

Harrier E3.25

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

Inside: - Raptor persecution in East Anglia - Elveden's conservation efforts - More Swift action

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Cover photograph:

Juvenile Black-winged Stilt (Himantopus himantopus)

Photographer: Barry Woodhouse, 2014, digiscoped at a pig field pool south west of Cavenham village on the Risby to Barton Mills road using a Nikon D 3300 body, Nikon T 2 mount adapter on a Celestron Ultima 100 ed scope

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Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

Editorial

SOG - stand up and be counted!

This issue's lead article on raptor persecution covers a litany of atrocities committed against virtually every large raptor species in the UK. And last month demonstrated this is not just a remote grouse moor problem but one much nearer to home. East Anglia is harbouring its own raptor persecutors, which is why SOG is launching its 'Campaign against raptor persecution' at The Cut on 20th October with an address by Simon Barnes and a display and talk by the RSPB investigation team.

If you are unable to attend (there's still time to book your ticket - see page 48) then you should at least sign up to our online petition aiming to stop these outrages going on.

And talking of going on, I'm not. This is my final Harrier editorial.

Farewell

I've had to take this difficult decision because too much of my working year (between two and three months) is being taken up with editing the Harrier. As a result I am unable to work satisfactorily on several other projects I have underway.

But this issue is not all about persecution. There is wildlife protection too. So we're also featuring the Elveden Estate's largely unpublicised commitment to Suffolk's bird

conservation. Then, nearer to home, we have an update on SOG's Swift SOS - which is in the capable hands of Adam Gretton and Edward Jackson. Keep up the good work guys!

There's also an indication of an improving Brecks Stone Curlew population. Additionally there are reports on another matter that greatly concerns me - Education. To whit two articles on SOG's educational forays at Wantisden and Carlton Marshes, plus an introduction to Richard Crossley's extremely valuable contribution to birding education (which he'll also be talking about this along with his guides on the 20th October at The Cut).

I hope these positives serve to counter balance the criminal persecution of the Long Melford juvenile Peregrine, along with my particular bêtes noire (or tabby?), the ever present domestic persecutor of birds in our midst - cats. As ever in conservation matters it is both swings and roundabouts, but in each case there is something that SOG members can do about it.

So it's goodbye. I wish my successor (yes I understand there is one) as much pleasure as I have had interviewing some fascinating people, dealing with excellent photographers and many brilliant birders.

Ed: First off a major article documenting the appalling prevalence of wildlife crimes against raptors throughout the UK.

Steve Piotrowski

Is raptor persecution again rife in East Anglia?

For the past 20 years, Suffolk ornithologists have been at the forefront in efforts to assist the spectacular recovery of breeding raptors that has taken place in our region. As a result, our skies are now graced by Buzzards and Peregrines, which were so uncommon 30 or so years ago. Our Marsh Harrier populations have risen to such an extent that the species is now a common sight in coastal areas in all seasons. Red Kites are slowly colonising Suffolk's countryside. no doubt aided by introduction schemes elsewhere, and nesting Hobbeys are as plentiful as they have ever been. However, are these recoveries now under threat due to the actions of the selfish few?

There have been incidents of breeding raptors being shot and poisoned all over Britain, especially in and around the grouse moors of Britain's uplands. Last year was the first time that Hen Harrier failed to produce any young in England and there has been a campaign to save the species from becoming extinct as a breeding bird in this country. Suffolk people are quite rightly appalled at the needless slaughter of birds of prey, which is almost always carried out to appease the wishes of the shooting fraternity, but are livid at the fact that such crimes are now occurring right here in our own county.

Nesting Peregrines Return

From 1991-1997, a wintering pair of Peregrines near the Orwell Bridge raised speculation that they might breed. SOG members lobbied the Highways Agency and eventually a strategically-placed box was fixed to one of the piers under the bridge. It took another ten years before breeding took place, 2007 was the first time that Suffolk had seen nesting Peregrines for over 200 years. Peregrines have bred successfully there for the past eight years and boxes have also been fixed to tall structures in Lake Lothing, Ipswich Docks (in-situ box on a new block of flats), the Port of Felixstowe and Bury St Edmunds. Most have seen some degree of success, with chicks reared from the Lake Lothing box and eggs laid at Ipswich and Felixstowe Docks. A pair is also pioneering the Sizewell nuclear power stations complex and another was thought to have hybridized with an escaped Lanner

Falcon on Orfordness.



