



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Inside:

- Peregrines return to Lowestoft
- Part 1 - History of birdwatching & Suffolk
- Suffolk's Bird of the Year 2012
- Enjoyable AGM

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Cover photograph -

Photographer: Rebecca Nason. This Lesser Redpoll shot was taken in April 2010 at Sutton, Woodbridge, using a NikonD300, a Nikon 200-400mm VR lens handheld. 1/800sec manual f5.6 ISO 320

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The Harrier

March 2013 Magazine No. 172

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

Guest Editorial

SOG - forty years on

This year SOG will be celebrating its Ruby Jubilee and it is amazing just how far the Group has progressed since its founding in 1973. SOG was originally split into two branches – the East Branch based in Ipswich and the West Branch based in Bury St Edmunds. Each branch had its own set of officials and more-or-less worked independently of one another. The Group initially published a bi-monthly bulletin, which featured bird-related articles, but included an extensive systematic list of birds that had been collated from members' records. Members from both branches received the bulletin that formed the link between them.

SOG complements SNS

The upsurge in the popularity of birdwatching began in the late-1960s and Suffolk birdwatchers sought up-to-date bird news, an outlet to publish their work, regular local meetings featuring bird lectures, a variety of field events and, most of all, a sense of identity. The newly formed SOG wrote its constitution in a way to ensure that it complemented the work of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society (SNS), which had been in existence since 1929. The SNS had its own bird section and was responsible for the assessment of bird records and then publishing them in an annual report. The Suffolk Bird Report was then the only outlet for local birdwatchers to publish their work and was published annually as a section of SNS *Transactions*. The bird section was bound separately from 1950 to 1959, the forerunner to the modern-day *Suffolk Birds*, but local ornithologists had to wait until 1979 before it was handled by SOG, initially under the editorship of Derek Moore.

SOG's role to gather records

The SOG constitution spelt out the need for its members to gather records and forward these to the County Recorder, a position that would remain under the auspices of SNS. SOG had its own branch Recorders, and the Group's systematic lists were forwarded for inclusion in the annual Bird Report. To begin with, SOG initially received cursory recognition for its work, being included on a list that thanked our Editor for kindly passing on relevant records and correspondence. The branch recorders were one of the first positions to be merged and Bob Warren took over as Recorder for the whole Group. Bob spent hours meticulously logging the records and he was soon recruited to become County Recorder, a move that created further unity between SNS and SOG. Nowadays, a joint membership is available at a reduced subscription rate, where members receive four issues of *The Harrier* and *Suffolk Birds*, as well as SNS publications, a real bargain! In the last year, SNS has been a significant funder for much-needed equipment and materials to help the Group with its activities.

Having no previous involvement with any local natural history organisations, my personal introduction to SOG came just before Christmas in 1976. I was fishing for flounders along the Orwell, just about where the Orwell Bridge crosses the river today, when a Great Northern Diver swam past. I was thrilled with my sighting and was wondering who I should tell when a young man, sporting a pair of binoculars, walked past wheeling his bicycle. It was Philip Murphy. I told him of my find, but was soon deflated when he said, "it's still here then". Philip told me about SOG, which I joined later that day and was soon recruited to the Editorial team whose main role was to check the systematic list prior to it going to print. The team then met in West Suffolk and we spent many an evening at Roger and Pam Walton's house discussing records; rarely did we get home before midnight. Putting the bulletin together was a monumental task. Each issue was typed onto a stencil, run off using an old Gestetner printer, and then the printed foolscap pages stapled together. Eventually, it was realised that six issues a year was too much, so a re-vamped quarterly bulletin, now A4 and stapled in the middle, was introduced in the 1980s. So *The Harrier* was born, a change that coincided with the merging of the two branch Committees.

SOG publications and books

The Group has organised many species-specific bird surveys such as those for the Rook, Cuckoo, Ringed Plover and Tufted Duck, and administered two county raptor surveys. Our publications include: *The Rook in Suffolk* by Mike Jeans and Reg Snook (1976), *Birds of Prey in Suffolk 1973-1978* by Alan Paine (1980) and *Survey of breeding raptors and owls in Suffolk 1995-1998*

by Mick Wright (2001). There have been two editions of *Easy Birdwatching* – a book designed to help those less mobile to find easy access to birdwatching sites in Suffolk. Nowadays, local survey work focuses on studies instigated by the BTO and the pages of *The Harrier* are used to promote work on national surveys locally. Mick Wright has been both SOG Project Officer and BTO Representative for over 25 years, a remarkable contribution to Suffolk ornithology.

SOG helps to found LBO

The Group was instrumental in the founding of Landguard Bird Observatory (LBO) in 1982, when it also became more active in the field of nature conservation. It protested loudly about the loss of wildlife habitats, particularly on the Orwell Estuary, and its biggest battle was its fight to save the Fagbury mudflats and marshes. The Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company announced that they were seeking to expand the Port of Felixstowe westwards up the Orwell Estuary and as a Group we were to fight this tooth and nail. We assisted LBO in gathering vital information on the birds that frequented this part of the Estuary and sent a representative to the Enquiry in the House of Lords, which was myself (after enrolling as a Parliamentary Agent). We may have lost this battle, but Trimley Marshes Nature Reserve and Levington Lagoon are testimonies to our efforts to look after wildlife on the Orwell.

Your Council will be looking at ways to celebrate our Ruby Jubilee with a series of events, so watch these pages and those on our website for further announcements.

Steve Piotrowski, Honorary President



Andrew Easton

The return of the Peregrine to Lowestoft

A pair of Peregrines is recorded as having bred regularly in the tower of Corton Church in the early 1800s, although exact dates are unknown. But each year a local falconer, John Dawson Downes from Gunton, took the young reared by them. So, with an effective productivity of zero, it was no great surprise that the species didn't become established in the area at that time.



Corton Church - the original Suffolk Peregrine nest site

As all SOG members know, it was not until 2008 that Peregrines bred successfully again in Suffolk, on the Orwell Bridge on the outskirts of Ipswich, their initial attempt in 2007 having failed.

2009

The story of the return of the Peregrine as a breeding bird to the Lowestoft area began on December 19th 2009 when, at dusk, one was noted flying south westward over Toning Street in central Lowestoft.

2010

In January 2010 it became clear that a first winter bird had taken up residence in the town, primarily frequenting the Commercial Road grain silo and a rig module then under construction in the SLP yard in Lowestoft harbour. It also used the old container crane along the North Quay (until it was dismantled). Once the rig module left SLP, the grain silo became its main residence. There was no doubt that this was the bird seen hunting over Corton Wood and the adjacent beach area on January 8th, where the local Sparrowhawks sallied out of the wood to mob it.

1st winter Peregrine - Lowestoft - January 2010



Without another Peregrine to compare it with, size was difficult to judge, so there was debate over whether it was male or female.

In anticipation of the bird staying and eventually attracting a mate, permission was sought from the grain silo owners (then Plasmor, now Dudman Group) to place a nest box on the silo. Permission being granted, a collection was made amongst our birding group and a wooden nest-box was built and placed on the top of the silo on February 18th.

Having read that Peregrines can breed from two year's old, we realised that 2011 would be the very earliest we could hope for a breeding attempt to be made by this bird, should a mate turn up; and so the long wait began. The Peregrine remained around the harbour and Lake Lothing area of central Lowestoft throughout the whole of 2010 and into 2011, and sightings at Carlton Marshes and Oulton Broad throughout this period were no doubt also of this individual.

2011

Hopes were raised when two were seen together around the grain silo in February 2011, only to be dashed when they proved to be the same sex (judged by being identical in size and build); but at least another Peregrine had found the area suitable, which was very encouraging. This second bird, a first winter/summer, was still around in April 2011, though it was not seen after this.

Herring Gulls - Lowestoft - summer 2011 Squatters in the 'des res' penthouse suite



The nest-box did get its first use in 2011, albeit not by its intended occupants. A pair of Herring Gulls started showing a lot of interest in this 'des res' penthouse and went on to successfully raise one youngster there. Their chick was colour-ringed and has been seen subsequently at Mutford in August 2011, at Wangford landfill site in November 2011 and at Leathes Ham in December 2012.

2012

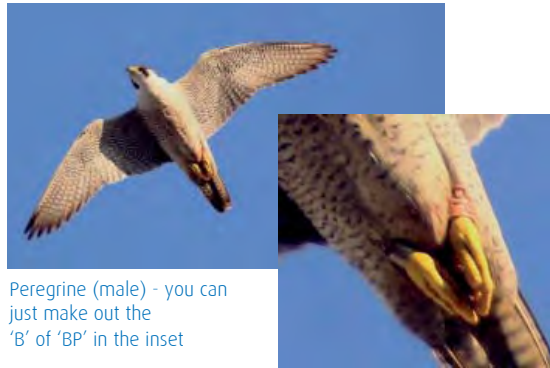
The year started with just the one Peregrine, now apparently resident, and coming up to the age of three, a more typical age of first breeding. All we needed now was a mate to arrive.

On March 17th it was joined at the grain silo by a second bird, however this proved to be not only a first summer bird, but again the same sex. The following day an adult Peregrine was spotted on the radio mast of Lowestoft Police station and this appeared to be smaller than the other two birds. Had a mate finally arrived?

On March 24th this smaller bird, clearly an adult male, was seen at the grain silo with the resident adult, now demonstrably a female, and accompanied by a first summer female. The male was seen to be colour-ringed, but it would take until April 12th before the bird sat in a location enabling the ring to be successfully read. Then we discovered he had been ringed 'BP' as a chick on the Orwell Bridge, Ipswich in May 2010.



Peregrine (male) - Lowestoft - summer 2012
His orange plastic ring coded BP, partially visible here in this digiscoped shot



Peregrine (male) - you can just make out the 'B' of 'BP' in the inset

We finally had a pair of Peregrines of breeding age (only just in the case of the male), but it was now nearly April and most of the Peregrines in southern Britain already had clutches of eggs. Was it too late for a breeding attempt in 2012?



'BP' on the Orwell Bridge nest in 2010



Peregrine (female) - Lowestoft - summer 2012
The female is un-ringed so her origin is unknown

Luckily in early April the couple were soon seen displaying and mating and, from their behaviour, by the end of April it was clear the female was sitting on an unknown number of eggs. Another wait began.

First breeding attempts have a high failure rate due to inexperience, and late broods also fare poorly as well; as this attempt met both criteria we didn't have great expectations of success.

However the pair proved us wrong and, on the late May Bank Holiday weekend, from their behaviour it became clear that an egg had hatched and they were feeding a chick. A visit by a suitably licensed ringer was arranged for early June to check on progress and ring any young. The visit proved that they had indeed hatched a chick, but there was no sign of any other eggs. Perhaps being a first breeding attempt by young birds and, compounded by a late start, the female may have only laid one egg this time?

[Peregrines chick - Lowestoft - summer 2012](#)
The first Peregrine chick hatched in the Lowestoft area for c.200 years. It appears that one of its meals was probably a Redshank judging by the leg to the left and in front of it



Unfortunately by mid-June their behaviour changed again and they were no longer visiting the nest box regularly, nor taking food in at all. A subsequent visit to the box revealed it was empty, with not even the expected dead chick there.

Without a webcam we can never be sure of its fate, but at least one Herring Gull was regularly present nearby, and had been seen on the roof of the box and walking along the edge of the roof past its front. Once both adults were out hunting perhaps a lone small chick proved too tempting a target? This behaviour change also followed the westerly gales, with the cold and torrential rains of June; and, although westerly facing, the raised lip at the front of the box should hopefully have prevented it falling, or even being blown out of the box whilst at that early stage.

2013?

Both adults were still present at the end of July 2012, and a colour-ringed female (possibly from Cornwall) was also present for at least one day in late September. The original female at least was still around in December 2012. The latest news is that from February 26th two birds, apparently a pair, have been seen together around the grain silo again. Finally on the evening of March 7th both birds were again together, calling frequently, and then the following morning, before the male left to hunt, a 'handy' stretch of its leg proved it was indeed 'BP'.

