our rapidly growing readership. Our first plant list comprised rowan, barberry, firethorn, foxglove, thyme, sunflower, lavender, honeysuckle, ice plant, buddleia, evening primrose and purple loosestrife – something for everyone!

For local people without access to the internet, I wrote an article for one of our local advertiser magazines and gave interviews to our local community TV station and BBC Radio Suffolk. One of the volunteers took it upon herself to print off information posters about our work and aims. Those posters ended up on just about every community notice board in Felixstowe! Over the months leading up to Christmas 2015, it was difficult to miss the name of Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve. By now, we had received messages from 92 local people, saying they had bought and planted at least one of the plants which we had recommended. We were thrilled with the early take-up.

The work continued by highlighting plants with berries and other seasonal fruit, including hawthorn, yew, alder buckthorn,

elder, berberis, holly, rowan, spindle, dogwood and wild privet.

Where are we now?

At the time of writing, we've had 443 messages from local people, who've bought and planted one or more of the plants on the list. But the good news doesn't stop there.

Thanks to the internet, and Facebook in particular, people in the Leicestershire villages of Cosby and Burbage have heard about our initiative and have copied our model to develop their own Community Nature Reserves.

Furthermore the BBC presenter Chris Packham found out about us, again through the internet. Chris's tweets to his 145,000 twitter followers produced a small avalanche of enquiries about our work and achievements.

We're also working alongside Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Community Projects Officer, which has the dual benefit of helping them with their grassroots conservation initiatives and raising our profile.

Participation in a Green Forum in January, jointly organised by the East Suffolk Greenprint Forum and Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Felixstowe Town Council, also generated tremendous enthusiasm for our work – not only our aims, but also the results we have achieved – as well as lots more volunteers. Some wonderful new ideas came out of the Forum, such as the organisation of a plant-swap opportunity, to keep the cost of buying and growing wildlife-friendly plants as low as possible. We even met a local poet – aptly named Tim Gardiner – who hopes to organise a summer poetry competition on themes related to the work of Felixstowe's Community Nature Reserve, which again will promote both his and our work. The aim is always to raise awareness about wildlife-

friendly gardening.

We've had enquiries from people all over the UK, asking for the details of how we set ourselves up, and how the initiative has developed. I hope this feature will inspire and help other communities to take responsibility for their local conservation in a way where everyone can get involved.

Moving forward, some lessons

The most important lesson which we can offer other groups who may wish to start their own community nature reserve is to listen to as many local people as possible. Be patient. Don't rush into the Facebook phase until your local community feels comfortable with what you plan to do.

The next lesson is to keep listening, so fresh new ideas from the community can be fed into Facebook and other social media as often as possible. We like to use streetlife.com because it's a great way to get discussions going among local people who otherwise might not get involved in community engagement.

Finally, we recommend that you use as many different types of local media as possible to spread the message about what you're trying to achieve. As well as Facebook and streetlife.com, we have used LinkedIn, local magazines, community radio and TV stations, BBC Radio Suffolk and Twitter.

[www.facebook.com/
FelixstoweCommunityNatureReserve/](http://www.facebook.com/FelixstoweCommunityNatureReserve/)



Photo: Adrian Cooper

Eddie Marsh Summer Bird Review

JUNE 2016

June on the whole was a mixed month with at least fourteen days when it rained. The first three days were cool with a high of 12°C and a low of 8°C on the 3rd, then a warm spell with temperatures reaching 20°C to 24°C from the 4th to the 11th, although the 11th produced 39mm of rain. The 18th was a cool day with a high of 14°C and low of 11°C, the 20th produced 35mm of rain; the 22nd reach a high of 23°C, then no higher temperature was reached for the rest of the month. With fourteen days of significant rainfall, it was a wettish month with 189mm in total.



Greenish Warbler

Photo: B. Moyes

The **Greenish Warbler** continued to show and sing at Dip Farm Gunton 1st-3rd. The **Long-tailed Duck** continued on the scrape at Minsmere although was not reported after the 1st. Two **Glossy Ibis** at Micklemere 1st-4th, then a single immature bird remained to the 26th; a **Glossy Ibis** then appeared at Sapiston on a flooded meadow on the 28th and 29th. A **Purple Heron** was seen in flight from Island Mere Hide on the 1st and was seen on and off till the 6th; possibly the same bird was seen at Blythburgh on the 9th flying south mid-morning. A few **Spoonbills** remained throughout the month at various locations, along with a scattering of **Little Gulls**. At Hollesley on the 1st a **Common Swift** bearing a *white-rump* was seen over the scrape,

presumed to be the same individual that has been recorded for its 4th year at this site. A report was made of 18 **Common Crossbills** on the 2nd flying west over Stowupland village at 2.15pm and a count of 20 over Upper Hollesley Common on the 18th. A **Cattle Egret** was seen at Tendring Hall Park on the 2nd, the only report all month. A few reports were made of **Great White Egrets** still in the county this month. Two drake **Garganey** were seen at Boyton on the 2nd and an eclipse drake noted at Trimley Marshes 10th and 21st.



Ruff

Photo: B. Buffery

Also on the 10th, two full summer plumage **Ruff** were displaying at Trimley – what a show! I personally had not witnessed this in Suffolk before. They had been performing several days either side of this date. **Red Kites** noted from the 2nd, too many sightings to list, but an influx throughout the county on the 8th with three noted at Reydon on the 11th and four on the 12th. It seemed that a few **Short-eared Owls** were over-summering, with sightings from Tinkers, Southwold, Orfordness, Havergate and Hollesley. **Roseate Tern** seen at Minsmere 3rd, 4th and 27th and two were seen off LBO on the 4th. **Osprey** seen over Minsmere on the 14th and six **Spotted Redshank** on their return journey on the 16th plus 13 full-summer plumage birds on the Dunwich Shore Pools on the 23rd. An early **Wood Sandpiper** on the 24th was

at Minsmere; an un-seasonal **Fieldfare** was trapped at LBO on the 16th, and on the 17th two **Black Redstarts** put in an appearance. Both **Turtle Dove** and **Spotted Flycatcher** were seen at Shingle Street on the 25th.