Orwell Bridge nest

Shot Peregrine

Proof of persecution came in the form of a recently shot Peregrine that was found beside a public footpath next to Chad Brook near Long Melford on August 20th in West Suffolk. The incident was superbly described by John Grant in the East Anglian Daily Times on September 9th 2014 and his story was posted on the EADT website on the same day: http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/long_melford_rspb_offer_1_000_reward_for_information_about_illegal_shooting_of_a_young_peregrine_falcon_1_3762495

After being peppered by gunshot, the bird is now being rehabilitated at Lavenham Falconry at nearby Monks Eleigh with the aim of returning it to the wild when its recovery is complete. Owner Steve Younge said: "It is doing very well. We have kept it hooded to keep it calm. I think she will survive. We've just removed the bandage from the wing and it's gone back into its correct position. It is eating very well and, in the next two or three weeks, we will try to build up its strength and fitness and see where we go from there, but the hope is to return it to its rightful place in the wild."



SOG member Darren Underwood co-found the injured and very approachable young female Peregrine, which showed no obvious external injuries. He assumed that it had perhaps accidentally flown into the fence and was stunned and, with the help of a local resident, put it in a box and contacted the Mulberry Court Veterinary Surgery in Sudbury. Darren said: "They were excellent and very caring and when they took an X-ray of one of the bird's winas they found it had several pieces of lead shot in it." Veterinary Surgeon, Jan De La Rey said: "We saw there were puncture wounds over most of her body and a most noticeable fracture to its right wing."

The injured Peregrine

There was some speculation as to whether this wounded bird was raised by a pair of Peregrines

in Bury St Edmunds, which would be the first breeding record of the species in west Suffolk in modern times and possibly the first time the species has ever nested in the area. However, although a juvenile was photographed in the town, there is no known pest

July 2014, the Bury Peregrine - a very grainy digiscoped image so it is difficult to confirm whether this is the same bird or not Suffolk police and the RSPB are appealing for information and RSPB is offering a £1000 reward for information leading to a conviction in relation to the shooting. The charity's investigations officer Mark Thomas said: "This bird has only recently left its nest and has already been shot, presumably by a person who intended to kill it. Numbers declined during the last two centuries due to illegal killing, but unfortunately we are still having birds shot and poisoned. Whilst it is good news that the bird has survived, it is unknown if the bird will make a full recovery."

Other Peregrine incidents in 2014

The Long Melford bird was the 17th Peregrine known to have been targeted in the British Isles in 2014 and these are only the ones that have been reported – how many more have been killed?

The Raptor Persecution Scotland blog, which highlighted the Suffolk Peregrine incident, makes grim reading.

http://raptorpersecutionscotland.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/police-investigate-shooting-of-young-peregrine-in-suffolk/

It states:

In February a poisoned Peregrine was found dead in South Lanarkshire, Scotland. In March, a shot peregrine was found dead in Dorset, England. In April, a shot peregrine was found dead near Stirling, Scotland. In May, a shot Peregrine was found critically injured in Devon, England. In June, the public foiled an attempted poisoning of six Peregrines in Co. Dublin, Ireland. In June, a poisoned Peregrine was found dead in North Wales. In July, four dead Peregrines suspected to have been poisoned were found in Gwynedd, NW Wales. In August, a shot peregrine was found critically injured in Co. Wexford, Ireland

The loss of a single one of our magnificent raptors in such circumstances is a tragedy, but at least in the case of Peregrines we are dealing with a species which is rapidly expanding its range. The BTO Bird Atlas 2007-2011 (Balmer *et al* 2013) show a 200% range expansion since 1968-1972 and the breeding population is now at an all-time high. This is mainly down to the fact that the species has taken to our towns and cities, nesting on high buildings and sometimes hunting at night with the aid of streetlights.

Montagu's Harrier "missing in action"

A recovery such as that of the Peregrine population is not mirrored by Montagu's Harrier, which has been living on the edge as a UK breeding species for decades. Early in the 19th century it was considered to be the commonest harrier in East Anglia and small numbers bred on Suffolk's heaths and marshes right up to the 1960s. It was extensively persecuted, however, with adults shot and nests destroyed year after year until it became virtually extinct.