But nothing is ever totally straightforward. A pair of Herring Gulls is also still showing interest in the 'Peregrine' box - on the first weekend in March both were sitting on the roof and its front sill, so once again this year there is competition for the box.

Nevertheless, we remain hopeful that in 2013 this pair may succeed in fledging the first Peregrines in the Lowestoft area for 200 years. We'll keep you posted!

Editor: This is the first of a two-part history of birdwatching in the county. In part 2 Steve will consider the impact of various technologies over the last twenty years and speculate on its likely impact on birdwatching in the future.

Steve Piotrowski

The history of birdwatching and its relevance to Suffolk

Introduction

Some of Suffolk's place names reveal our forebears' early connections to birds, but for the most part their interest was of a utilitarian nature (mainly food) rather than any general fascination with ornithology. Observing birds for their aesthetic value can be traced to the late-18th Century, especially through the works of Gilbert White, Thomas Bewick, George Montagu and John Clare.



However, locally there is little written work about birds and authors from this period and researchers of the time gleaned information from general ornithologies and references from journals and books whose subjects ranged from country sports to travel, zoology and even cookery. Norwich-based ornithologist Sir Thomas Browne's reference

to Spoonbills nesting upon the tops of high trees at Trimley, in about 1668, belies an early interest. Parish accounts also yield clues to the status of the county's avifauna, especially for species classified as vermin, when bounties were placed on their heads.



An early 'birdwatcher'?

The first ornithological account, based specifically on Norfolk and Suffolk, was written by Rev. Revett Sheppard and Rev. William Whitear in 1824-25. Unfortunately, Whitear did not live to see the publication of his work as he was accidentally shot whilst tracking poachers in 1826. A total of 217 species was listed and the work basically consisted of birds killed in the two counties. Although the study of birds and natural history became fashionable in Britain during the Victorian era, it was mainly collection-oriented with eggs and, later, skins being the artefacts of interest. Suffolk had some of the most obsessive collectors. A number of authors, such as T. M. Spalding (1846) and Tuck (1891), included bird lists in their writings.

One of the most fascinating accounts of the carnage meted out to the local bird life was provided by

Rev. Julian George Tuck, President of the SNS and author of the 'Ornithology of Suffolk' (1891)



Nicholas Fenwick Hele in his *Notes or Jottings about Aldeburgh, Suffolk* (1870 and 1890). Rev. Dr Churchill Babington (1884-1886) catalogued specimens of birds that had been killed in Suffolk and gave a brief summary of the distribution and status of each species that had been recorded.

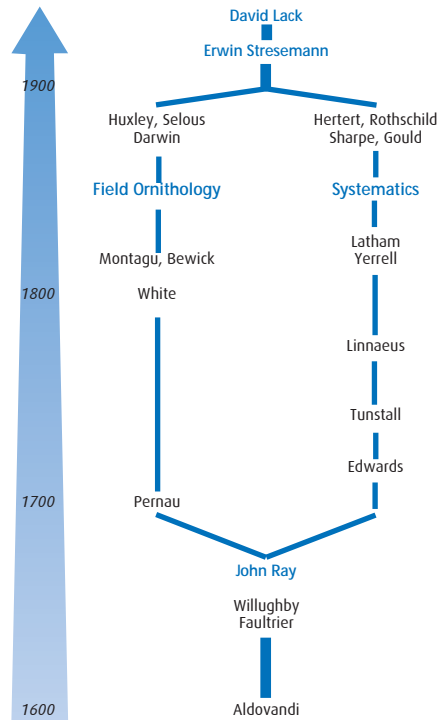
God, science and bird protection

John Ray (1627-1705) has been referred to as the father of English natural history and was responsible for the classification of species. He rejected preconceived ideas on the division of species, which had previously been based on similarity, function, habits and habitat. Instead he based his classification on form and divided the birds into land and water species, further dividing them according to the shape of bill and feet. However, he had to compete with folklore, superstitions and - most importantly - needed to ensure that he didn't upset the Church. After all, it was during his lifetime that Galileo was imprisoned after falling out with the Jesuits by daring to suggest that the Earth didn't stay still, but orbited the sun and not the other way round! This was contrary to what was written in the Old Testament. In the mid-1600s it was still widely believed that a single Magpie meant sorrow and to hear the call of the Raven or see a Barn Owl at your window would result in death. Ray spent most of his life in Black Notley in Essex, but also had a Suffolk connection as "a few" of his moths were collected at Heveningham (Morley 1937).

Something of a battle between scientists and birdwatchers started in the late 17th Century and continued up to the early 20th. Birkhead (2008) covers this on p.44 of his 'The Wisdom of Birds' with a perfect diagram and text towards the end of the book's first chapter:(see right).

In summary, between 1700 and 1900, ornithologists were divided into two groups. One group were the "systematics" who were considered to be the true ornithologists - the professionals and the scientists whose interests lay with taxonomy and classification. The other group were the "field ornithologists" who studied behaviour and the ecology of birds. The latter group were considered by the "systematics" to be dilettantes and amateurs, with their roots in physic-theology rendering their work worthless!

Many field ornithologists of that day were clergymen and teachers. The divide began after Ray and the diagram in 'The Wisdom of Birds' shows which side of the line the interests of our most eminent ornithologists lay. A German ornithologist named Erwin Stresemann is credited in bringing the two strands of bird study back together in the 1920s. Birkhead (2008) said that Stresemann "revolutionised ornithology, making it scientifically respectable and part of mainstream zoology".



It was only in the late 19th Century that the call for bird protection began to lead to the rising popularity of observations of living birds. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was formed to protect birds from the growing demand for feathers for fashion and especially the millinery trade.

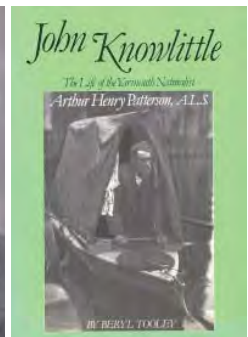
The term “birdwatching” appeared for the first time as the title of a book “Bird Watching” by Edmund Selous in 1901. Selous (1857-1934) was a British ornithologist and writer. He was the younger brother of big-game hunter Frederick Selous. He practised as a barrister only briefly before retiring to pursue the study of natural history and literature. He married in 1886 and moved to Wiesbaden, Germany with his family in 1888 and then to Mildenhall in 1889. Selous started as a conventional naturalist, but developed a hatred of the killing of animals for scientific purposes and pioneered birdwatching as an alternative method of study. He became a strong proponent of non-destructive bird study as opposed to the collection of skins and eggs. In his book, he said:

“For myself, I must confess that I once belonged to this great, poor army of killers, though happily, a bad shot, a most fatigable collector, and a poor half-hearted bungler, generally. But now that I have watched birds closely, the killing of them seems to me as something monstrous and horrible; and, for every one that I have shot, or even only shot at and missed, I hate myself with an increasing hatred. I am convinced that this most excellent result might be arrived at by numbers and numbers of others, if they would only begin to do the same; for the pleasure that belongs to observation and inference is, really, far greater than that which attends any kind of skill or dexterity, even when death and pain add their zest to the latter. Let anyone who has an eye and a brain (but especially the latter), lay down the gun and take up the glasses for a week, a day, even for an hour, if he is lucky, and he will never wish to change back again. He will soon come to regard the killing of birds as not only brutal, but dreadfully silly, and his gun and cartridges, once so dear, will be to him, hereafter, as the toys of childhood are to the grown man.” How poignant is this statement!

The rising popularity of the car increased the mobility of birdwatchers and this made new locations accessible to those seeking out birds that were not to be found in their local areas. Networks of birdwatchers in the UK began to form in the late 1930s under the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The BTO saw the potential to produce scientific results through the networks, unlike RSPB, which, in common with the Audubon Society in America, stemmed

from the bird protection movement. The British Ornithologists’ Union (BOU) had a focus mainly in collection-based taxonomy and changed its focus to ecology and behaviour only in the 1940s. The BTO movement towards ‘organized birdwatching’, was not favoured by the RSPB, which claimed that ‘scientification’ of the pastime was ‘undesirable’. However, this stand changed in 1936 when Tom Harrison and others took over at the helm of RSPB. Harrison (1931) had been instrumental in the organization of pioneering studies such as those of the Great Crested Grebe.

Increased mobility of birdwatchers ensured that books such as those in the *Where to watch birds* series became best sellers. Initially, birdwatching was a hobby largely confined to developed countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Since the second half of the 20th Century, an increasing number of people in developing countries have engaged in this activity. Trans-national birding has played an important role in this, as citizens from developing countries who birdwatch have often developed this interest from being influenced by foreign ornithologists on birding visits. Most modern-day birdwatchers make regular trips abroad in search of birds.



Patterson and his Breydon houseboat

Field guides and optical aids

The identification of birds, once thought impossible without a specimen, became easier with the emergence of optics and field identification guides. Early authors gave few clues as to the optics they used to help them identify the birds in their districts.

Arthur Patterson (1857-1939) kept detailed notes about the flora and fauna of the Great Yarmouth region and used to write in the Eastern Daily Press under the pseudonym John Knowlittle. He had a houseboat moored on Breydon Water where he befriended the old "Breydoners" such as the wildfowlers, poachers and eel catchers of the late 19th Century. His great granddaughter, Beryl Tooley, describes his life beautifully in her biography "John Knowlittle" (1985) in which a photograph, dated 1887, shows Arthur clutching a pair of binoculars. The author describes how her great grandfather bought a new pair of Zeiss binoculars in 1905. The Porro prism binoculars design was invented by the Italian optician Ignazio Porro and consists of a double prism Z-shaped configuration to show a proper image of the subject. Porro patented this technology in 1854 and his design was enhanced by Carl Zeiss in the 1890s. The first high-quality modern binoculars were sold in 1894, a product of the optical design of Ernst Abbe and the production techniques of Carl Zeiss. These antiques gave very sharp views and are still one of the most attractive binoculars ever made.



It is interesting that Patterson was eager to obtain a pair of these early binoculars and it is quite conceivable that he was East Anglia's first 'real' birdwatcher. Patterson used his houseboat as a hide and there were rumours of a large telescope mounted in one corner. However, there is no mention of this in Tooley's book. Patterson's binoculars could be the first reference to optics being used to aid bird identification. Further references came in a book published in the USA entitled: *Birds through an Opera Glass* (1889) by Florence Bailey - this was also the earliest field guide.

Recording, Local Clubs, Societies, Bird Reserves and an Observatory

Interest in migration increased rapidly during the late 19th Century and, in 1909, ringing schemes were introduced. The founding of the Suffolk Naturalists Society (SNS) in 1929 was a milestone in the study of natural history in the county and it gave local ornithologists an outlet to publish their sightings. The society encourages and organises biological recording within the county and publishes papers, notes and observations in its annual Transactions.

In 1937 the one surviving ringing scheme was taken over by the BTO. The Ringing Office, originally housed at the Natural History Museum in London, moved to Tring in 1965 and thence to Thetford in 1991.

Many of Suffolk's eminent naturalists of the early 20th Century were based in north-east Suffolk and the Lowestoft Field Club (LFC) was founded in 1946. The Dingle Bird Club followed in 1953 and was the first group in Suffolk to concentrate specifically on bird migration, with studies that have continued to this day. The Suffolk Ornithologists Group (SOG) was founded in 1973 with the aim of promoting general interest in the active conservation of Suffolk's wild birds, to carry out field studies and to record and publish observations. This was soon followed by the creation of the Suffolk Biological Records Centre in 1974 to specifically collate and store records for biological and geological groups concerning Suffolk.