Spotted Flycatchers

Photo: B. Buffery

Rarer Birds

At Landguard on the 2nd around 8am a cracking male **Kentish Plover** was found by Paul Holmes on the beach by the sea-watching hide, where it showed very well and remained till 1.30pm, despite being harassed by breeding Ringed Plovers. A **Common Redstart** was ringed in the Obs the same day.



Marsh Warbler

Photo: Eddie Marsh

Paul Holmes found another good bird on the 4th, namely a singing **Marsh Warbler** at Fagbury rail crossing Felixstowe, however it was elusive and only present that one day. There must have been a small influx of **Marsh Warblers** as a very showy singing bird was found at Reydon by the third hide in the Hen Reedbeds on the 7th where it showed very well till the 13th, enjoyed by all. Another was

discovered for one day only at Lowestoft in the North Denes scrub on the 12th. A superb drake **Blue-winged Teal** was on the scrape at Carlton Marsh SWT Reserve on the 6th and 7th – only the 6th Suffolk record of this bird. A **Red-Backed Shrike** (male) was reported from Reydon Hen Reedbeds for a brief five minutes at 10am, with another seen at Upper Hollesley Common on the 6th with a third sighting from Dunwich on the 11th.

At Westwood Marshes, Walberswick, an adult female **Red-footed Falcon** was reported by Sean Mimms as seen from 9.25am until mid-afternoon at least on the 7th – perhaps the same bird that was at Upper Hollesley in May. The same day a **Bee-eater** was seen going north at 9.41am with a second sighting, possibly of the same bird, over the Minsmere Discovery Centre at 9.50am.



Whiskered Tern

Photo: Will Brame

The Trimley Marshes came to life on the 7th when a **Whiskered Tern** was found by Nigel Odin at 4.12pm, a 7th Suffolk record and a potential tick for several Suffolk listers including me. Unfortunately I had a prior engagement and could not get there the first day, so was hoping it would remain till the following morning when I arranged a lift with Justin 'Z' (who also needed it and couldn't make it the first day, because of a family engagement at the Spring Watch Studio at Minsmere). The Tern remained and showed very well, mainly from the Reservoir Hide on

the 8th and 9th. This was not the end of an incredible story for the 7th: Chris Bridge, the LBO summer warden, found his way down to Trimley later that evening in order to see the Whiskered Tern and, to his astonishment, had a male **Little Bittern** fly across the reservoir. It was seen only briefly a few times in flight during the next day but was often heard singing with that distinctive barking call; then in the evening it showed well, climbing up to the top of the reeds from the bridge near the hide. It was also seen well from the visitor centre hide, although unfortunately there was no sight or sound of it on the 9th. A **Serin** was found on the common at LBO at 8.35am where it remained till 1.10pm at least on the 7th. A female was trapped at 10am on the 15th, with another on the 26th and 29th (breeding!). **Black Kite** seen over Melton at 8.30am on the 8th, prompting the thought that it could still be the Wrentham bird. **Montagu's Harrier** was found over Falkenham Marshes on the 13th and was only seen between 6am and 8am. A **Caspian Tern** arrived at the east end of Breydon Water on the 19th and was seen every day from the 24th to the 29th, often mobile, but what a great stayer. A nice female **Bluethroat** was found on the 26th, present in the North Dunes opposite the Bird's Eye factory Lowestoft.

JULY

July was a good month weatherwise with temperatures of 20°C or over for the majority of the month and little rain. The month overall was dry and warm with the only substantial rain on the 12th (5mm), 21st (14mm) and 30th (4mm) with slightly less rain on five other days. There were six days where the lowest temperatures dropped to single figures although the low of 8°C on the 15th was followed by temperatures soaring from 26°C to 29°C from the 16th to the 20th – the highest of the month, with the 23rd and 24th producing 25°C.

Spoonbills remained throughout the county during the month with numbers now increasing at various locations: amongst sightings too numerous to mention, numbers at Holllesley RSPB reserve reached 15 on the 3rd, only topped by those seen at Havergate (22) on the 13th. Trimley's numbers were smaller, one to three birds over the month although better than Hazelwood and Boyton with just a single sighting late month. If the increasing numbers during the month indicate birds moving over from Holland, surely they must breed in Suffolk sooner or later!

The immature **Glossy Ibis** still remained at Sapiston on the flooded meadow, viewed from the road that leads to church on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th, and then on the 10th two birds were seen flying over. Another **Glossy Ibis** was showing well at Pipp's Ford on the 9th remaining till the 12th, although strangely there were no more reports of this species during the rest of the month. The eclipse **Garganey** remained at Trimley SWT reserve all month. An **Osprey** on Weybread Gravel Pits was seen fishing on number one pit on the 1st. Up to four **Red Kites** were noted from Walberswick on the 26th. A few reports came in of **Great White Egrets** still in the County during the month. There were **Caspian Gull** sightings all month of birds of various ages, most reports coming from Walberswick as well as Minsmere and the Alde Estuary; the most interesting bird being a juvenile found at Walberswick by Brian Small towards the end of the month. This bird was wearing a yellow ring and had been ringed as a chick in Schleswig-Holstein in Northern Germany. **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported throughout the month from Minsmere, the Alde Estuary and notably Walberswick, which had the highest count of 50+ on the 27th. There were two very good counts of **Mediterranean Gull** at Walberswick: one hundred were counted on the 4th and 136 on the 9th; and one hundred again, possibly from Walberswick, at Minsmere on the 5th. During

the month, **Little Gull** numbers increased slowly, with the highest count of 15 coming from Minsmere on the 17th. A **Roseate Tern** on the scrape at Minsmere on the 3rd and 12th was followed by another sighting of an adult at Trimley SWT coming off the reserve and flying up the river at 7.45am on the 23rd and probably the same bird at LBO was then seen coming out of the river and then heading north. Two **Arctic Terns** were at Minsmere on the 5th and one on the 19th plus one at Alde Estuary on the 27th.