The RSPB has posted a very worrying report on their website and the account is summarised as follows: A female Montagu's harrier, shown being fitted with a satellite tracking device on the BBC's The One Show, has vanished in Norfolk under unexplained circumstances. Scientists working on a project to track raptor migration routes tagged three Montagu's Harriers, the UK's rarest breeding bird of prey, including this adult female in Norfolk in July.

http://www.rspb.org.uk/
news/382573-rare-bird-of-prey-taggedon-tv-show-missing-in action?utm_
medium=website&utm_source=twitter&utm_
content=montaquharrier&utm_campaign=pr

The tiny satellite trackers, fitted to the harriers' backs, reveal the migration routes the birds take between Europe and their wintering grounds in Africa. The missing Montagu's Harrier, a three-year-old bird nicknamed 'Mo', was last detected leaving a roost site at first light on the Sandringham Estate close to Great Bircham, Norfolk, on 8th August 2014.

Ben Koks, of the Dutch Montagu's Harrier Foundation, who fitted the tag, said: "Since 2005 we have tagged 58 Montagu's harriers, and a sudden loss of signal is exceedingly rare. It is very unusual that an experienced bird like this would abruptly disappear, especially whilst the tag was in the process of sending data, as it had done successfully for the previous few weeks."

RSPB Senior Investigations Officer Mark Thomas said: "There are very few possible reasons for Mo's disappearance, either she was caught by a fox and the tag was immediately taken underground, or she suffered illegal persecution and her tag was deliberately destroyed. With only seven pairs in the UK the loss of a breeding female is a serious setback to this threatened bird of prey."

Naturalist and The One Show presenter Mike Dilger filmed the item with Mo earlier in the year. He said: "It's a very sad situation. I personally helped to tag Mo: she was a beautiful, healthy harrier and by now she should be zipping through the skies of Senegal. This is a tragic loss of an amazing and rare bird."

The tag fitted to this bird was sponsored by the owner of Lush Cosmetics, Mark Constantine, who named the harrier after his wife Mo. Mr Constantine has offered a reward of £5000 for information on the missing harrier. The two other birds tagged, Madge and Mark, have begun their migration and in September were nearing their wintering grounds in Senegal.



Buzzards under threat

We have witnessed a remarkable return of Buzzards to the Suffolk countryside and many parishes now host at least one breeding pair. It became extinct as a Suffolk breeding species at the beginning of the 20th century as a result of persecution. Ticehurst (1932) said: "Little wonder that this fine bird has died out as a nesting species, every gamekeeper's hand was against it, no one seems to have given it sanctuary".

Suffolk undoubtedly had the habitat requirements for the species return, but its re-colonisation was initially very slow due, it was thought, to persecution. The *New Atlas* (Gibbons *et al* 1993) highlighted conspicuous gaps in the eastern fringe of the Buzzard's

breeding distribution that "coincided with well-keepered estates". Thankfully it is now a common sight throughout East Anglia.

Sadly, as I write this article towards the end of September 2014, I have received two reports of Buzzard remains found in suspicious circumstances: one at Lavenham (Peter Evans) and another at Newbourne (Mark Piotrowski). Surely we're not going back to the bad old days when anything with a hooked bill is subject to intense persecution?



Hen Harriers

One raptor that is most unlikely to return to Suffolk as a breeding species is the Hen Harrier as these birds are persecuted relentlessly by some of our more unscrupulous game preservationists throughout Britain. Ticehurst (1932) was in no doubt that Hen Harriers bred in Suffolk in the early part of the 19th century, but were lost as nesting species due to historic persecution. Persecution of nesting Hen Harriers on upland grouse moors has pushed

the species to the brink of extinction in England and, as a result, it is a rare visitor to Suffolk where it used to winter in good numbers. This summer conservationists, monitoring nests on the United Utilities Bowland Estate in Lancashire, were full of optimism when chicks fledged from nests, the first Hen Harrier chicks to fledge in England since 2012. However, two females named Sky and Hope, which

had been satellite-tagged, have vanished in unexplained circumstances. The lightweight solar-powered satellite tags are designed to be operational for around three years so that scientists can track their movements. Both tags have stopped transmitting. Sky's signal stopped suddenly on the evening September 10th, when data suggested that she was roosting, while Hope's last known location was sent on the morning of September 13th. Both birds had remained in the Bowland area since fledging. Searches have been conducted but neither bird has been found.