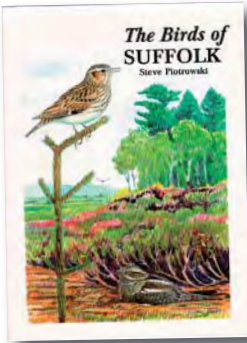


Landguard Observatory

Following years of planning, Landguard Bird Observatory was founded in November 1982, with its headquarters in the wartime fortifications at Landguard Point, Felixstowe. Since its formation, the observatory has been manned daily by an experienced warden and ringer, often backed up by a ringing team, throughout migration periods.

Local reports and county avifaunas

Dr Claud B. Ticehurst wrote the county's first definitive avifauna in 1932. Thirty years passed before an update was written by W. H. Payn, which was revised in 1978, and Suffolk's latest avifauna was published in 2003 (Piotrowski 2003).



The first volume of the *Transactions* of the SNS featured a paper on Suffolk shorebirds and highlighted one of the great menaces of the 20th Century - oil pollution. The SNS continued to publish its *Transactions* throughout the Second

World War, although notes and observations were limited due to access to the coast, in particular, being very much restricted. The LFC's first annual report covered the period from February 1946 to January 1947 and included a comprehensive systematic list of birds seen in the Lowestoft area.

The SNS published the first countywide Bird Report as a section of the *Transactions* in 1950. There were 84 contributors to this first edition, but obviously the novelty value diminished as the number decreased to 53 the following year.

During the early years of the *Suffolk Bird Report*, there was great emphasis on recording and ornithologists were encouraged to estimate the numbers of birds at the sites that were visited. Counts on estuaries were not co-ordinated and were largely carried out on an ad hoc basis and the optical aids were inadequate for the task. In consequence, many sites relied heavily on the skill of the observer in identifying birds and it is obvious from the consistent round-figure totals that large gatherings were often the observer's

'best guess'. Seabird sightings were extremely rare.

The SOG initially published papers, field notes and sightings in a bi-monthly bulletin and, as standards in the quality of production improved, the journal moved to quarterly, being published as *The Harrier*, which today is considered to be one of the best regional newsletters in Britain.

As a result of the continuing upsurge in interest, and the demand by birding members of the SNS, the annual Bird Report was again issued as a separate publication, but now separate from the *Transactions*.

Vignettes, drawn by accomplished Suffolk artists, were introduced and became a feature of the reports but, otherwise, there were few major changes in format during these embryonic years. Standards improved rapidly throughout the 1980s and colour photographs were added for the first time in 1985. About 437 observers forwarded bird records for publication in 2010¹, which is more than eight times the number who did so in the early 1950s.



Acknowledgements:

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¹ In 2011, while this total was down to 325, it was still considerably more than the 1950s.

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Editor's note:

To be continued in the next Harrier #173.

Philip Murphy

Looking back – January to March 1963 and 1988

Selected highlights from the 1963 and 1988 Suffolk Bird reports for the period January to March.

50 years ago

In the introduction to the 1963 report, the editors provided an excellent summary of the effects on Suffolk's birdlife of the infamous 1962/63 winter,

- probably the most
severe winter ever -

probably the most severe in Britain for at least 200 years. We read:

".....At one time it seemed likely that some of our less-hardy birds would be almost wiped out, as had happened in the past under similar climatic conditions. Happily this did not prove to be the case; while most species suffered to a greater or lesser extent, such normally tender birds as long-tailed tits, treecreepers, stonechats and bearded tits survived in encouraging numbers, showing perhaps no worse than a fifty per cent drop"

"Heaviest mortality was among redwings, thrushes, water-rails, woodcock, green woodpeckers, wrens, goldcrests and kingfishers, the last three species being particularly hard hit."

"During most of the year wrens were extremely scarce throughout West and central Suffolk and in many coastal localities also. At Aldeburgh, for instance, where nine wrens roosting together in one nest in January were found frozen to death, the species was thought to have been almost wiped out. Kingfishers and goldcrests suffered still more severely....."

"On the coast, dunlins and redshanks, knots and sanderlings were found dead or dying along the tideline, while coots and moorhens, dabchicks and herons also suffered heavy casualties. With all of the dykes and broads frozen over, ducks and grebes were concentrated in sheltered tidal channels and estuaries and many parts of the coast were devoid of fowl for weeks..."

"The first birds to succumb were, as always, the redwings which in many cases seemed too benumbed to take advantage of food provided for them. The fact that blackbirds, fieldfares, hedge sparrows and bullfinches, still in well-nourished condition, were also found dead, confirms the belief that the intense cold rather than the lack of food was responsible for much of the mortality."

"However, many species, particularly the Turdidae, must owe their survival to the abundance of berries and apples still hanging in hedges and orchards when the cold weather

set in. At Hartest the unpicked crop on one large apple-tree sustained for about ten days a mixed flock consisting of forty-six fieldfares, fifty-five blackbirds, seventeen redwings, two song thrushes, two missel (sic) thrushes, eight chaffinches and a willow tit..."

"At Minsmere the warden saved the lives of a number of bitterns, water-rails and swans by bringing them indoors and releasing them again with the advent of the thaw in March. This thaw probably came only just in time to save many birds, notably the Bearded Tits, which were probably about at the end of their tether"

Included within the main body of the report are more intriguing accounts from Minsmere of the effects of the severe weather on the reserve's birds. A weak Whooper Swan caught on 2nd February and kept in captivity until being released on 6th March, ate a large loaf of bread daily, while at least 19 Bewick's Swans perished on the reserve during the severe cold. A Water Rail, kept alive by the Minsmere wardens, fed on dead sparrows while others on the reserve fed on dead coypus. Elsewhere, at Boxted, a Water Rail fed for several days on a dead Rabbit in a ditch.

Whooper Swan



Havergate hosted 5000 Wigeon on 6th January but these soon departed. "Thousands" of Wigeon were feeding on stubbles at Iken in early February. Scaup totals were impressive in February with up to 300 on the Orwell at Freston, 50 at Walberswick and 40 on Havergate. The highest total of Tufted Ducks was 180 in Ipswich Docks. Totals of Smew peaked at six in Ipswich Docks, 31st January to 10th February and five inland at West Stow, 30th January.



Smew

A Quail, attempting to overwinter at Lakenheath was, perhaps not surprisingly, not seen after January.

Passerine highlights during the severe weather involved up to 19 Shore Larks in the Blythburgh area, up to 20 Hooded Crows at Benacre and Brambling flocks at Minsmere and Havergate totalling 250 and 150 respectively.

The long-awaited thaw set in on 5th March. During the first few days of March, Lapwings, which had been entirely absent from the county for more than two months, began to return. The first summer migrant to be noted was an early Sandwich Tern at Havergate, 14th March, and by the end of March there had been sightings of Garganey, Stone Curlew, White Wagtail, Wheatear, Black Redstart and Chiffchaff, so concluding one of the most dramatic three-month periods ever recorded in Suffolk ornithology.

25 years ago

In complete contrast with 1963, the first three months of 1988 were generally wet and very mild. The most notable ornithological response to this mildness was Suffolk's first (and to date, only) record of a Swallow in January²; what must surely have been the same bird was noted at Bromeswell, 22nd January and nearby at Melton, 26th January. There were very early breeding records of Collared Doves, Blackbirds, Robins and Great Tits, but the most eye-catching report was of a pair of Coal Tits feeding young at their nest in a Rabbit burrow on Upper Hollesley Common, 31st March – the date is more remarkable than the nesting site given that Coal Tit eggs are not usually laid until late April.

A spell of cold northerly winds in March resulted in an influx of Shags peaking at 18, Lowestoft, 11th and ten, Alton Water, 10th. Also on the latter date, a Shag ringed on the Isle of May was found exhausted in a garden at Stradbroke and another was taken to Minsmere after being rescued from a huge vat of vegetable oil at a factory in Diss, Norfolk – it was released apparently in good condition. Also in early March, seawatchers recorded northerly movements of Gannets off the Covehithe/Southwold stretch of our coast totalling 273 on 3rd and 324 on 6th – the latter figure was, at the time, a record Suffolk total. A Pomarine Skua off Southwold, 3rd January was the first county winter record for five years.



Pomarine Skua

Rarer species involved a pair of American Wigeon at Minsmere, 27th and 28th January (second Suffolk record), single Grey Phalaropes at Ness Point, Lowestoft, 31st January and south off Felixstowe, 13th February and a very popular Black-bellied

Dipper on the River Box at Thorington Street, Stoke-by-Nayland, 21st to 26th February. The total of 44 Purple Sandpipers at the traditional Ness Point locality, 15th and 20th March remains as Suffolk's largest recorded gathering of this species.



Twite

Flocks of wintering passerines were well in evidence. Up to 350 Tree Sparrows were at Long Melford in January and February while Twite totals peaked at 75 at Bawdsey in February and 70 at Levington in January. Finch totals at West Stow in January included 300 Redpolls and 100 Siskins. Buntings were attracted particularly to Sudbourne Marshes where there were peaks of 240 Snow Buntings, 100 Yellowhammers, 100 Corn Buntings and 25 Lapland Buntings.

A Goldcrest at Landguard, 28th February was the first site record for that month. First arrival dates in March included three Whimbrel, Landguard, 27th; Sandwich Terns at both Minsmere and Havergate, 20th; Sand Martin, Haverhill, 15th; White Wagtail, Lowestoft, 11th; Wheatear, Haverhill, 15th; Ring Ouzel, Landguard, 30th and Willow Warbler, Woodbridge, 20th.

A Nuthatch watched foraging on the roof and gargoyles of Stutton Church, 21st February was one of the more unexpected sightings of this period.

² Given the mild winter, one alternative explanation is that it might somehow have been a rare surviving over-wintering bird

BINS Winter

December 2012

The very confiding Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll, that was discovered on the beach at Aldeburgh on 8th remained in the area up until the 19th and delighted many hundreds of birders during its prolonged stay.



Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll -
2012 Bird of the Year

A Great White Egret that was initially seen from Lemons Hill Bridge Alton Water on the 8th stayed right up to Christmas Eve and, at times, showed really well as it fed with the much smaller Little Egrets present. Nearby on The Strand, Wherstead Long-tailed Duck, Great Northern Diver and Velvet Scoter could all be seen on the 16th.

Two putative Taiga Bean Geese were present on North Marsh North Warren from the 16th until 31st at least. Waxwing numbers peaked at 155 at Chiltern Industrial estate, Sudbury on Christmas Day and then 110 were noted along the A12 Saxmundham bypass from the 27th.

January 2013

A 1st winter Red-breasted Goose was found on North Warren during late 2012 having previously

spent a couple of days on Hollesley Marsh amongst a small flock of Eurasian White-fronted Geese, surprisingly a second 1st winter Red-breasted Goose was then found on North Warren on the 4th and remained throughout the month along with the four regular feral adult birds, we will probably never know the true origins of these young individuals, but it has certainly caused a lot of conversation.



Red-breasted Goose

Up to six Tundra Bean Geese ranged between Westleton and Minsmere RSPB throughout the month, also at Minsmere RSPB a drake Green-winged Teal was reported briefly on the 5th and there was a sighting of a Willow Warbler there on the 6th.



Red-necked Grebe at Slaughden on 26th January

A Great White Egret was reported over Thurston 13th. A very confiding Red-necked Grebe was seen on the Alde estuary at Aldeburgh Marshes 25-26th. A juvenile Glaucous Gull was seen close offshore at Aldeburgh on the 6th and another showed up intermittently at Oulton Broad and Benacre Broad throughout the month and into February.



A juvenile Great Northern Diver that was first seen in Hamilton Dock on 29th Dec remained at Lowestoft all month. Alton Water produced both Great Northern Diver and a Slavonian Grebe on several days, though wildfowl numbers appeared to be well down on previous years. Both the Orwell and Stour Estuaries were productive throughout the period with Great Northern Diver, Long-tailed Duck and Velvet Scoter being seen between The Strand and Woolverstone and up to eight Slavonian Grebes in Holbrook Bay, plus Velvet Scoter and Long-tailed Duck off Stutton Mill.