Although still only July, it seemed like autumn, with good numbers of waders already returning south. **Wood Sandpiper** sightings occurred all month from Minsmere, Hollesley RSPB, Boyton, Trimley SWT and Carlton Marshes. Good numbers of **Spotted Redshank** were seen returning, with the highest count of 27 at Minsmere on the 22nd. A few **Little Ringed Plover** sightings were reported from Minsmere, Walberswick, Hazelwood Marshes and Trimley, the highest counts being five juveniles at Minsmere on the 25th and four at Trimley SWT, two adults and two juveniles on the 21st.



Little Ringed Plover

Photo: Brian Buffery

Eight **Ruff** were recorded at Minsmere on the 8th. An excellent count of 1,700 Black-tailed Godwits was made by Mark Cornish at Hazelwood Marshes on the 28th. The only report of **Turtle Dove** this month was from Hazelwood on the 23rd.

Rarer Birds

On Orfordness a male **Citrine Wagtail** was briefly seen twice on the 3rd on the NT reserve in an area of unauthorised access and without a permit. Also on the 3rd at North Marsh Walberswick a drake **American Wigeon** found at 2.30pm showed well into that evening, although unfortunately it was a short stayer and was no longer seen on the 4th. A **Balearic Shearwater** was reported 10 miles east of Sizewell from a ferry on the 5th.

Some early scarcer waders put in an appearance in July: **Curlew Sandpiper**, an adult summer plumage bird, turned up on Havergate on the 13th followed by many other sightings at Minsmere, Walberswick (Tinkers), Hazelwood Marshes (two and then three adult summer plumage birds); three **Little Stint** were sighted at Minsmere between the 14th and 21st (three birds) and a single at Hazelwood Marshes 28th.



Little Stint

Photo: P. Whittaker

A **Honey Buzzard** was seen over Minsmere car park early afternoon on the 21st, again on the 22nd and presumably the same bird was seen again, circling over the visitor centre and workshops mid-morning. This male **Honey Buzzard** became a big star and was seen on a regular basis, even displaying with wing clapping at several locations on its daily routines between 24th and 31st. More detail reveals its movements: it was at Westwood Lodge on the 24th, then again on the 25th for 20 minutes from 9am, then over Minsmere

for 10 minutes from 11.05am, and then low over Westleton Heath at 12.50pm. The next day it is estimated it left its roosting site at 9.10am and soared until 9.30am when it drifted north east, re-appearing at 10.30am. Picked up again at Theberton Woods at 10.45am, it was then seen at Westleton Heath at 11.25am for five minutes. On the 27th it showed well for an hour from 2.50pm at Westwood Lodge, then Westleton Heath for 25 minutes from 4pm when it drifted north. On the 28th it showed at Minsmere at 11.30pm, then drifted north, appearing back at Westwood Lodge 20 minutes later where it showed for 10 minutes from 2.05pm. On the 29th it was seen again from Westwood Lodge at 8.30am, heading south over Dunwich Forest at 9.30am, appearing at Westleton Heath fifteen minutes later. On the 30th at Westwood Lodge it was seen to come out of the roost at 9.40am and circle the area for just over 10 minutes when it drifted off south before being seen over Westleton Heath just after 10am. On the 31st it left the roost at 8.43am and showed well before drifting off south at 9.12am. A great bird for Suffolk birders and listers; this was a fantastic opportunity to see this scarce passage raptor in the county and it must have been the best watched Honey Buzzard ever in Suffolk – amazing!

A **Wood Warbler** was trapped and ringed at Minsmere on the 28th.



Baird's Sandpiper

Photo: Bill Baston

Mega Alert news broke just after 11am on Sunday 24th: a **Baird's Sandpiper** had been

discovered on the East Scrape at Minsmere. It showed well till dusk and was showing well again on the 25th. It was only the eighth record for Suffolk if accepted. It was found by RSPB volunteer Peter Philips who was not sure of its identity, but knew it was something unusual. Handily, John Grant was in the hide and able to help him confirm its ID and send the news out. Then – you could not make this up – on the last day of the month, Sunday 31st, came a second **Mega Alert** from Minsmere: a **Western Purple Swamphen**



Western Purple Swamphen

Photo: Bill Baston

had been found by Frank Clark, an out-of-county birder, on the pool behind the South Hide, where it showed well till dusk. (There were even whispers that it had even been glimpsed on the 30th). There have been no accepted records on the British List to date; the ones that have turned up in Britain in the past have mainly been of the Eastern Race and are kept in captivity. However, this bird may have a chance, as populations have increased and there have been vagrant birds recorded in France with at least one in Brittany.

A **Caspian Tern** circled the scrape briefly at 4pm but unfortunately did not stay. Lastly, for the Dragonfly people, a nice male **Lesser Emperor** found by Will Brame was seen well on Loompit Lake on the 17th and 18th, and a good photo of it appeared on the BINS website.



Photo: Sue Reynolds

AUGUST

What a scorching month August turned out to be! And with so little rainfall it was also a very dry month. High temperatures only dropped below 20°C on one day, the 10th, and then only to 19°C; there were 17 days where the high was 23°C or above, with the highest temperature of 32°C occurring on the 24th. It seems crazy but there were three dates when the low reached single figures: 8°C on the 9th, 10th and 16th. Rain did fall on 12 days, with six of those producing 2mm or less. The only substantial rainfall was 11mm on the 2nd and 12mm on the 28th.

The **Spoonbills** remained throughout the county during the month, their numbers still increasing; the highest count for the month was at Hazelwood on the 17th with at 25+ counted. Another notable count was 24 on the 24th at Havergate. Further south at Levington Creek there were three on the 20th and again three at Trimley SWT Reserve on the 22nd. Cattawade also saw three on the 23rd on the Stour by the railway bridge and there were once again three at Stutton Mill on the 24th. Presumably the same three Spoonbills are commuting the Stour Estuary. A **Glossy Ibis** was seen in flight over East Scrape Minsmere and went down in reeds on the wader trail on the 18th, then seen again on the 19th. The only two reports of **Great White Egret** to BINS this month were from Botany Marsh, Snape on the 11th and Minsmere on the 31st. A **Purple Heron** was reported over the lagoons at East Lane, Bawdsey on the 14th. There was an out-of-season report of two **Goosanders** on South

Scrape, Minsmere on the 12th. Two **Garganey** were seen from Minsmere during the month and at Lakenheath there were nine **Common Cranes** seen on the 14th.