Experts think that it is unlikely the loss of their satellite transmissions is due to technical failure. Bob Elliot, RSPB head of investigations, said: "In our experience, this satellite technology is normally very reliable and it is rare for them to fail for technological reasons. Losing two birds in such a short time frame and in

the same geographical area is strange. Based on the last known data and our understanding of the technology, Sky appears to have suffered a catastrophic tag failure at roost, suggesting either natural predation or human intervention as the likely causes for her sudden failure to transmit. However, we would not expect natural predation to stop the tag transmitting data so suddenly. Hope's tag was transmitting reliably, with no evidence of any technical problems."



Discussion

In 1978, whilst carrying out SOG's Ringed Plover survey close to Sizewell A Nuclear Power Station, I came across a dead secondvear male Marsh Harrier close to a carcass of a rabbit. The harrier was a magnificent specimen, so freshly dead that its eyes still glistened and I suspected that it had been poisoned as its stomach appeared to have caved inward. I found an old fertiliser bag nearby (probably used to carry the rabbit?), collected the bird and bait and took it to Ieremy Sorensen who was then warden at nearby RSPB Minsmere. I used a couple of sticks to pick up the bait, chopstick-like, and placed it in the bag. This course of action was fortunate on my part as a subsequent report by the RSPB revealed that the rabbit was so heavily laced with a weed-killer type of poison that it could have killed me had I touched it!

Jeremy was devastated by my find as Minsmere's Marsh Harrier population was rising very slowly from a single pair in 1971, which constituted the sole British breeding record for that year (Piotrowski 2003). At that time, there was a heavy reliance on the bigamous behaviour of the males to pair with two or perhaps three females, so the loss of a male was a real setback. The RSPB investigated the incident and confirmed that poisoning was the cause of the bird's mortality. The landowner was contacted and initially denied that the bird had been found on his land so, in the company of Jeremy, we went with him to the spot where the bird had been found and land ownership was confirmed. Apparently, his gamekeeper was reprimanded, but no further action was taken against the perpetrator of such a hideous crime!

Since that day, I have developed a personal hatred against those who commit such crimes and have supported campaigns that strive to highlight the issues with a view to strengthening the law. Whilst researching

my book The Birds of Suffolk, I was touched by a passionate passage in Ticehurst (1932) under his account for Montagu's Harrier. It reads: "Being a bird of prey its advent is almost always met with hostility amongst gamekeepers and it is only because of the bird's extreme persistency that it survives today at all. The records of this bird in Suffolk are mournful reading indeed, for they consist mostly of birds killed on their nesting ground year after year. The wide open heathlands suited to this bird are becoming more restricted annually, yet there are few left where birds turn up regularly, perhaps not more than four or five pairs in the whole county, and almost as regularly they are killed. Here above all. is a case where protection can still save a fine bird from extinction, for it has not yet entirely disappeared. In so many cases protection has come too late, in some cases, as with the Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet, etc., a hundred years too late. But in the case of this Harrier it needs the goodwill of all the landowners whose properties the birds may frequent. In 1912 I located two pairs of these birds which had settled down to nest on an East Suffolk heath. Sanctuary for them needed the help of only three landowners whose co-operation I tried to enlist. Two of them were enthusiastic and the requisite orders were given for the birds' safety, but the third replied that he did not blame his keepers if they killed every 'hawk' and he certainly should not give any instructions to the contrary. I believe all four birds were killed lest an odd aame chick or two should be taken. How any landowner, who ought to be proud to give a pair of these birds harbourage, can care so little for the wild life on his property that he should acquiesce in illeaal destruction of almost our rarest breeding bird passes my comprehension." History shows that Ticehurst failed in his gallant attempt to save the Montagu's Harrier for future generations.