An adult Black Brant was picked out amongst 600 Dark-bellied Brent Geese at Shotley Marsh on the 3rd and then seen on occasions throughout the month on the river at both Collimer Point and Coulton Creek; further Black Brants were also seen at Gedgrave Marsh and on the saltings at Felixstowe Ferry on the Deben.

A probable Little Bunting was seen all to briefly at Eastbridge on the 19th, however those looking for the bird then discovered an adult Lesser-White-fronted Goose amongst mixed Greylag/Tundra Bean Geese which soon departed, only for it to re-appear on North Marsh Southwold on 27th.

Three Lapland Bunting were seen to fly over East Lane, Bawdsey on the 8th and carried on inland. Up to five Short-eared Owls were seen at Puttocks Hill, Pakefield. A Black-bellied Dipper was seen on the border with Norfolk on the river Little Ouse at Thetford and proved very popular especially as it was so photogenic (Editor: The same bird was still present and seen by SOG/'NOG' on 17th February Brecks trip, see page 29).



Thetford's first Black-bellied Dipper - it was joined by a second in mid-March

February 2013

After 54 days, the juvenile Great Northern Diver decided to move on from Hamilton Dock on the 24th, whilst nearby the peak count of Purple Sandpipers reached ten birds at Ness Point.



Purple Sandpiper

The six Tundra Bean Geese continued to commute between Westleton and Minsmere with seven birds being the peak on 22nd. There were several flocks of Waxwing around the county with the highest count being 70 in Bury St. Edmunds early month.

The viewing mound at Waveney Forest continued to prove popular with up to two Rough-legged Buzzards being regularly seen along with supporting cast of Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Peregrine and Great White Egret.

A juvenile Glaucous Gull was initially seen north offshore at Covehithe then on pig fields behind the Broad on the 2nd and then what was presumably the same bird seen briefly at Carlton Marshes on the 16th then in flight over Oulton Broad on the 20th. It or another juvenile Glaucous Gull was initially seen west over the dock complex at Felixstowe before being watched out to sea following the Qingdao Tower off Landguard on the 28th.

Twenty-two Pink-footed and four Tundra Bean Geese were seen on Town Marsh and Reydon Marsh, Southwold with the latter being seen on Benacre Broad 15-16th. A notable count of 40 Pink-footed Geese was observed at Gedgrave on the 5th and peak count of Eurasian White-fronts reached 305 at North Warren on the 10th.

The Long-tailed Duck continued to be seen from Stutton Mill, Stour Estuary throughout the month and up to ten Slavonian Grebes were seen nearby in Holbrook Bay on the 17th. The only Greater Scaup of the period concerned a young bird at Trimley Marsh SWT.

Hawfinch

A single Hawfinch put in several appearances throughout the month at Sotterley that proved quite popular as a once regular bird in numbers at this site. Up to three Tree Sparrows were seen frequenting feeders at East Lane, Bawdsey.



A Red-breasted Goose of unknown age was found on the 3rd amongst the Brent Geese flock on Sudbourne Marshes that also contained six Pale-bellied Brent Geese. Two Black Brants (adult and juvenile) were seen together at Felixstowe Ferry from the 18th with the juvenile bird being the first individual of this age to occur in the county. The adult Black Brant was also seen intermittently throughout the month on the Orwell.

A Great White Egret was seen on the Meare at Thorpeness on the 6th then spent the rest of the month commuting between here and nearby North Warren and what was thought to be a Great White Egret was seen over the A12 by the Seckford roundabout at dusk on the 15th.

Caspian Gulls were noted at Lackford (two x 1st winter and probable 4th winter) birds on the 6th and single adult birds seen at Minsmere throughout the month. Jack Snipe were seen at Trimley retreat (two birds) and Levington Lagoon both on the 9th.

Great Northern Divers were seen off both Dunwich 9th and Slaughden 13th. Smew numbers at Minsmere peaked mid-month with ten birds (two drakes) being present around the reserve. Single Pomarine Skua sightings were noted off Minsmere on the 13th and then over the scrape for four days until the 20th, whilst another 'Pom' was seen offshore from Landguard on the same date and yet another bird was seen north offshore on the 24th and what was presumably the same bird sat in the river mouth on the 26th. An unseasonal Balearic Shearwater was seen offshore at Landguard on the 6th where up to 6000 Gulls were seen feeding in the shipping channel some 4-5 miles offshore!



Snow Bunting

The only report of Snow Bunting was from East Lane, Bawdsey where up to nine birds were seen on the shingle beach just north of the lagoons. The only Shorelark sighting of the month came of a single bird on Havergate Island RSPB. A female Dartford Warbler was seen away from its usual haunts at Levington Creek throughout the month, though proved to be very elusive.

In the very west of the county, four Common Crane were present at Lakenheath Fen RSPB, this site also held at least three male Hen Harrier in the roost. Some 100 Brambling were seen at Livermere on the 2nd. A 1st winter Ring-billed Gull was reported in the gull roost on the evening of the 23rd but not seen thereafter.

A Great Grey Shrike was a noteworthy find inland at Wrentham on the 22nd and proved popular until 25th. A flock of 38 Twite were seen along the footpath 100 yards west of the Bailey bridge, Southwold towards the month's end.



Bewick's Swan

March 2013

Good numbers of Bewick's Swan were seen heading East back to the near Continent early month after spending the winter in the UK. Both the adult and 1st winter Black Brants remained on Ferry Marsh Felixstowe with the latter still present on the 5th at least.

Up to eight Hawfinches were seen within Sotterley Park on the 1st that proved popular with local birders, and allowed the opportunity for some to photograph this normally secretive species. Two Rough-legged Buzzards continued to be seen from the viewing mound within the Waveney Forest that also hosted two Short-eared Owls, Peregrine and Merlin!

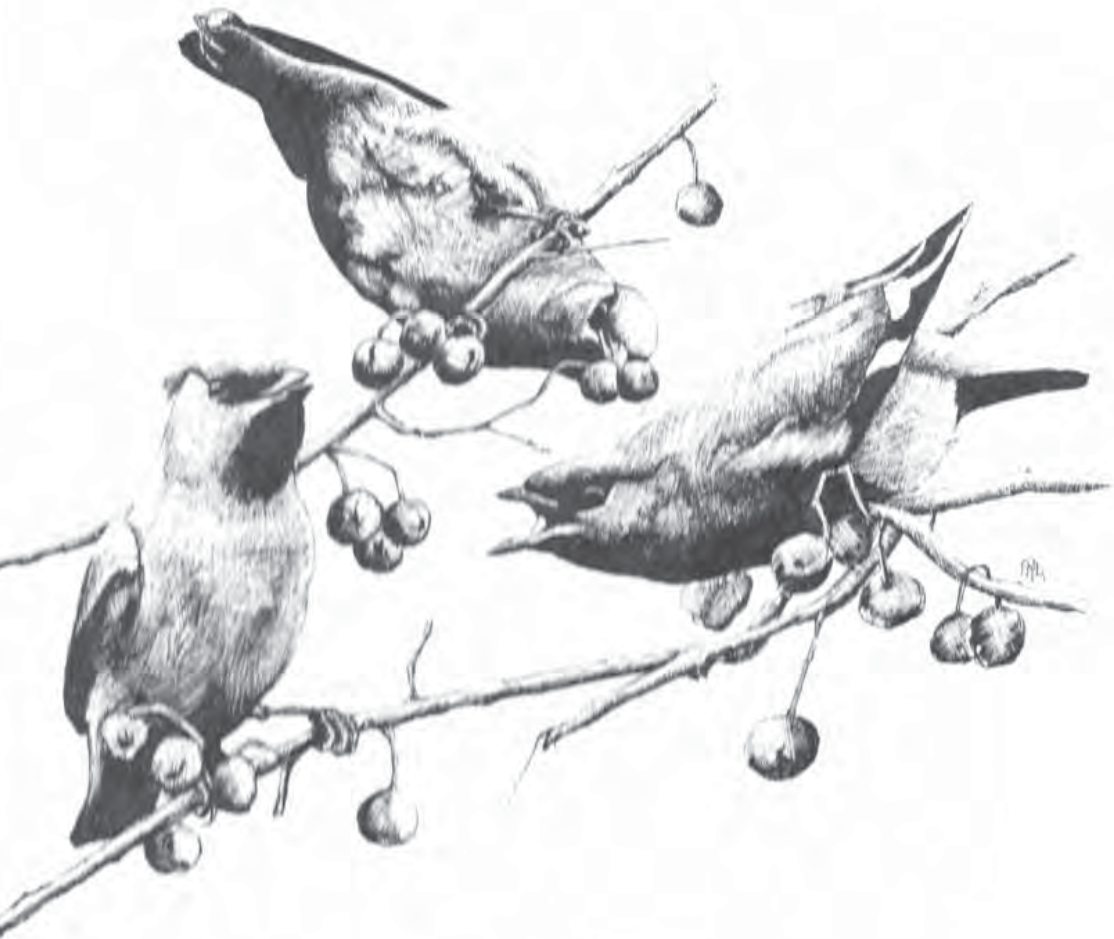
Tundra Bean Geese were noted with six birds on South Marsh North Warren, four birds remained on Reydon Marsh, Southwold and six were seen to fly over Westleton all on the 1st (with the latter birds presumably the North Warren individuals?). A Hooded Crow was seen at the pig fields near Covehithe Broad on the 5th.

A 2nd calendar year Caspian Gull was a noteworthy find away from the usual haunts at Felixstowe Ferry river mouth, with the same site hosting a Black-throated Diver up until the 2nd then seen to fly upriver.

Further Caspian Gulls (3rd and 4th winter) birds were noted on the levels at Minsmere on the 2nd, also noted on this day were eight Slavonian Grebes in Holbrook Bay, Stour Estuary and the long-staying Long-tailed Duck was still viewable from Stutton Ness.

The first Sand Martin of the year was reported at Lackford Lakes SWT on the 2nd with surely more to follow as the month progresses and, more importantly, if weather conditions are favourable!

After going missing for 5 days, the Wrentham Great Grey Shrike decided to put in another appearance along Guildhall Lane on the 3rd and showed well. The small flock of Twite continued to show by the Bailey bridge at Southwold. Three Snow Bunting were seen just south of Battery Cottage Shingle Street on the 3rd that also held up to three Water Pipits.



Waxwings were still being seen with up to 53 birds still present in Bury St. Edmunds and 20 birds behind Waitrose in Saxmundham. Finally, a Great White Egret was seen in flight over Kessingland levels on the 6th being mobbed by Herring Gulls then ditching into a reedbed adjacent to the A12!

A probable Rough-legged Buzzard was seen opposite the sugar beet factory in Bury St. Edmunds on the 8th and what was, presumably, the same individual was then 'firmed' up on the 13th as it flew north-west over the A14 at Barrow Bottom between Higham and Risby on the 13th.

The first reports of Sandwich Tern this year were received on the 10th with two birds being seen north off Orfordness and a single bird was

observed north off Ness Point. A male White Wagtail was also seen on the 10th near Trimley Marsh SWT, and a Sand Martin was seen the same day battling across the Stour Estuary in a northerly gale!

Small numbers of Waxwing continued to be seen, especially around Lowestoft and Ipswich, up until the 15th at least.

Finally, a Pomarine Skua was seen off Felixstowe on the 11th and nearby two Caspian Gulls (adult and 3rd winter) were seen on the point at Landguard at high tide on the 14th, also a Great Northern Diver was seen to fly north on the same afternoon.



'BirdTrack - log it or lose it' and 'my local patch' - an interactive BirdTrack tutorial, 21st March

This description of the talk in the SOG Event Programme was inevitably a bit cryptic. Strictly speaking it was a BirdTrack tutorial with a talk about a local patch's data trapped inside it. Why? Well, as many of you will have seen, from the middle of last year we've published a series of articles in the Harrier about the need to gather and communicate patch data.