An **Osprey** was found by John Richardson on the River Deben at Wilford Bridge on the 14th, where it performed very well till the 18th, when it was last seen flying downriver at 9am. This juvenile female Osprey was from a brood of three, containing two females and a male. It bore a Blue Darvic-type ring on its left leg **HL8** having been ringed at Glen Affric in Scotland on July 1st 2016.

Other **Osprey** reports include: Hazelwood/Alde Estuary – one over 2.45pm on the 6th; one on the 27th and 28th; one over Herringfleet Marsh, Lowestoft on the 18th; one at Halesworth on the 17th; one west over Seafeld Bay, Stour Estuary on the 22nd, and one over Claydon early morning on the 23rd. On the 27th, two birds were reported, one from Cavenham and one from Blythburgh, followed by one at Boyton and Gedgrave on the 29th. One was seen at Leiston over Carr Avenue at 8.53am on the 30th; one over the Deben Estuary at Methersgate on the 31st; all told, a very good August for Osprey sightings.

On the 9th, a **Montagu's Harrier** was seen north over Westwood Lodge. Two **Red Kites** were seen at Blythburgh on the 6th and a **Hen Harrier** was reported over Whatfield, heading north east at 10.45am on the 24th. Regular sightings occurred of up to two Short-eared Owls on Havergate Island.

Caspian Gulls and **Yellow-legged Gulls** continued from locations reported in July. During the month **Little Gull** numbers increased, with the highest count coming from Minsmere: 54 on the 24th. An **Arctic Tern** was at Hazelwood on the 15th. **Black Terns** were reported from LBO: one on the 18th and two on the 27th, as well as two **Arctic Skuas** at LBO on the 18th and a **Pomarine Skua** on the 19th. A pale phase juvenile **Pomarine**

Skua was seen over the beach at Minsmere on the 24th. An **Arctic Skua** was at Slaughden on the 24th.

It was a good August for **Wood Sandpipers** with the two long-staying birds continuing at the Flash at Boyton until the 20th at least. Some were also reported from Minsmere from the 8th to the 29th with counts of three or more on the following dates: four on the 21st, three on the 22nd, four on the 23rd, six on the 24th, four on the 25th and four on the 27th. At Pippis Ford two were seen from 17th to 26th at least. A single record from the Orwell Estuary was on the shoreline by Loompit Lake on the 18th and a single report from Carlton Marshes on the 25th. Good numbers of **Spotted Redshank** continued throughout August with Minsmere being the hot spot, highest counts being 24 on the 22nd and 27th. A single was reported from the Alde on the 6th, 9th and 29th, and from Botany Marsh on the 11th. Other common waders passing through the county included **Dunlin, Knot, Ruff, Redshank, Little Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwits, Bar-tailed Godwit, Turnstone, Whimbrel** and **Curlew** to name a few.

There was some movement of common passerines throughout the county this month with too many species and locations to mention in detail. Good numbers of **Whinchats** at the coastal sites, increasing numbers of **Wheatear**, a few **Redstart**, also **Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Pied Flycatcher,**



Pied Flycatcher

Photo: John Richardson

Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Pipit and **Grasshopper Warbler** all noted. **Dartford Warbler** reported from Hazelwood on the 28th – perhaps local movement. A **Turtle Dove** was at Bawdsey Hall on the 1st.

Rarer Birds

The **Purple Swamphen** remained in the pool behind South Hide on the 1st and showed well on and off up to and including the 5th. Hundreds of twitchers and birders from all over the UK made an effort between Sunday and Friday to catch up with this potential first for the British List. There were still birders and Suffolk listers (at work or on holiday) who could not get there during the week and were travelling overnight on Friday to go for it on Saturday morning, however these were to be very disappointed by its no-show on the Saturday morning (6th). Many good photographs were taken and put up on various internet sites, including BINS.

The first **Sooty Shearwater** of the year was reported offshore from Minsmere on the 3rd, another from Southwold on the 18th at 9.05am, and also passing Southwold at 9.15am on the 18th was a nice **Balearic Shearwater**. The **Honey Buzzard** remained to show daily at the same location as July till the 29th at least. There had been claims of two birds being seen, but there was no really conclusive evidence, as some reports were of a pale phase and others a dark phase, which could have been due to different light conditions. There should be no Suffolk listers still needing Honey Buzzard after this amazing long-stayer.

A **Cattle Egret** was seen at Minsmere on the 2nd, but no further sightings were reported. A **Black Stork** was seen in a stubble field at Stradbroke on the 22nd. A **Quail** was seen at Mount Pleasant, Westleton on the 26th (Richard Drew).

It was a fantastic month for **Little Stints**, with sightings from Minsmere from the 5th to the

30th: three on the 18th, three on the 20th and 21st, four on the 29th and six on the 30th. At Southwold Flash on the 7th and 8th there were seven juveniles, Boyton had one on the 20th and 25th (juvenile), then two on the 26th. Pippas Ford, Needham Market saw one on the 28th and 29th, Havergate two on the 29th and Trimley one on the 31st. From mid-month there was a nice trickle of **Curlew Sandpiper** appearing in the county, with the first at Minsmere (a juvenile) on the 16th, reported till the 31st, with double figure counts on the following dates: 20 on the 20th, 16 on the 21st, 17 on the 22nd, 26 on the 23rd, 14 on the 24th, 16 on the 25th and 17 on the 27th. At Trimley there were one (a juvenile) on the 19th and six on the estuary on the 22nd while Havergate saw 18 on the 29th. Good to see some decent numbers this year and looking at numbers throughout the UK it seems they have had a very good year. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was briefly spotted on East Scrape Minsmere late afternoon on the 14th.