This article is not intended to be a direct attack against the shooting fraternity. I have many friends who shoot and some modern-type gamekeepers that I know are just as passionate about wildlife as me and wouldn't dream of harming raptors or carrying out any other illegal activities. However, shooters must urgently get their act together and exert peer pressure to make more unscrupulous game preservationists think twice before committing a crime against wildlife. In East Anglia, we have some gigantic game estates where commercial shoots take place regularly throughout the autumn and winter. Attitudes must change and there should be more severe penalties for the perpetrators of wildlife crime, such as the suspension or permanent withdrawal of shotgun licenses or making landowners vicariously liable for wildlife crimes committed on their land if committed by their employees or those with permission to shoot. For example, a successful wildlife crime prosecution on a Scottish estate may jeopardise the payment of agri-environment grants to that estate.

As TV presenter and Hen Harrier campaigner Chris Packham has said: "It's incredibly disheartening to discover that two of this year's (Hen Harrier) chicks have already apparently failed to survive. It shows how vulnerable Hen Harriers are and that four nests are nowhere near enough. Without satellite tagging, these disappearances might never have come to our attention but technology is on our side and we will keep watching."

Finally, will we ever forget the furore that took place when Natural England was working on the proposed reintroduction of White-tailed Eagle to coastal Suffolk? Further, should birds eventually attempt to colonise naturally (e.g. from the Netherlands) can we expect them to be left undisturbed?

You can help?

- Use the power of the social media. Twitter, Facebook, etc., has proved to be an invaluable tool highlighting wrong-doing. Tweets from high-profile personalities such as Chris Packham and Mark Avery have resulted in a 'Twitter storm' so much so that the issues have been forced into the public realm. Following one such 'storm', principally campaigning against the shooting and poisoning of Hen Harriers on grouse moors, the issue of "why do we want to shoot birds" was featured on BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine Show. The discussion was most enlightening!
- Be vigilant in the countryside, report anything suspicious and take photographs wherever possible.
- Collect a dead or injured raptor, and take it to a vet or wildlife rescue organisation for its death to be further investigated or injuries dealth with.
- If you suspect poisoning, as well as collecting the bird also look around for bait. Sometimes bait is so heavily laced with poison that the birds die on the spot. However, as a word of warning, be very careful how you pick it up as the poison, by penetrating your skin, could harm you (as in the 1978 Marsh Harrier case above). If you are able to stay with the find, it would be best if the crime scene is left intact, so ring 999 and wait for the arrival of the police. If you are a dog owner be wary of your pet picking up items that could be contaminated.
- Hopefully, we have seen the end of pole traps but, if you find one, take a photograph, dial 999 and wait for the police.
- Support campaigns that highlight wildlife crime. Suggested changes in the law could include stricter conditions for those in possession of shotgun licenses,

licensing of gamekeepers, shoot owners made responsible and a ban on grouse shooting.

- Voice your concerns to your elective representatives – e.g. your MP, County Councillor, etc.
- Report any snippets of information to the RSPB Investigations team, even if it's only hearsay. This can help the RSPB build up a database of where wildlife crimes are being committed.
- Look at the RSPB's website link "Wild Birds and the Law" http://www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/ policy/wildbirdlaw/index.aspx

Anyone who suspects that a wildlife crime may have been committed, or has any information on the cases highlighted above, should contact Wildlife Crimes Officer PC Mark Bryant on 101, or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. If a crime is in progress or it a case of suspected poisoning, then ring 999 and await the arrival of the Police. Alternatively, call the RSPB's investigations team on 01767 680551.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks are due to Darren Underwood for collecting the injured Peregrine and taking it to a vet for further examination and to John Grant for his EADT article and comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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Ed: I too have wondered why gamekeepers, who I have generally found tend to be pro wildlife, can commit such disgraceful actions as Steve has documented. The answer is not a simple one. At its heart I suspect it is the nature of ownership of some shooting estates that is to blame. In many cases the owner's interest is a purely monetary one, with wildlife barely featuring in their calculations. As a result considerable pressure can be applied by these owners to gamekeepers to ensure game levels and thus income remains as high as possible. "If the game bag is down, you're out." Thus for some keepers it is a stark decision as they are between a rock and a hard place.

Ed: See page 48 for details of a special event to launch SOG's Campaign against raptor persecution at The Cut.