- SOG's priority - gathering data for conservation -

As we all know, a good database of bird statistics is the foundation stone for bird conservation. So, as bird numbers continue to decline, for some species catastrophically, bird conservation is doubtless an objective everyone in SOG subscribes to.

The radically re-vamped BirdTrack programme is an excellent means of gathering such data. But the overall figures for those submitting records to the county recorders and BirdTrack was, at the last count, less than 200 Suffolk residents - which is unexpectedly low. While the comparable figure for Norfolk (omitting BTO staff) was more than double this. Obviously at SOG we'd like to encourage an improvement in these numbers.

This was one reason why we published that series of articles in the Harrier. The other was the fact that birdwatching is changing around us as various technologies make it easier to capture and present data. BirdTrack also allows birders to fully exploit the benefits of smartphone technology.

But just providing words about the new re-vamped BirdTrack was never likely to be enough to change behaviour - we felt something more would be needed. It was appreciated that it would make using BirdTrack very much easier for everyone if members were shown exactly how to exploit it. This was why the 21st March SOG meeting concentrated on BirdTrack and its value for presenting patch data.

Continued on page 35

[BirdTrack - an excellent data collection and presentation resource](#)

The screenshot shows the BirdTrack website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Home', 'About BirdTrack', 'Taking part', 'Maps & reports', 'Bird recording', and 'Surveys'. Below this is a 'Welcome John Marchant' section with a 'Log Out' button. The main content area features a map of the UK with red dots indicating bird sightings. A 'Map popup' is visible, showing 'Chiffchaff' with a 'Log' button. Below the map is a 'Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*' graph showing 'Reporting rate (this year)' and 'Reporting rate (historical)'. The graph shows a peak in March and another in September. To the right of the graph is a 'Great guide' section with a 'Reporting rate' table. The table shows the percentage of complete lists that contain each species, with a 'View all' link. Below the graph and table are sections for 'Top BirdTrackers', 'Species recorded this year', and 'BirdTrack photos'. At the bottom, there's a 'More BirdTrack' section with social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.



Lee Woods and Phil Brown

Suffolk's Bird of the Year, 2012...

Another county first

Once again BINS members have voted and delivered a clear winner for the 2012 Bird of the Year. The voting was almost unanimous:

- Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll - 82.5%
- Olive-backed Pipit - 3%
- Spanish Sparrow - 4.5%
- Long-billed Dowitcher - 3%
- American Golden Plover - 1.5%
- Black-winged Stilt - 1.5%
- Red-breasted Goose - 3%

Sensible tactic

The Hornemann's was another county first for Suffolk, but it might very well have been missed altogether had it not been for Colin Barley's sensible tactic of photographing birds he wasn't 100% sure of, and then emailing his evidence to an expert.

On the morning of Saturday 8 December, while scanning the bushes at the front just to the north of Aldeburgh, Colin thought he'd spotted a Lapland Bunting. Luckily, as he was a little uncertain, he managed with some difficulty to 'capture' the bird digitally and forward it later in the day to Lee Woods at BINS. This was extremely fortunate as Lee's quick scan of a 'Redpoll-like' bird (not a bunting) led him to conclude it was a likely hornemann and the BINS alert duly went out at around 21:00.

Confiding & long-staying

As the numerous photographs of this bird testify, this proved to be an extremely confiding bird. And reasonably long-staying too, as it was not only re-found on the 9th December, but actually remained about the town until the 19th December, to the obvious satisfaction of hundreds of birders across the country.

Well-done Colin, because this sensible tactic (which digital photography and mobile communications now permit) combined with BINS expertise, provided enormous pleasure for a great many of us. The Hornemann's was a worthy 2012 winner.



...and the runners up were:



Spanish Sparrow, in August found by Jack Levene
Long-billed Dowitcher, in May found by John Walshe



Olive-backed Pipit, in October found by James Brown
Red-breasted Goose, in February found by Will Brame



Meet Craig Fulcher

Biographical note:

Suffolk born and bred. Now aged 36, he reluctantly works in between his SORC duties, bouts of birdwatching and birding holidays several times a year around the world.

How long have you been birdwatching?

I first got involved with my father. When I was very young we used to fish together most weekends and, whilst you're sitting on a bank for hours on end, you can't help noticing what's going on around you. So, little by little, I became familiar with wildlife and was especially interested in birds. The Kingfisher was a special favourite of mine back then.

Time went by and, at around the age of nine, my father and I decided to take up birdwatching during the autumn and winter when fishing wasn't so attractive. It was then that we joined SNS and I went on many trips being led by Philip Murphy - then and now a SOG stalwart.

What's your earliest birding memory?

That would be observing the Great White Egret from the Tree Hide at Minsmere in 1986 - I think? It was a real rarity and the hide was chocker full.

So how did this interest then develop?

It was because of the bird trips that I got a really good taste for birdwatching. And twice a year, dare I mention it, SNS used to cross the border and visit Norfolk. By the time I was in my early teens, as I got more heavily into birding than dad, I used to beg for lifts all over the place.

In the early 90s I somehow found myself acting as an unofficial recorder for the Gipping Valley that gave me a real feel for bird data, plus an inkling of how vital it is as the basis for bird conservation. But, by the middle of that decade, all this came to an end as I become far more interested in all the usual teenage pursuits!

What happened next?

Well, I call this period my 'sabbatical' because, for the next ten years or so, I pursued other kinds of birds.



Understood, so how'd you get back into birding again?

Well I don't think you ever totally lose interest. I believe it was in 2003 when a work colleague mentioned there was a roost of Long-eared Owls at Lower Holbrook and would I like to see them? As they had been a favourite of mine I went up into my loft to retrieve my old bins and boots, dusted them down and accompanied him to the roost. I was immediately hooked again. Though fishing remained a draw, I realised birding was easier to slot into a day. Also I quickly found that it was as if I had been in hibernation, because I found all of my earlier studying paid off and my bird ID skills and call/song knowledge came back very quickly.

Then what?

Well it just got more serious. Now I work hard and bird hard too. I suppose I take between four or five birding holidays each year. And, as I'm a bit of a control freak, I like to do all the planning - I'm so thorough my fellow travellers have taken to referring to me as 'Fulcher Tours'.

So where have you been?

Excluding the UK trips, I've been to Israel, Morocco, Western Sahara, Egypt (twice), Turkey, Greece, Finland, Norway, Madeira, China and five times to the USA (California twice, Oregon, Texas and Florida).

That's a fair amount of globetrotting, so what about nearer to home, what's your favourite UK site?

It has to be Southwold in Suffolk with its excellent mix of habitats - the sea, the river, reedbeds, meadows and marshes, all within walking distance. A visit there almost always turns up plenty without too much trouble.

What have been your birding highlights?

Actually in this country too, though it's a world away on Fair Isle on 23 September 2012. A couple of us had just found our own Lanceolated Warbler at Da Water.



When we got back to the Obs my mobile rang to announce an "American Warbler" was nearby. Well, with the Lanceolated under our belts, we were up for it and yomped a mile and a half uphill over a rock-strewn moor. But it was well worth the effort. The bird was in a small Geo on the western side of the island and, as it was late afternoon, it was illuminated perfectly by the sun setting over the Atlantic behind us - magical. Along with others we'd spotted Britain's second Magnolia Warbler. And, as you can see from the photograph, we were all pretty pleased.

Craig reflects on the Magnolia Warbler - with the bird probably still present on the cliff beyond



O.K. if that's your UK highlight, anything else further afield?

It's a difficult question as there have been quite a number. But I suppose one of the best and pretty special was the singing Hawk Owl one mid-May morning in northern Finland. Then there was also the Siberian Rubythroat in a small park in the centre of Beijing on May 10th 2012. It was such a surprise in that vast noisy sprawl to find such an exotic species in a tiny urban park - less than 500 square meters. Disgracefully I shouted my find out and scared it off, so I was the only member of that tour to get that tick! You would have thought a birder with my experience would have known better - but unfortunately I just got too excited. Though it didn't turn out to be the only Rubythroat seen on that tour, so I was forgiven for my 'youthful' exuberance.

Any top tips for the readers?

Just one really, it's practice, practice, practice. The more you do the better you get. But you've got to really look at birds and thoroughly study them - the plumage details, their behaviour and what calls or songs they make, and where. If you put your 10,000 hours in, you'll always get payback.

What about dislikes?

There could be quite a list, but I'll confine myself to three things. First, I'm uncomfortable about the way some reserves are going. I know for the sake of birdwatching it is a necessary evil, but I regret reserves that used to be wildernesses turning into theme parks.

Second, it is photographers who act as spoilers, disregarding habitats, other birders and the birds themselves as they pursue that 'perfect shot' come what may. It has got worse over the last three to four years and some body or group needs to make a stand.

Finally, with my SORC hat on, it's the annual lack of descriptions coming into SORC. Without these descriptions being submitted the county records are deficient. So if you see something interesting, always record it and then let us have it, so we can then build up the best picture we can of Suffolk's many birds.

Field Trip Reports

Eddie Bathgate

Westwood Marshes

8th December 2012

Leader: Adam Gretton

Ten of us met on a dry early winter's morning at Westwood Lodge car park where Adam welcomed new members Pam and Lee to the group.

Marsh

We listened to the calls of a Bullfinch before setting off through the woods down to the marsh. It was rather quiet, with a distant flying Marsh Harrier. A Little Egret landing on the footpath behind us, next to a deep puddle, was an oddity. Patience was rewarded with two flying Bitterns and several Bearded Tits. Cetti's Warbler could be heard calling along with a Water Rail.

Beach

Heading towards the beach we discovered the remains of a Lapwing that showed the signs of having fallen prey to a Peregrine, with the breastbone pecked clean. Redshanks were on the pools and 18-19 'wild' swans were flying away

to the north. After the end of the meeting, some of the group got closer views of a mixed group of Bewick's and Whoopers in an arable field near the Blythburgh – Walberswick road.

A seawatch produced Red-throated Divers, Common Scoter and Great Crested Grebe on the water and a Gannet flying north. We enjoyed a Grey Heron coming in off and a steady flight of Lapwing south, counting 150 whilst we were there. Adam then picked out seven Velvet Scoter flying north all showing their distinct large white wing patches. Unfortunately they were only spotted at 12 o'clock, so not all the group got good views before they landed distantly on the water. A Brent Goose flying south over the beach was our last bird before heading back inland. Disappointedly we couldn't locate the flock of Twite believed to be present.

Reedbed

Heading back through the reedbed, Bearded Tits could again be heard and in total five Marsh Harriers were seen over the reserve. The track back up through the woods yielded a Great Spotted Woodpecker and two Bullfinches. A Treecreeper could be heard high up in the trees, but was not located as we were too close to a shooting party. As the weather was closing in we arrived back at the car park and thanked Adam for what had been a thoroughly enjoyable meet.

Steve Fryett

Orfordness

26th January 2013

Leader: Steve Fryett

Due to snow and bitterly cold weather, there was some doubt during the preceding two weeks as to whether this meeting would go ahead.

However I had made my checks with the warden on Orfordness who informed me we would still be able to go, although I had planned a final decision on the quay. So, in the end, nine members came aboard the launch seemingly well prepared for braving the cold.

Onto the Ness

Having arrived on the Ness there was not a lot of snow present, but some ice still remained on the marshes and it was bitterly cold. The Corral was the first stop, where an abundance of Meadow Pipits resided in the long grass taking shelter from the wind, finding food and avoiding predators. The first raptor seen was a female Merlin close by on a post, giving excellent views.