At LBO on the 8th a nice **Wood Warbler** was discovered in the compound. It was seen again on the 9th and on the 24th a Serin was recorded. It seemed like the LBO was returning to form, with **Icterine Warbler** on the 25th and another new one on the 29th, the latter showing very well all day till dusk. A **Bee-eater** was found at Minsmere on the 18th where it remained till mid-morning on the 19th. A **Wryneck** was seen flying over the Felixstowe Docks Complex towards Trimley Marshes on the 15th.



Photo: John Richardson

Another **Wryneck** was discovered at Corton old sewage works on the 25th and was still showing on the 31st.

On the 12th a report came into BINS of a much wanted bird for Suffolk birders: an **Aquatic Warbler** was in bushes by the Bird's Eye factory at Ness Point, Lowestoft. It was seen briefly at 12.10pm, but when birders arrived at the site soon after the news, there was no further sign and with much searching the only bird produced was a **Sedge Warbler!**

Field Trip Reports

Gi Grieco

Thorpeness

4th September 2016

Leader: Gi Grieco

We had a bright if somewhat breezy day for this SOG trip to look for some autumn migrants and seabirds. A new trip leader (yours truly) was drafted in, as David Walsh was unable to attend, busy leading an Ornitholidays trip to the Cantabrian Mountains that included wolves, brown bears, wildcats and Wallcreeper – unfortunately species not on the agenda for this day in Thorpeness!

Heading north up through the allotments we found a partly sheltered sunny spot that a number of birds were favouring, although they quickly disappeared into the scrub. With patience we saw Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Whitethroat and a couple of smart Lesser Whitethroats, along with a tit flock moving through. Carrying on to the open grassy area we saw one male Wheatear and a couple more Whitethroats in some bramble. A bit of a sea-watch was then undertaken, though after 20-30 minutes we decided that it was time to move on as it was pretty quiet – a tally of six Little Gulls and a similar number of Gannets, although these were all more distant. Checking the north end of the caravan park, again a partly sheltered spot, we found a similar array of warblers and the tit flock this time had a Coal Tit amongst the more typical Long-tailed and Blue Tits. A recce of the beach found it to be very quiet and the sea was still, although we did pick up a Grey Seal. We meandered back through the old caravan park picking up a couple more Lesser Whitethroats on the way and overhead a lone Swift. Back down towards the village we stopped to look at some buddleia that had attracted butterflies including painted lady, red admiral and small white as well as a couple of large hornet mimic hoverflies that caught our attention.

Blythburgh

Back at the cars we watched some House Sparrows bathing in a puddle and were discussing where to go next when a timely Suffolk BINS message came through to say that the Ospreys were still present on the River Blyth, so we headed up there next. The tide was high so few waders were present; those on the uncovered bits of bank were Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and a couple of Common Sandpipers. We walked east towards the bird hide when Marion called out that she'd found one of the Ospreys. We were treated to great views, including diving for a fish, which the Osprey had trouble taking off again with. The bird managed to flap to a nearby spit, partially hidden by reeds. At times we could see the Osprey flapping, trying to fly, then it would be out of sight behind the reed fringe. Eventually after five minutes the Osprey flew off minus its catch and flew past us upriver. Other raptors in the area were Buzzard and Marsh Harrier and we added Curlew and Oystercatcher to the wader list.

Westwood Lodge

Our next port of call, to finish off the day, was Westwood Lodge. On the approach road were many Pheasants including quite a number squashed by cars. Parking up we scanned across the reedbeds and woodland and our raptor afternoon continued with several more sightings of Marsh Harrier and Buzzard along with a Red Kite and Peregrine, as well as sightings of Little Egret and Grey Heron flying over the reedbeds. In the woodland we heard both Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker. An enjoyable day, with a bit of migration and some fantastic raptors, although a shame that we couldn't have added wolves and bears to the list.

As a P.S., David Walsh's Ornitholidays Spain tour was very successful: 3 wolves, 2 sightings of brown bear, 6 of wildcats and 101 bird species including Wallcreeper, Alpine Accentor & Rock Thrush.

SOG Exile on North Ronaldsay pt. 2

June

Spring is a promise that never quite keeps itself. Every day of sun is followed by two of rain. The wind either doesn't blow, or comes only from the west. Purple orchid tips, pushing their way through the soil end up petal-deep in sudden puddles. The grass hasn't grown; the cows are still on silage. Islanders suck their teeth and say "Aye, and did you ever see the like?". Yet the fuschia bushes have become a dense wall of green in the gardens. The shock of leaves in springtime.

In the waterlogged start to June, I walk past a Lapland Bunting foraging under the chassis of three broken Volkswagen vans on bricks in a field of dandelions and clover. The vans are all missing bits — wheels, doors, etc — but the bunting is concerned only with insects and indeed I later learn that they need to eat at least 3,000 insects a day to sustain themselves. Its sharp chestnut nape contrasts with a black face and crown making it stand out starkly from the green grass. A typical spring migrant on North Ronaldsay, this one is so startlingly late that Mark jokes it should've been Cretzschmar's, a symptom of the increasingly bizarre spring we were having. It wasn't even the best looking bird on the island that day. That afternoon Mark found a male Rosefinch, a bird so bright it had us all gasping, dumb-struck. It sat on a stone wall amid lush greenery; hot pink and unapologetically — brilliantly — out of keeping with its surroundings.

The Lapland Bunting stayed with us for a while and had the ignominy of being outclassed each day by a rarer or prettier arrival. On the 2nd I came upon a female Dotterel hiding in a hummock. We both stared at each other in shock. Mark said that it was so late it really should've been a Caspian Plover. On the 3rd we had the absolute pleasure of a singing Bluethroat — radiant blue and brick red — in brilliant sunshine, again treating the stone walls like hedgerows and gorging on the hatching insects.