Editor: Having now read about bird persecutors, on a more positive note, we continue the series about farmers and conservation with a much larger operation - the 22,500-acre Elveden Estate that acts as a wildlife protector. And the scale of this enterprise reveals an impressive balance between farming practices and conservation measures.



Phil Brown, Paul Dickinson and James Holliday¹

Elveden Estate - a massive commitment to conservation

Since the original 15,000 acres were purchased by the first Earl of Iveagh in 1894 the Elveden Estate has undergone a major transformation - from Duleep Singh's sporting estate, via a major dairy unit pre and post the Second World War, to today's farm largely dedicated to root crops. But alongside this shooting to farming evolution has come a second transformation - from the nineteenth century sporting venue to, in the twenty-first century, Suffolk's largest privately-run conservation operation.

This transformation stemmed from the second Earl of Iveagh's 1920s visionary decision to ensure much of Elveden's land did not disappear under the plough, but remained dedicated to wildlife. Thus these

twin but diverse cultures were created and now effectively co-exist alongside each other. With the result that now the Estate comprises a central core of farmland, split by the recently upgraded A11, surrounded by a 'doughnut' of natural areas embracing fourteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), twelve County Wildlife Sites (CWS's), along with numerous woods and copses, heath and acid grassland, all linked by over 100 kms of hedgerows and Brecks pine shelterbelts.

Today the Elveden Estate has a 10,000 - acre commitment to conservation, while the remainder of the Estate is a highly successful farm unit that has diversified into several commercial enterprises, including supplying Christmas trees and 'instant' hedging, to operating a range of leisure and refreshment venues.

¹ James Holliday and Paul Dickinson lead the Elveden Estate Conservation Team



Elveden Estate Fact File

Total size: a single block of 10,000 ha (22,500 acres) of mainly sandy soil with flints over chalk. So the Estate is free draining (hence the concentration on root vegetable farming). At its highest the land is 60m above sea level. and at its lowest, 5m.

History: When the original 15,000 acres were bought by the Irish Guinness family in 1894, it was as a shooting estate made famous by Maharaja Duleep Singh, sited on the remnants of natural Breckland heath. In the mid-1920s the second Earl of Iveagh began to transform a substantial part of this shooting preserve into farmland. Early on livestock were introduced in order to improve the poor soils and build fertility. Only sheep (circa 2000 head) and a few cattle are now retained, principally for grazing purposes on the heathland and grassland.

Scale of operation: Elveden Estate has a total of ten separate viable businesses and is the largest single lowland farm unit in England with its own private road network of 30 miles. Interestingly the regular mowing of this system's road margins has significantly reduced road-kill.

Today 10,000 acres are farmed - principally for root vegetables (potatoes, onions, carrots and parsnips), plus cereals and peas to balance rotation and to maintain soil fertility. More rye is grown at Elveden than anywhere else in the LIK



While the Estate is careful about pesticide use, unfortunately the land is naturally weed infested and infertile, with soil pests proliferating, so pesticide use is vital. But fortunately the consequent more beneficial cropping for the farm indirectly supports conservation activities.



As the annual rainfall is not sufficient to sustain intensive cropping, two substantial reservoirs have been created ('Canada' and 'Old Eldon'). These exploit the underlying clay and hold up to 100 million gallons drawn from nine bore holes in the chalk aquifer below. There is one reservoir on each side of the A11, along with 130 miles of ring mains installed across the Estate to carry this water under pressure to the crops. The farm then employs low-level water sprinklers to reduce waste and to avoid scaring ground-nesting birds off their nests.

Conservation area: In addition to the cropped area, 3000 acres are on a long-term lease to the Forestry Commission; another 7500 acres are dedicated to wildlife, comprising 3500 acres of heathland and grassland and 4000 acres of forestry/woodlands. There are 128km of field margins under ELS; 322 shelter belts amounting to about 80 kms; plus over 10km of hedges.

Estate economics

With a multi-million pound turnover the Estate has around 200 employees, including part-timers. The conservation operation represents less than 1% of the business costs. Nonetheless it also contributes to Elveden's bottom line as a certain amount of income is derived from both the ELS and HLS schemes.