The female Merlin

This feisty little falcon certainly causes terror amongst the local pipit population and we watched her low level sorties from post to post across the marsh without success. Two female Marsh Harrier with two Reed Bunting and a lonesome Fieldfare were also noted, but waders and ducks were absent although the marsh on the left held a few Curlew and the odd Snipe. A Fox, Chinese Water Deer and Common Shrew were also noted at the Corral. Around the village buildings the usual Barn Owl emerged whilst we checked over the river. Here there were waders with three Bar-tailed Godwit, a couple of Avocet and several Redshank, also noted were five Little Grebe. A single Blackbird and Song Thrush were also located before recording six Bewick's Swans flying over to the south, a noteworthy record for the Ness. We continued to make our way across to the lighthouse for lunch and a sea watch.

Seawatch time

Yet again we had good fortune to be able to sit at the edge of the North Sea and quickly noted good numbers of Red-throated Diver including one movement of 170 north. A single Gannet passed south with the odd sighting of Great Crested Grebe and Wigeon close in. On advice from the warden we moved off north below the level of the shingle to ensure we did not scare off the birds on the North lagoon, our next stop.

Next North Lagoon

Once roughly in line with the lagoon we popped up over the shingle bank to view a mass of ducks.

There were probably 1000+ Wigeon together with Mallard, Gadwall and Shelduck, plus a single female Pintail flying off out to sea. A few more waders were present, with a Sanderling the most noteworthy. Another female Marsh Harrier was noted as we flanked the lagoon heading for the BBC buildings. A gathering of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits were not exceptional, but a "short-tailed" individual caused a flutter but could not be relocated and identified.

The return leg

A male Marsh Harrier passed by the BBC buildings before another Chinese Water Deer came crashing through the sedges at alarming speed in front of us. On top of the bridge we were able to note four Common Buzzards over Orford and two White-fronted Geese on Sudbourne Marsh. Flying north up river were 250 Greylag Geese with one white individual amongst them - almost certainly of "farmyard" origin. The sun was now dipping behind clouds and the temperature began to drop as we made our way back to the jetty, noting a splendid male Hen Harrier hunting the shingle bank and 32 White-fronted Geese heading south over the lighthouse. A further Barn Owl sighting was noted with the second Stonechat of the day. Finally we trudged the last half-mile of a long trek spurred on by the news of a Bittern at the Corral, only a second record for the Ness, but sadly it proved too well camouflaged and did not show. Orfordness had yet again provided an excellent field meeting - despite the weather.

Dunwich

10th February 2013

Leader: Ashley Gooding

I'd been looking forward to this trip as I had not been out properly since the January 1st Bird Race. It was great to be out, although it was a shame the strong wind and dull light made the birding difficult. But at least the sleet stopped upon reaching the coast.

First the beach...

At Dunwich, whilst awaiting everyone's arrival, some of us did an initial seawatch using some shelter huts on the beach for protection to spot a few Red-throated Divers moving through with a Great Northern Diver close-in heading north. The group, ten in total, assembled and we headed towards Walberswick noting the odd Skylark along the grass and one each of Ringed Plover and Dunlin along the shingle, with Redshank and singles of Little Egret, Grey Heron and Grey Plover on the marsh. Reaching some open water, a number of ducks were present, predominately Mallard and Shoveler, with Teal and Wigeon too.



Further along, a Marsh Harrier braved the winds over the reedbed, as well as a Bittern, briefly. Another pool held a single Brent Goose that was busy feeding on some plant and did not mind a fairly close approach. Some photos were taken through the telescope, but with the low light and windy conditions it was very difficult to get a decent picture.



As this shot of the Brent demonstrates

Where the path goes through the reedbeds towards Dingle Hills there was no sign of any Twite, with only five Linnet and two Rock Piptits present. Up to three Marsh Harriers were seen towards Westwood Marsh, while the path back inland towards Dunwich produced a flock of finches, mostly Chaffinch, with some Greenfinch on feeders, as well as Blue Tits and a single Coal Tit. It was fairly quiet passing along the edge of Dunwich Forest and upon reaching the road and stopping to look along a ditch, a Goldfinch and a pair of Marsh Tit were present on one side, while on the other a Water Rail, emerged from the reed and crossed the ditch, characteristically traversing the water with its head down. Back at the car park we sheltered in the cars to have lunch.

...then inland to the river

The decision was made to head to the River Blyth next and so, parking opposite the Blythburgh White Hart pub, we headed down the footpath to scan the river. There were lots of gulls present, including excellent numbers of Common Gull, along with Herring Gull, Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Black-headed Gull and a couple of adult winter Mediterranean Gulls among the throng and ducks included several Wigeon. As the tide was going out more waders appeared including Redshank, Curlew, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and an excellent flock of 45 Bar-tailed Godwit dropped in. Some Avocets were seen further down-river as was a couple of Marsh Harriers, while the assembled gulls at the top end erupted in panic, the cause of which was a Peregrine.

Walking along the path to visit the small hide several tracks and some spraint pointed to the presence of Otter, and nearby was a Redshank. Again low light and strong wind made photography difficult.

At the hide a similar range of birds were again seen, as well as a close flyby from the Peregrine. The hide has been re-built, but with seven of us in there it made for a bit of a squeeze! As a finale, back at the car park, at least two and maybe three Bullfinches were found along the scrub.

Great to be out and enjoy the Suffolk coast, hopefully the trip next week will be more conducive weather wise!

Editor: Thankfully it was.



Gi Grieco

Breckland

17th February 2013

Leader: Gi Grieco

Normally this trip takes place in March but, this year for a change, I brought it forward to February and, as it turned out, this was a good decision. The Brecks have some specialist species that are not likely to be seen in the rest of the county, some due to habitat, others due to population contraction, so it's always nice to have a trip in the area.

Along the Little Ouse

Heading up the A14 early morning the fog gradually cleared, so that on reaching the meeting place at Santon Downham, the early morning sun was seen rising through the trees. As usual the village was alive with birds and the assembled group were surrounded by the song and calls

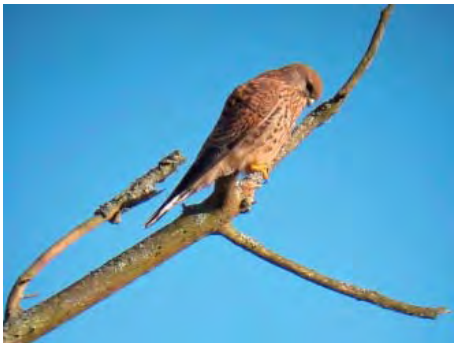
of Blue Tit, Great Tit, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Greenfinch and Goldfinch with a Marsh Tit heard up the road near the church. Heading to the Little Ouse River, we came across the picturesque scene of a river twinkling from the rising sun with a layer of fine mist.



Quite a few photos of the scene were taken as a Cormorant flew overhead. The water level looked higher than usual and the path was frozen from the crisp air.

Listening and looking, similar species as in the village were present so we started to walk heading in the direction of Brandon. On the other side of the river Nuthatch showed really well, the colours looking resplendent in the strengthening sun, with Great Spotted Woodpecker and Lesser Redpoll noted in the area. Further along a few Siskin were seen drinking down by the edge of the river before flying up in to some Birch and two or three Reed Buntings in the scrub and reedbed behind us to the north.

It was a beautiful walk and there was lots of birdlife present, along the river itself Little Grebe, Canada Goose, Mute Swan and Mallard while in the woodland predominately Blue and Great Tits with occasional Starling, Stock Dove and some Fieldfare flew over. There are a couple of species, Willow Tit and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, having declined dramatically in Suffolk in recent years, that are just hanging on in the county and can still be found along the river. Having got to a point where it was time to turn back and not encountered either, we stopped when the song of the Willow Tit was heard coming from a bush nearby. It ceased when a Great Tit started singing but started up again in a nearby tree where we got our first views. Unfortunately these were all too brief as a pair of Marsh Tits started calling and chased the Willow Tit off. Pleased that we managed to see one of the species we headed back, encountering a female Kestrel in a dead Poplar.



Mayday, mayday..

Our next destination was back into Thetford Forest, again for another speciality of the Brecks, Goshawk. We got to Mayday Farm and walked to a clearing to give us a view over the forest and quickly found our first raptor, a Common Buzzard. The shout soon went up for Goshawk, where we had good scope views of its characteristic display flight with deep wingbeats along with its size. In all we noted three birds move through, with another pair of distant Buzzards circling and a Kestrel hovering. Other birdlife was quiet in the immediate vicinity - with the warm weather we had hoped to have Woodlark, but maybe it was a bit too early in the year before their return to breeding sites.



Waiting for Gosso!

What were almost certainly the same Goshawks, flew back across about twenty minutes later, one of which then circled quite high. Pleased with such good views, we headed back for some lunch; the consensus was that most would like to visit to see the Dipper nearby at Thetford, which had been present throughout the winter. Those who had already seen it headed off to Lakenheath RSPB reserve where they saw up to four Cranes, four male Hen Harriers, two Barn Owls, a large rook roost and a couple of Whooper Swans.

'NOG' field trip

Those that got to Thetford³ first had immediate views and said the bird had flown up stream.

³ Strictly speaking this was a Norfolk bird (hence the 'NOG' reference), however a number of patient birders had legitimately claimed it as a Suffolk bird too when, from time to time, it had strayed over the Watsonian Vice County border into Suffolk. Later, in mid-March it was joined by a second Black-bellied.



Black-bellied Dipper dipping

We all headed up together and had superb close views, the bird seemingly unperturbed by human presence. We watched it as it bopped characteristically up and down on a stone in the stream before diving in to catch a Caddisfly larva, which it banged on the stone before eating it. This Dipper is considered to be of the northern continental race known as Black-bellied Dipper.

As a finish to the day some of us stopped off at Euston on the way back seeing three Buzzards along with a large flock of Woodpigeons that contained a few Stock Dove. Some Fieldfare were also noted there too, while a lovely Barn Owl was on a post as we left.

All in all an excellent visit to a lovely area, lucky with the weather and the birds, and good to meet up with fellow members.

Editor: On talking to fellow member David Walsh, we later learned that on our river walk we had actually passed through three Lesser Spot territories, but that this early in the year they were still feeding-up in the surrounding woodland before occupying these territories to breed. Although their subsequent continued absence two weeks later may suggest they have indeed been lost.

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group Annual General Meeting

Holiday Inn,
London Road, Ipswich

7.30pm 28th February 2013



Minutes of the meeting

1. The honorary president opened the meeting and welcomed all present to what was the 40th Anniversary year AGM of the SOG. He commended the chairman for his "strong leadership throughout the year" and in particular the emphasis that had been placed on successful fund raising in what could have been financially a difficult year.
2. **Minutes of the 2012 AGM**
Minutes of the last AGM had been published and had appeared in the Harrier #169 and on the SOG Website. The meeting approved these without amendment.
3. **Presentation of Accounts**
The out-going treasurer presented the accounts for the financial year and highlighted the importance of specific items which had raised additional funds:

Gift Aid (£1300) L&G events (£650) Bird race (£3000+)

The present balance of £3000 credit was an excellent outcome. The meeting approved the accounts.

The treasurer introduced Matthew Deans as the treasurer designate until election. He also proposed thanks to Richard and Jean Attenborrow for their outstanding help with the accounts and the delivery of the Harrier over many years.

The meeting thanked Bill Stone for his "fantastic job in edgy times" and in particular his excellent work which gained Gift Aid returns was especially endorsed.

4. Election of Council Members

The following were proposed:

- Matthew Deans (treasurer)
 - Eddie Bathgate (publicity)
 - Adam Gretton (indoor meetings)
- All were elected without opposition.

5. Chairman's Report

The Chairman reviewed the work of the Council during 2012 and a range of SOG events and activities. He highlighted the following:

- Due to higher work-load an extra council meeting was added and five council meetings were convened, with five now planned for 2013 also.

- A major development in terms of the way Council would operate was the introduction of sub-working groups.

- The group's successful fundraising has enabled a range of IT equipment to be purchased to support SOG activities. These included; a laptop, a digital projector, memory sticks for recorders and various support digital programmes.

It was conveyed that the coming year would again bring many challenges, with the continued necessity to generate additional funding alongside striving to grow the membership.