Photo: Stephen Rutt

It was after the Lapland Bunting left that I got a first taste of a spring fall. It had rained and blown an easterly all morning on the 5th, the hallowed weather that had avoided all us spring. I walked every wall in the morning and found only a few Lesser Whitethroats before my shift indoors began. So I was in the kitchen when I got the call that Gavin had another Bluethroat in the Heligoland trap. The afternoon was a wash out: a day watched from the observatory lounge, hoping for birds when it finally stopped raining. It stopped raining. The birds came. I arrived at the nets just in time to see Gav emerge, grinning, holding a big bird bag. Hobby, he says. An Orkney rarity and the first to be ringed on the island. While I spread



Photo: Stephen Rutt



Olive-backed Pipit

the news, news from elsewhere on the island filters in. Twenty-five Spotted Flycatchers up the west coast and a Red-backed Shrike at the top end. I flit with the other volunteers and guests from the falcon to the shrike: the first adult male I have seen in a long time, ominously lurking on the walls by the bushes where the Linnets roost; a not-so-subtle pink, red and black.

I head back to the nets to help furl up as another squally shower hits. 9pm. End of play on another good day on North Ronaldsay? Not quite. In the long June sunset, a pipit drops out of the sky with the rain and lands on the west coast in front of Mark. An Olive-backed Pipit from Siberia, about as unseasonal an arrival as could be. I bike to the airfield from the nets in two minutes flat, wheezing, run across two boggy fields, breathless, muscles burning up, lungs obliterated. I find Mark. He's just standing there.

"Too late?" "No, it's just there".

He points at the grass. A few metres ahead of him, shuffling through a clump of grass, is a stripy Siberian pipit. In the long Orkney sunset we watch it forage, replenishing itself on insects for an hour before it scurries into the wall, mouse-like, to roost for the night. It is 10pm. The sky is cloudless. Dark blue. The sun hangs above Papay and the Atlantic before burning up in the salty air and dropping out of sight. I amble down the road to the observatory as the colour drains from the sky to a soft pink and the bay by the obs is flat-calm, water like silk shining, with an Eider floating just offshore as a skua makes one final sortie through the terns. Even at 1am, the northern sky is still bright and still colourful in an echo of sunset.



Seasons change, although seasons mean little this far north. We begin to ring the first of the wader and gull chicks when I bump into a pair of Nightjars in the gardens at Holland. Rarer here by a large margin than Olive-backed Pipit or Rustic Bunting, for a fortnight we find them regularly roosting on stone walls, pallet piles, rusting machinery. A privileged opportunity to study a plumage of bark and mud and rotting pine needle camouflage, completely out of its context. Not for the first time it occurs to me that I've been very good at finding regular East Anglian birds completely out of their normal range. Spring here really runs until July when you find yourself surrounded by Golden Plovers and in autumn again. Spring migration lingered until the final dose of bad weather in late June: in two windy days, two Icterine, two Marsh and one Subalpine Warbler turned up.

Breeding in the northern isles is a risky undertaking. This spring was so cold and wet and slow that the grass which provides cover for the nesting waders didn't grow. Then Bonxies, Ravens and Hooded Crows saw to most of their first generation. The rain flooded out the gulls breeding in the lochs and iris beds — and both gulls and weather saw to the first of the Arctic Tern broods. Integral to the role of a bird observatory is counting, ringing and monitoring the success of the breeding birds, though we don't stage interventions. We can't stop the weather.

In the early season we experience the highs and lows. We drive around the island on the long bright evenings looking for wader chicks, jumping electric fences and sprinting after them. The high is finding Redshank chicks — the most elusive of all the waders breeding on the island — standing on spindly, long legs, still downy yellow. The low point is entering a tern colony and finding bare rocks and eggs either cold or broken, and no adults dive-bombing, disagreeing with our presence. The silence of absence is haunting. I can't return to those headlands without imagining how they should be: bustling, full of noise and life.

The hardest thing with the terns is waiting for their success. The hardest thing about wader

chicks is spotting them — then running after them. Young Lapwings are fast, some faster than me. Gull chicks are a harder proposition still than the waders, though the principles are the same. On warm, settled days with no chance of rain, you enter the colonies quickly and carefully, gently attach the rings to the chicks you find and move on. For waders this involves, at worst, a boggy field with a suspiciously interested cow at one end. For the gulls you have to hop a barbed wire fence, then, as if with a death wish, walk into a loch. Ankle deep, you splash through the knotted carpet of iris roots, that just about support your weight, though they are riddled with holes and, as someone with a pathological fear of drowning, I was hoping with every fibre of my being that it wouldn't be me up to my knees with my wellies collecting water and dragging me down. Half the battle is finding a way of walking, the other half is psychological.

I strut, heron-like. From one root perch to another, the fragrance of mint under-foot rising, purple spikes of marsh orchids poking out from the roots and delicate florescences of cuckoo-flower amid the blunt thick forest of irises. We find nests: clumps of guano-splattered rushes, washed out by the rain. The irises are several feet shorter, the water-level four inches higher than in past years. Gulls dive around us, cackling, harassing us. We find some chicks, palm-sized, barely a day old and too young to ring, before we discover ones that are old enough. These are still downy, but independent enough to scurry through the irises, with feathers growing: miniature black wing tips with faint white spotting poking out from the down. We only ring eight chicks but each one feels like a victory. I hope they prosper.



By day, we focus on fledglings but at night, birds continue to migrate past the island. Storm Petrels don't breed here — or rather have never actually been proven to — but are curious investigators of tapes playing their song. It's a small deception, and one of the more surreal things I have experienced on this sometimes unbelievable island. Carrying speaker systems to the coast trailing cables, with the sea dimly visible in the moonlight, we plug everything in and a

chattering, squeaking, song — like something breaking down in slow motion — fills the air, echoing off the rocks and out to sea. It works best on cloudy nights, when the northern sky is not so bright. Typically the birds start arriving at midnight and peak at 2am, when they are like bats, half-resolved shapes quickly flitting through the darkness. In the hand a Storm Petrel is tiny — barely Starling sized — and prone to singing, vomiting or kicking out with cocktail stick legs and over-sized webbed and clawed feet while being held. Gentleness and firmness are key to controlling a wriggling bird, a particularly enrapturing process. Wader chicks might be cuter, but petrels are inherently mysterious; innately ludicrous, tiny, nocturnal creatures of the high seas. They possess, weird as it may sound, the most pleasant, musky scent of any bird. Each one of these had its own character and different measurements; one had leucistic streaking on its face, and many of them were missing various bits of their feet. Life is hard for petrels.