Due to the size of the Estate, coupled to the numbers of land parcels involved, Elveden operates two separate ELS and HLS² schemes (in fact it is one of the biggest such agreements in the country) that are split geographically by the A11. Both are due to expire in 2018.

The Brecks as a whole is renowned as a valuable landscape with a nationally significant level of biodiversity. It is floristically important and the Estate features six solely Schedule 8 species (affording special protection in UK law) and eight additional Red Data Book species, some of which are almost unique to Elveden. The Estate fully appreciates this significance and appreciates conservation is a key feature of the Elveden's perceived responsibility of care to protect its wildlife legacy. This is achieved

² See The Harrier, #176 for background information on these two schemes

by conservation being conducted in close conjunction with the Estate's commercial activities.



A massive conservation team

This is the largest private conservation operation in the county:

- It comprises almost 70 people, thus:

Under the Forestry and Conservation Manager (James Holliday) is a Conservation Officer (Paul Dickinson), four gamekeepers and two part-timers, one seasonal Stone Curlew assistant, two full-time deerstalkers, circa 45 pairs of "eyes and ears" (i.e. the Estate workers)/helping hands, five volunteers, plus a further group of five 'external' experts who meet quarterly.

An important feature of the conservation operation has been the change in the role of the gamekeepers. Instead of dealing exclusively with game birds they are now actively involved in conservation by undertaking more habitat management work, providing bird status data and two of them are now licensed to ring Stone Curlews!

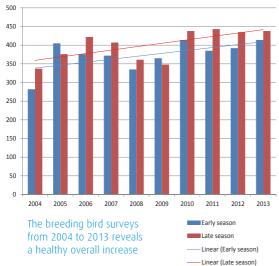
This substantial team is responsible for developing and maintaining the 'ring' of conservation around the intensively farmed centre. Almost 30% of the Estate's land is dedicated to conservation and within it are the fourteen SSSI's (covering a total area of 1400ha, with the largest single unit being Lakenheath Warren at 488 ha) as well as twelve separate CWS sites (totalling 60ha). Further the whole Breckland area (39,483ha) has been designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds.

Conservation activities

Within the overall aim of sustaining and promoting diversity throughout the Estate, a substantial programme of projects is already underway, grouped under two main categories, viz. habitat maintenance and species protection, though there is also a certain amount of public engagement work.

Ala indicated, the Team is also educationally oriented too and has undertaken a number of ad hoc presentations directed at the public, local communities and their own Estate staff. With regard to the last, when undertaking any habitat management duties, the rationale behind the task is always explained to the workers involved.

All of this activity is based upon extensive record keeping (which after all is at the core of all conservation - i.e. 'knowing what's where'), hence butterflies, moths and insects are recorded, there is a well-established on-going botany survey, a Veteran Tree study (monitoring almost 50 trees), a range of reptiles are recorded, while for farmland birds there is regular monitoring of key species by the gamekeepers:



Lord Iveagh

No less committed to conservation than his ancestors, the present fourth Earl of Iveagh was responsible for ensuring the farm ceased to be a drain on the Estate and secured its conservation arm. He writes: "Despite the scale of this business,



the Estate's wildlife legacy is uppermost in my mind. Elveden is a substantial and viable commercial concern but nevertheless, to my mind, it is critical its operation leaves the land and its wildlife in a better state than when I took over in 1992. This is why I have created and aim to sustain this conservation activity."

Almost all types of raptor are present on the Estate, for example the four species of owl, Common Buzzards, with nesting pairs up into double figures, plus the Brecks' iconic top raptor, the Goshawk, are noted



Finally,
each year, a
comprehensive
Conservation
Report is
produced by
the group
reviewing the
progress on all
of the projects
the Team is
involved with.





1. Habitat maintenance

- Heathland - this is one of the Estate's most notable habitats and all areas are SSSIs. So a programme of maintenance, which includes grazing, is constantly underway to retain condition on each parcel of heathland. This is recognised as a way to improve site biodiversity.



Also to this end the team has been operating its own forage harvester, a Ryetec C2000 CHS btw since 2008 and are very satisfied both with its performance removing

thatch on the Estate's heaths and grassland as well as the additional flexibility its purchase has afforded.