A full range of indoor and outdoor meetings had been arranged as usual and an important development was a joint Waveney Club/SOG talk featuring Mark Cocker in November 2012, with a further joint event planned for autumn 2013, with Derek Moore speaking – see programme card for details.

Suffolk BINS continued to forge strong links with SOG & RSPB during the year.

The Harrier was published four times during the year and, because of anticipated financial constraints at the time, one edition was printed without colour photography inside, although it still remained the main communications tool for SORC. Members were also told that, in the light of rising costs surrounding the printing of The Harrier, an alternative printing firm was being sourced.

The Chairman appealed for outstanding descriptions of rare and scarce birds to be submitted to SORC as soon as possible, otherwise these records will be lost, and would therefore not appear in Suffolk Birds 2012.

He outlined the proposed website developments stating that these will provide a different style and overall feel and appearance, and is likely to go live over the spring period.

Special thanks were given to:

- Nick Mason and his team of writers and editors who produced Suffolk Birds 2011 published in November it was once again an excellent edition.
- Jean Garrod, Paul Gowen and Jon Warnes who have now left Council and were especially commended for their hard work, commitment and support during their terms of office.
- Jean Garrod had passed on her regards.
- The Council members for their hard work and commitment during the year, and especially their forbearance as some meetings had overrun, with one ending at 11.20pm, which in part highlighted the need for additional meetings and sub-groups which have now been agreed by Council



Another 2012 investment - the new display boards in action

- Jean and Richard Attenborrow had been visited earlier and presented with a bouquet of flowers and a book token in recognition of their long-standing commitment and support of SOG, particularly through mailing out the Harrier and auditing our accounts.
- Bill Baston was again thanked for the loan of his projector for indoor meetings throughout 2012.
- All Group leaders of Outdoor events and speakers at Indoor events were thanked for their significant contributions during the year.

The Chairman suggested that it was very important for our future that all members should be ambassadors of SOG, and advocates of the main aims of the Group.

He suggested that, as SOG is 40 years old in 2013, members should submit ideas for celebrating this anniversary in 2013 by e-mailing their ideas or by contacting a member of Council. If these ideas could be submitted before the end of April, this would be appreciated.

Finally the Chairman requested that if anyone wanted to volunteer to support events throughout the year, such as manning our display panels, etc when occupying supermarket foyers, etc, then they should again e-mail in or contact a member of Council to express their interest.



The award was presented (in his absence) to the finder Colin Barley.

and the winner is...

6. Denis Ockelton Trophy

The Denis Ockelton Trophy was presented to someone who had been Secretary, Treasurer and Chairman of SOG. The award went to Paul Gowen who has worked tirelessly for SOG over many years. Paul was presented with the trophy by the Honorary President.

He stated on receiving the award that he had joined SOG 25 yrs ago as Treasurer and that he had greatly enjoyed his time and the multi-roles he had fulfilled. He said that he had made a recent plea for new blood, in particular younger members to join Council and he was really pleased to see this materialise this year. He thanked Council and the membership for the support he received over the years.

7. BINS Review of the year

Roy Marsh and Lee Woods reviewed the year with an interesting and entertaining presentation of photographs of rare, scarce and more common birds by the month. It was noted that 2012 was the wettest year on record in Suffolk with 34.12 inches of rainfall. They summarised the year as being a "quiet but good year, but not outstanding". The high quality photography submitted to BINS was a very impressive feature of the year.

8. BINS Presentations

The result of Bird of the Year was announced as:

- i) Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll with 82.4% of the votes



The Pied Twitchers win again!

- ii) The 2013 New Year's Day Bird Race was won by the Pied Twitchers with just 115 species - the lowest winning score in the race's history. Roy Marsh, Craig Fulcher, Scott Mayson and Lee Woods were presented with the prestigious BINS Cup. The Chairman made a plea for more members to take up the challenge and get involved in next year's event.



Steve Abbot tested our feather recognition skills

9. Quiz

Steve Abbot presented an entertaining and challenging Quiz this year, based around identifying birds from some puzzling photographs, individual feathers, song and

call recordings. The overall winner was Scott Mayson who was presented with a framed photograph of the '2012 Bird of the Year'.



Scott Mayson was the clear Bird Brain winner on the night

10. BirdTrack

Phil Brown alerted the meeting to the Indoor Meeting on 21st of March 'BirdTrack – Log it or lose It & My Local Patch' led by Nick Moran of the BTO and Scott Mayson. He reminded the meeting that laptops should be brought, as it would be a workshop style tutorial event. It would deal with personalised manipulation of BirdTrack data. Scott will present his patch in detail. The BTO BirdTrack App will be covered. He reiterated that Suffolk's overall BirdTrack input was presently well below other counties and that there was much room for improvement in this area.

11. Little Tern Project

In Robin's absence, Roy Marsh gave a brief summary of the project emphasising that all sightings of Little Tern breeding and breeding attempts be recorded and forwarded to Robin Harvey and his team immediately so that their 'rapid response team' can action their protection programme. Details will be found on SOG and BINS websites from the beginning of April.

12. AOB

- i) Mick Wright asked for volunteers for:
 - BTO Breeding Bird Survey
 - BTO Nightingale survey is continuing in Suffolk still lots of tetrads to cover.
 - BTO Breeding Woodcock Survey is an online survey
 - BTO WeBS counters wanted on the Orwell as six have recently retired.
- ii) Phil Brown has looked at possible new printers for the Harrier and found a more cost-effective option. It should now be possible to produce more full-colour in the publication and postage will be direct from the printer and much cheaper than previously.



The raffle prizes

Editor: As I think the photos make plain, this was an extremely enjoyable event for everyone who attended. It was also very welcome financially to SOG too. Raffle tickets were on sale at the start and bird boxes, drawings and books were on sale throughout the event. These realised a total income of £130.00 (our first raffle alone secured £77.00). So thanks to all who attended and were so generous with prizes and donations on the day. Here's to 2014!

Obituary - Muriel Beecroft (1925-2012)

Muriel Jean Beecroft was born on 16th May 1925 and spent most of her childhood years with her sister and two brothers in the village of Holbrook in south Suffolk, where she developed a keen interest in nature.

I first met Muriel, in the company of her husband Rex, at Landguard in spring 1983 where we discussed the inaugural opening of Landguard Bird Observatory (LBO). Rex was well known in local ornithological circles being a former Editor of the Suffolk Bird Report and a very experienced ringer. Muriel shared Rex's interest and attended all his ringing sessions as his helper. LBO was desperate to recruit their skills, so I did all I could to persuade them both to sign up. I was delighted when they accepted my invitation and we were blessed when Muriel agreed to take over from me as the Observatory's Treasurer.

With Muriel's support, Rex went on to be the leading figure at Landguard, serving a term as Chairperson and always at his side was the happy and smiling Muriel. One of our happiest memories of Muriel will be her amazing homemade cakes that she readily supplied for LBO Open Days.

As well as leading ringing activities at Landguard, Rex and Muriel were instrumental in the founding of Bawdsey Bird Club and regularly led migration studies at Bawdsey Manor. Weekly ringing sessions here enabled Rex and Muriel to log England's first confirmed breeding of Common Rosefinch, a pair raising two chicks in 1992.

Sadly, Rex died suddenly ten years later, a great loss to the Observatory and Suffolk ornithology in general. Soon after, Muriel accepted the role as President of the Observatory, an honour that she enthusiastically received. It was so fitting for Muriel to be President as the whole Beecroft family had been instrumental in the development of LBO. Her son Roger became an active ringing member, also served a term as Chairperson and his wife Jean served as Treasurer. However, Muriel was not going to be a sleeping President and continued to attend the Observatory up until her recent illness. She officially opened the revamped Bird Observatory with the Mayor of Felixstowe in 2004.

Whilst serving my term as the Observatory's Chairman, I spent many an afternoon with Muriel at her home in Witlesham to discuss Observatory business and there was always a piece of Victoria sponge on hand to have with a cup of tea. Sadly, Muriel lost her battle against illness and it was a loss to us all when she died on 20th December 2012. I was going to say that she will be sorely missed, but not as much as she will be fondly remembered.



Spring delayed

As I write it is hard to believe this is the first day of spring. Because almost everywhere is reporting the late appearance of singing Chiffchaff - invariably the first of our spring migrants. While at Cavenham, Warden Mike Taylor informs me that, at the time of going to press, their Stone Curlews hadn't arrived on their normal date (they have now). Let us hope these weather-induced delays don't portend yet another poor breeding season for our birds.



The appearance of BirdTrack's new home page and system upgrade had been deliberately timed for the SOG talk. This joint SOG and BTO workshop was also something of an experiment, as we'd wanted as many members as possible to participate in it. We'd specially booked the hotel's wi-fi facility so that Nick could demonstrate the improved BirdTrack system 'live'. Despite the wilfully slow broadband service the hotel supplied, he applied it to some of his own patch data showing how simple it was to manipulate and derive useful information from it.

A total of nine Council members attended while, sadly, only six ordinary members joined them on the night. It was most useful having such a good expert on hand to sort out any snags that were encountered and he opened our collective eyes to the value of new-improved BirdTrack.

The most exciting aspect of Nick's presentation was the reveal of the BTO's new BirdTrack app. All were impressed by its utility and Scott Mayson, who had only recently started to use it, sang its praises at the end of his presentation on his local patch - the old caravan park at Thorpeness. Occupying only a small acreage stretching from the Dower House to the north, down to the allotments in the south, this site nevertheless

offers a wide mix of habitats comprising woodland, heathland and beach. In the six years that Scott has birded it this tiny patch has yielded him 137 species. Quite a sizeable proportion of which were interesting migrants - including some rarities.]



Up 20% of bird data received by recorders now comes from smartphones

The BirdTrack app comes in both Android and iPhone versions and is extremely easy to use in the field. It's downloadable for free from either Google Play Store or the Apple App Store. As with BirdTrack Online, you can use it to record casual sightings and species lists.

The old caravan park at Thorpeness

Occupying only a small acreage stretching from the Dower House to the north, down to the allotments in the south, this site nevertheless offers a wide mix of habitats comprising woodland, heathland and beach. In the six years that Scott has birded it this tiny patch has yielded him 187 species. Quite a sizeable proportion of which were interesting migrants - including some rarities.



The app exploits the respective phones' GPS facility to give accurate location fixes and, once you return home, everything you have recorded can then be uploaded onto your own BirdTrack account and the data automatically sent to BirdTrack.

One of the most important learnings of the evening was the realisation that using BirdTrack meant, if permission had been given, the data could be submitted automatically to the respective county recorder - so there was no need to make a second entry of the records. Also Online is not confined to birds - now it's possible to use it to capture dragonflies and damselfly records too and, in time, these will be joined by other taxa.

Once he'd finished his 'live' demonstration it was over to SOG members to 'play' with BirdTrack on their own laptops, tablets and/or smartphones. Eventually we had to close this workshop at 22:00 and all agreed it had been a valuable experiment. In fact, five members of the audience signed up to BirdTrack on the night and five lapsed users (including your editor) were revitalised to use it regularly again. So, despite the low turnout, Nick was extremely pleased with such a positive result.

Hopefully as a result of the presentation, plus all our articles and tutorials, more SOG members will get into the BirdTrack habit. Not necessarily submitting records of every bird encountered, but at least their more unusual and important sightings.



So let's all make an effort to log it, not lose it!

Book Reviews

Chris Courtney

Fighting for birds

by Mark Avery

Unlike Chris Packham, as exclaimed in his enthusiastic foreword, circumstances didn't permit me to consume this book in a single sitting. Nonetheless, I did enjoy reading much of it, in some fairly large chunks. This was due in no small part to Mark's lively and ebullient character, which manifests throughout; from the face beaming out from the front cover, through the ensuing selection of semi-biographical and theme-related chapters, liberally peppered with a sprinkling of interesting and sometimes downright juicy anecdotes, to the final sections, where some of the key questions facing 21st century UK conservation policy are considered.