I was by the nets when a Leach's Petrel was trapped and immediately started singing. It is a sound that defies words and sense and it sent shivers down my spine. It is a sound that belongs to the most isolated isles and skerries where they breed. In the hand it was twice the size of the Storm Petrels that came before. It is roughly comparable to a Dunlin — but this is so weird a



Photo: Stephen Rutt

comparison as to be completely unhelpful. We ring until 3am or when colourless dawn gently glimmers behind the cloud covering, and the petrels, like bats, fade away for the day.



July was a blessing. July is a month of confusion: spring in the colonies; autumn in the plover fields. I didn't wear my winter coat once all month — the only one — and we had 31 days of warmth and azure skies. In the bay the sea was brilliantly turquoise, lapping gently on the white sand. It is on days like these that time unravels. Mornings spent birding, afternoons spent working. Gather up all the unused time and take it to the beach, basking on the rocks by the spangled sea and cry of the terns, the jellyfish swimming, kelp and oarweed floating. One day, stepping out to walk the warden's Chihuahua, a flock of Arctic Terns alerted me to a Honey Buzzard drifting overhead. Eiders moulting out of worn brown-black feathers, Tysties carrying thick red strands of butterfish.

The Tysties are doing well, possibly having the best breeding season of all the birds on the island. The chicks are currently at the age of fledging, and the adults are hanging around on the rocks squeaking like hinges in need of oiling. They nest in crevices amongst the coastal boulder slopes. When we find a crevice, freshly 'whitewashed' and stinking of digested oily fish, we peer through the cracks into the half light amongst the scree — the shadowy gaps and tunnels of the young Tystie's world. Where we see just beach, there is a whole subterranean world, a rock maze open to the birds. We go fishing for them. Sometimes we can see them through the cracks, other times hear them scabbling about. Faces pressed into guano-stained rocks, we feel about with our hands amongst the cracks, shoulder wedged up to boulder, feeling gravel, rocks, guano and then a bundle of warm feathers. You locate the leg, and pull gently — the bird will either come, or scarp and slip out of your grasp.

The first time one young Tystie sees daylight is with my hand around it. There's a split second where it doesn't know what to do. Then at once it squirts from one end a jet of warm, wet, fishy liquid, while the other end nips at the soft flesh of my wrists which feels like an insect bite.

Being just slightly larger than hand-sized they are awkward to hold, and need to be pressed to your leg, one hand holding wings shut and a leg out, the other manoeuvring the metal ring and pliers over the leg. It doesn't take long before they scabble back under rocks. We catch them just before they fledge and many of the birds we handle look like they're about to go within the week, some possibly that very night, although a few of the chicks are from second attempts and look like balls of black tumble dryer fluff with a beak and feet.

July was the month when the terns bred again. From the ashes of failure, the flocks increased with birds from other islands arriving. Strength in numbers. Now when a skua appears it is seen off in a storm of terns. If I stray too close I'm also seen off by belligerent birds queuing in the air above me, waiting to swing low and peck at my head. Even through my cap it still feels like a pinch.

We count 95 pairs, from which 59 young fledge. On ringing trips to the colony I witness the first, hesitant flights: gauche juveniles with stumpy wings who seem surprised at what their wings are doing. I see eggs shake and crack as the young inside strain to swap a life of embryonic comfort for the world outside. I see broken eggs where things have gone wrong, headless chicks which, bizarrely, are the victims of the island's sheep, and adults returning with sticklebacks and sand eels. I get shat on. A lot. I fall in love with them regardless.

When the terns are done, when they halve in numbers from four thousand to two, then one thousand, it becomes officially, properly autumn all over the island. I find a Spotted Redshank wading around the loch. I am blasé — but in recent years on the island there have been as many records of American *Catharus* thrushes as Spotted Redshanks. I am told I am being churlish to have preferred a *Catharus*. It is, after all, only the second that Gav has ever seen and he studies it with diligence as if it were a great rarity. The other volunteers, by now all experienced birders from the south of England, all twitch it too — perhaps a sign that the unofficial year listing competition had got a little out of hand.

A week later and I was walking past the lighthouse in rain when I found an American Golden Plover. An easy sentence, one that obscures that fact that between first spotting it and confirming its ID an hour later, I was chasing its shadow around the tip of the island, losing my cool in bitter bad weather. Not the biggest rarity ever, but the biggest I've found. Not the most exotic, but it's crossed the Atlantic and that's good enough for me. It's a moulting adult: all spangled gold and patchy black on the breast, a svelte structure and suave presence amongst the thousand-strong flock of European Golden Plover.

August rain turned out to be the best thing for migrants. A few days later we stepped out into the front of a storm that would last for four days. It poured birds. I got sodden and cold and criss-crossed for miles up and down each wall in my allotted area: my notebook got wet and blurred the ink of my bird counts, my boots sprang a leak and I survived off a diet of biscuits until I got back to the obs and immediately into dinner duty. Adrenaline, sugar and caffeine keep things running here when the birds are good and the weather terrible. The first day of the fall I found a Barred Warbler and the second day I found two Wrynecks. The fourth day, when the sun reappeared and the wind tailed off, a Booted Warbler was found. There is no birding quite like fall birding on the northern isles: rain and easterlies is the equivalent of the joker in the pack. You can throw away form and expectation and, amongst the countless sodden Willow Warblers, it's impossible to predict what might be lurking. It is not easy. It never is up here. The effort required is massive and sapping, even when the birds have already been found. Mark found a Greenish Warbler that ran rings around me in a thigh-high thistle field in torrential rain: it wasn't until my legs had been shredded, and long after everyone else had seen it several times, that it popped up for me. I put the effort in because Greenish Warblers are less than annual occurrences here although there would be two more recorded on the island this year, all seen with minimal fuss.



August ended unexpectedly. It was early and a morning imbued with possibility. Pink, yellow,

orange in the sky. High grey clouds. A soft southerly wind.

The stillness breaks. As the sun creeps over the mill, it lights up a flock of Swifts, tight and spiralling higher. The flock unravels, birds take the lead. Eighty Swifts string out and fly south out of the island. In the early morning trick of the light, the several miles to Sanday look insignificant, like you could reach out across the firth and touch its beaches. It is a day for moving — a day for migrating low into a light headwind.

It becomes a day for Swifts. Twenty minutes later a flock fills the sky, passing low overhead. Counting becomes frantic with 50, 60, 100, 143 Swifts heading in, in as close to a straight line as a Swift can, the immediate horizon black with birds. We watch as they form a tight flock, a swarm of Swifts over the coast, gaining height and getting fainter before disappearing south.

And still they come. My notebook records the flock sizes and times, of 352 Swifts passing through the island's airspace and out south towards the other Orkney Islands. Added to the Swifts hanging around — tacking across the headwind, pirouetting above the lochs in search of insects — the count was 395. The previous island record count of Swifts was 182, on July 16th, 1996.

Part of the pleasure of migration is watching nature at work, a visible sign of seasonal changes when the days don't change in length or temperature. Part of it is the mystery. Observatories keep enough records to know what a typical year of bird movement is and this year has been very far from typical. Swifts at this extremity of Britain are an irregular summer thing, presumed to be non-breeding birds wandering, with no noticeable migration north or south. Such concentrated flocks, heading so determinedly south is bizarre.

Part of the pleasure of Swifts is the mystery. What is an island to a Swift? They are the bird with the most vexed relationship to land. They don't need land, yet they need the insects that take flight from it. They seem appropriate to the land this far north — both land and birds thrown and contrary.



The first of September was when the warmth went and the Arctic wind brought autumn properly in. Autumn is not a mellow season here. There is no hint in the wind, no first falling leaves. The wind is cutting and cold. The leaves on the few sheltered sycamores that have grown for two hundred years to barely twelve foot, are shrivelling, withered at the edges and snatched at by the wind. From the fields Snipe spring up like jack-in-the-boxes that carry on climbing through the sky. Fieldfares rattle down the walls, earlier than I have ever seen them before.

September is the month when it is autumn for all creatures. September is the month when everything moves.

It is clearest out to sea. The Arctic Terns have left, heading first for Australia then onto Antarctica, a journey that can take a juvenile from three months to complete from fledging. Instead Sooty Shearwaters stream past the island for several weeks as a metronomic presence — consistently ten per hour — on their way south for spring. An island bird throughout the world, they breed in the extremes of the Southern Hemisphere, spending their winter sweeping across oceans in the northern summer. The rougher weather of autumn in this end of the Atlantic suits them well. In calm conditions they dawdle, unsuitably stiff-winged into a strong wind the long thin wings shear up and down, echoing the crashing waves that threaten to, but never quite, wash them out of the sky.

As the month progresses the change in birds reflects distances travelled and distances left to go. The Willow Warblers of August fade in number and colour until the last of the paler birds from the far north have passed through. Mid-month is when the Yellow-browed Warblers turn up, from the forests of Siberia to flit down dykes and fences and lurk in the weedy corners of the island. It was my privilege to ring one that turned up in our nets, taking it snugly between four fingers and feeling its weightlessness, the thrum of its heart and the delicacy of wings that take it over enormous distances. The scales said 5.9 grams.

When I see them it's mostly in thistle fields, flitting between the purple heads that are softened and turning to seed, feeding on barely

perceptible insects. Typically it is the dreich days that bring the warblers in. Under glowering skies, a bird not much bigger than my index finger and bright vivid green and white with butter yellow stripes seems impossible — too small, too bright, too fragile in a place so harsh. It's a marvel that they make it here at all. The wonder is that they're a relatively modern phenomenon, turning up in numbers that suggest their occurrence isn't the result of errant migrations. Despite being thousands of miles off course, they have been discovered spending the winter in the Canary Islands instead of South East Asia. Not all those that are lost succumb. Some become pioneers of a new range, a new distribution. The survivors that return to Siberia to breed pass on their new migration routes. We still don't know how birds do it, where the impulse to migrate comes from or where the mechanics behind their navigation lies. We don't know why distribution changes like this.



September is the month when I have to move. I was lucky in what I did. Most islanders don't get a day off and life is hard when your livelihood relies upon cows and the fields are waterlogged and the grass doesn't grow. They don't get much time to sit and look at the place or stay up for the northern lights. Being here, spartan though it might be, was a massive luxury. North Ronaldsay is a struggling island. The population is declining and its economy is miniscule. Visiting birders at the observatory help keep it afloat and serviced by flights and ferries for the time being. Visiting offers the chance to see incredibly special things — maybe even find a rarity. And if you visit, I hope you have better luck than me. The day I arrived back in Suffolk was the day a Northern Harrier turned up.



Photo: Stephen Rutt

Hobby

Council for 2016

Officers

Honorary President:

A formal proposal will be submitted to the 2017 AGM

Chair: **Gi Grieco**

Vice Chair: **Roy Marsh**

Secretary: **Edward Jackson**

Treasurer: **Matthew Deans**

Membership Secretary: **Kevin Verlander**

Communications Officer: **Alex Rafinski**

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

John Grant

Robin Harvey

Nick Mason

Ed Keeble

Samantha Lee

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean Garrod

Mike Hall

Robin Hopper

Mike Jeanes

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

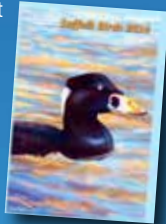
- A voice for Suffolk birdwatchers
- With established links to many naturalist and conservation organisations

Media

- Strong web presence - www.sogonline.org.uk
- Active Twitter feed - @suffolkbirds1
- 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. 801446

www.sogonline.org.uk