However, 'Fighting for Birds' does far more than entertain. At its core, the book sets out with admirable clarity, a picture encompassing pretty much the entire landscape of nature conservation over the past 25 years or more. The full range of options, complete with case study examples, available to a sizeable conservation organisation such as the RSPB, are examined and assessed. Covering the preservation of special places, the re-creation and re-connection of habitats, and the pros and cons of species re-introductions; the art and the science of determining conservation priorities and resource allocation, are described and explained. This is all set out, against the context of the many predominant human activities, from farming and power generation to demands for new airports, that continue to put pressure on the natural world and on many of our most cherished species. Mark broadly outlines these issues together with an account of the relevant legislative framework, that

can be invoked to help safeguard designated priority habitats and species. He continues with an informed discussion, as to the best ways to mitigate such potential and actual damaging human activities and developments.

Alongside this analysis, are some fascinating and colourful first hand accounts of his dealings with many of the principal political players of the period. These include, Environment Secretaries John Gummer, Michael Meacher and David Miliband as well as the odd Prime Minister. Once again, a very balanced and pragmatic approach to effective political lobbying is outlined with specific policy examples that describe the inside track of the mechanics and processes of government at a regional, national and European level. Later in the book, is a consideration as to how environmental NGOs might better leverage their political influence in the future. All this is presented in a style that is frequently witty and generally highly readable.

For me it is the bringing together of all these diverse strands into such a clear and coherent synthesis, which makes 'Fighting for Birds' such an important and in many ways a unique book. I cannot imagine many readers at any level, who would not learn something new.

However, I should point out that despite the serious nature of many of these topics Mark retains a very pleasant and light hearted touch throughout, so that mostly the experience resembles having a particularly interesting and friendly series of chats down the pub with plenty of amusing detours, rather than attending a formal lecture. It is possible that members of 'Songbird Survival' and the grouse shooting fraternity may not feel quite so congenial, but Mark's humour appears quite indefatigable, as when dining at the house of a prominent grouse moor owner and being presented with a plate

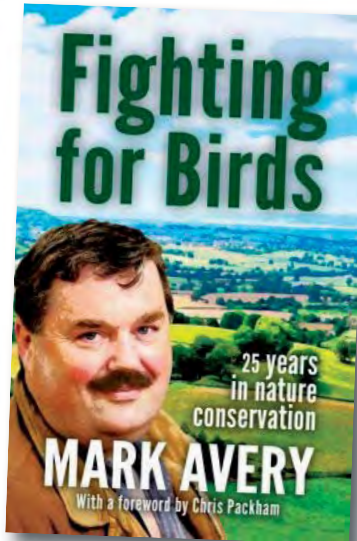
of roasted red grouse, he declares "Thank You. If it's good enough for Hen Harriers then it's good enough for me!"

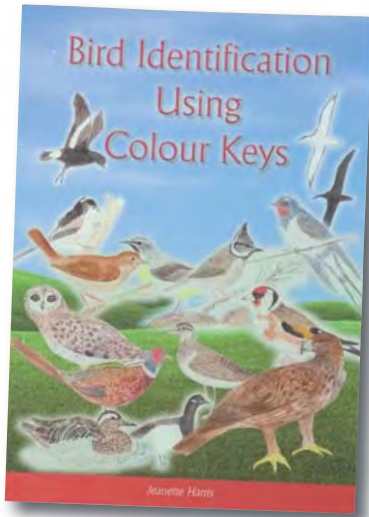
As RSPB Conservation Director for almost 13 years and a principal driver of RSPB policy up to 2011, the book also provides a fascinating insight into a period of considerable change within the organisation. Mark champions the RSPB as a highly professional, effective, science and evidence-based organisation. He describes how and why the RSPB's remit has significantly extended beyond its former more narrowly defined focus, which centred round the preservation of certain prescribed rare species,

to the present, where some much wider policy issues affecting more broadly defined biodiversity are being tackled. Examples include the factors underlying the collapse of many farmland bird populations and the multiple threats presented by climate change.

As has been widely commented on elsewhere, Mark's strident views on a range of topics are likely to provoke some controversy. Personally, I consider that in a very few places, such as some of his criticisms of other conservation NGOs, his arguments were not always sufficiently well substantiated, and others will no doubt challenge some of his

other conclusions and viewpoints. However, on the evidence provided here, I would conclude that Dr Avery's insistence upon always trying to see the bigger picture, being prepared to confront some very awkward questions head on and not being afraid to sacrifice the odd sacred cow, has helped to deliver a substantially better outcome for our wildlife than would otherwise have been the case. However, as Mark himself concedes, the challenges ahead have never been greater, so that we could all do far worse than to adopt at least some of the bullet points set out in the mini manifesto with which he concludes his book.





As soon as I received a copy I was impressed, not only with the charming illustrations and concise and helpful text, but also with the book's extremely sensible structure enabling birds to be easily identified. In all 227 species of British birds are grouped first by colour and then by habitat (land or water). Some birds sensibly are repeated in several sections. Under each illustration is a short piece of text covering keynote identification cues, mannerisms and where it's likely to be found.

Sukey Bathgate and Finlay Marsh
with Phil Brown

'Bird Identification Using Colour Keys'

Author: Jeanette Harris, paperback, 160pp., self-published 2012.



Larger illustrations and more diagnostic



Most of us grew up with, and fondly remember, 'The Observer's Book of Birds' that provided us with a good grounding in Britain's birds - despite some gross illustrations. Then, in due course, we migrated to more adult tomes such as Collins or Peterson.

Now there is a new birdwatching starter-book to consider, entitled 'Bird Identification Using Colour Keys' - it is a novel and sensible way of unravelling the complexities of bird identification. It was written by Jeanette Harris (a relatively new SOG member) and was designed and illustrated by her in order to help her grandchildren and nieces and nephews to get to grips with identifying birds.

A little over the page size of the Harrier, the book contains a total of 310 good-sized bird illustrations, yet it remains easy to use in the field. But that's enough from this adult. As I'm not the target market we handed out copies of the book to two children, asked them to use it and then review it. Here's what they had to say:



Sukey Bathgate is nine years old and only recently started bird watching. Her email ran as follows:

Thank you very much for the bird book, I'm really enjoying it!!!!

I loved the way that it was organised - by colour - and it had lots of information without taking up much room.

It is easy to find the bird even without looking at the index. For instance: If I see a green bird, I can look in the green section and find out that it is a Greenfinch and not a Green Woodpecker.

However, it didn't have Willow Tit from when we were in the Brecks. But it did have Marsh Tit. Also a page has already fallen out.

For the summary, I think it is a great book and it has inspired me to write my own bird guide.

From SUKEY!!!

Finlay "is it rare?" Marsh is seven years old and, when interviewed about his views on this book, he said:

"This book has helped me to enjoy bird watching. I've used it to identify a Long-tailed Duck for myself in January, a Waxwing in our garden and a Woodcock at Holbrook. The pictures are really nice and there's lots of detail about what to look out for and it tells you where to look for each species too.

It's the best book in the world!"

After two such positive views there's not much for me to add except to say it's available direct from the author at an extremely reasonable price of £10.00, plus £1.50 postage and packing for a single copy.

So if you've a young grandchild, nephew or niece you won't go far wrong buying this charming book for them. They'll definitely find it very useful, as will also their parents (and, if truth be told, quite a few older birders too!).

Contact details: Jeanette Harris,
The Old Police House, Main Road,
Sutton, Woodbridge IP12 3DU. Suffolk.
Email: ferryfarm12@btinternet.com

Announcements

Plea for Art Work

Many thanks to all the artists who produced the excellent art work for Suffolk Birds 2011. It is always pleasing to receive work from well-established and new artists for inclusion in the publication. In terms of format we can accept any digital or hard copy images but would suggest that images are produced so as to appear quite small on the page. Most will fill about 6x6cm square of space. Larger drawings can sometimes lose definition and their impact if reduced on this scale (but not always).

The deadline for submission is the end of August. Please submit drawings to:

Phil Whittaker Tel: 01449 760353;
email: oakbarn@hotmail.com;
or write to him at: Oak Barn, Pipps Ford,
Needham Market, Ipswich IP6 8LJ

WeBS fieldworkers required

Due to several stalwarts having to retire after many years of counting waterbirds Mick Wright now has several vacant sections on the Orwell that require a fieldworker.

The sections are: Ipswich Docks = Wet Dock, Lock gates and Fox's Marina to the Orwell Bridge; Strand; Freston; Levington Creek; Loompit Lake and Marina wall. Please contact Mick Wright on mickwright@btinternet.com

Photo credits:

Rebecca Nason (front cover & page 23); Eddie Bathgate (page 39); Derek Beamish (page 5); William Brame (pages 9 & 21); BTO (pages 19, 35 & 36); Ian Clarke (page 21); Chris Courtney (pages 15, 25, 26, 27 & 29); Andrew Easton (pages 2, 3, & 4); Jon Evans (page 16); Dave Fairhurst (page 14); Gi Grieco (pages 27, 28, 30, 31, 32 & 33); Dave Hermon (page 4); Jeff Higgott (page 21); Roy Marsh (page 39); Scott Mayson (page 16); 'Gadge' Nicholls (page 38); Gary Richardson (page 16); John Richardson (pages 15, 16, 17, 20 & 21).

Illustrations:

Peter Beeston (pages 12 & 18); Thomas Bewick (page 6); Eric Ennion (page 34) and Su Gough (pages 12, 13 & 17)

SOG field trip programme changes

Amendments - the August Havergate trip has been cancelled and the September visit has been changed to Sunday September 8th.

Correction - the trip on November 17th, it should read Lodge Farm, Westhorpe TM040703.

Wordsearch result

In all there were 32 Suffolk birds:

Brambling, Dipper, Dunlin, Glaucous Gull, Goldeneye, Goosander, Great Grey Shrike, Hen Harrier, Iceland Gull, Jack Snipe, Knot, Merlin, Pink-footed Goose, Pintail, Purple Sandpiper, Red-crested Pochard, Red-throated Diver, Redwing, Rough-legged Buzzard, Scaup, Shag, Shore Lark, Siskin, Slavonian Grebe, Smew, Snow Bunting, Swallow, Twite, Velvet Scoter, Waxwing, White-fronted Goose, Whooper Swan.

While the odd one out was the Swallow, as all the rest are mainly found in the winter.

And the winner is...

Only a half a dozen completely correct answers were received. All these went into the 'hat' at a February sub-committee meeting. Margie Carter's entry was drawn and a £25.00 book token was duly despatched.

Council for 2012:

Officers

Honorary President: Steve Piotrowski
Chairman: Roy Marsh
Vice-Chairman: Steve Abbott
Secretary: Phil Whittaker
Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Matthew Deans
Projects Officer: Mick Wright
Magazine Editor: Phil Brown
Website Co-ordinator: Gi Grieco
Publicity: Eddie Bathgate
Bird Report Editor: Nick Mason
Outdoor Events Organiser: Gi Grieco
Indoor Events Organiser: Adam Gretton

Members

Jean Garrod [to 2014]
Craig Fulcher [to 2015]
Robin Harvey [to 2014]
Scott Mayson [to 2015]

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean & Ken Garrod
Mike Jeanes
Mike Hall
Robin Hopper



Bird Recorders

North-east Area Recorder:

Andrew Green, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: andrew@waveney1.fsnet.co.uk

South-east Area Recorder:

Scott Mayson, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY
Tel: 01394 385595 Email smsuffolkbirder@gmail.com

West Area Recorder:

Colin Jakes, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN
Tel: 01284 702215 Email colin@jakes.myzen.co.uk

Treasurer/Membership Secretary

c/o 49c Oak Hill, Hollesley, Suffolk IP12 3JY



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



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

For birds & for birders

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

www.sogonline.org.uk