Heather is controlled, depending on the cycle of weather, on a 15-year progressive rotation; gorse is regularly removed and bracken contained where deemed appropriate. The Estate's objective is to retain a mosaic of key flora on each heath so as to maximise the species of plants, invertebrates and birdlife co-existing on it.

- Field margins - while these are up to a generous 12m wide grassy margin between field and shelterbelts, more generally they are 4-6 metres - this is a key component of the Estate's ELS agreement, serving to promote connectivity, maximise edge-effect and protect the shelterbelt's integrity. A whole-estate field margin review identified



the most floristically important margins and these now receive additional management in line with the County Wildlife Sites. These are forage harvested once in September to ensure maximum seed setting.

- Hedges - there are already 10km of natural hedges on the Estate. These are tended during the winter months and they are subject to a ten-year cycle of maintenance and replanting. The Estate has also installed its own 'instant Hedge' product on the Estate at a number of points as a way of securing habitat instantly!



- Shelterbelts there are 80 kms in all. Narrow belts warrant regular attention as they are vulnerable to strong winds. Thus there is an ongoing maintenance programme in hand (as thin belts need renewal every 100 years or so) with the team's objective being to render as many belts as possible self-sustaining through a combination of thinning and judicious planting.
- Woodland a programme of thinning during the winter months is on-going. Wherever opportunities present themselves the Woodland Team is alert to securing habitat connectivity - this being one of their primary duties.



- Ponds although there is little natural water on the Estate, pond restoration is on-going, most notably at Eriswell where there is a population of Water Shrew. The key to a successful pond restoration is perceived to be raising light levels and reducing leaf litter.
- Game strips many are scattered across the Estate. These also benefit wild birds, especially as the mix

of maize and millet in the strips has recently been improved with the introduction of sunflowers.

2. Species protection

- Invertebrates are at the core of a healthy food chain; despite the necessary use of pesticides on the farmed areas, the various insect studies show most populations remain healthy. For example, there are three beekeepers on the Estate operating over twenty hives.
- Stone Curlews the numbers breeding on the Estate's land had risen steadily to approaching 50 pairs with good long-term average productivity (0.63 fledged chicks per

pair) until the disastrous Spring 2013. That year only 26 pairs were recorded breeding. During 2014 there has been a slight increase to 28 pairs so, hopefully, the recovery is now resuming.



The Estate is working with Natural England on this project and it is recognised that, as disturbance levels increase on CRoW access land, farmland is becoming more attractive as a nesting site by this species and thus is of growing significance for the Stonies' recovery.

On farmland the routine is for the Estate's workers/equipment drivers to note carefully where nests are established, then the conservation team monitors them, intervenes if necessary and, at the appropriate time, will weigh the eggs and ring the chicks. All of the data is subsequently shared with Natural England.

- Barn Owls 20 boxes and natural nest sites are maintained and monitored for breeding pairs, with the chicks on the Estate being ringed and the records being forwarded to the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project.
- Bird boxes for commoner species are also provided for example a further 50 Blue Tit boxes will be installed later in 2014.



- Bats - a substantial 26m long hibernaculum was funded and built by the Estate on

Icklingham Plains in 2014. It is expected this will take several years to establish, so it is obviously early days, nevertheless its use is still being closely monitored. A further 70 bat boxes have been put up across the Estate. Also five 'bat bridges' have been installed by the Highways Agency on sections of the duelled A11³.



³ Where a number of Badger gates have also been installed.





- Rabbits - the Estate is participating in an investigation into the causes of and scale of the Rabbit population decline (which are critical to the maintenance of heathland) arising from myxomatosis, haemorrhagic disease (RHD) and the growing incidence of tapeworm.

- Winter bird feeding is provided through a minimum of 150ha of wintering stubbles with wild bird cover and seed mix every year - although in practice the actual area is usually well above this.

 Predator control and deer culling - Elveden remains a shooting estate so a component of the game keeping remains ensuring reductions in key predators such as Crow, Fox, Jay, Magpie, Stoat and Weasel - which greatly benefits the productivity of groundnesting birds.

In addition, with an estimated 800 head of deer on the Estate, the majority being Muntjac and Fallow, along with some Roe and Red Deer, deer control is critical too as their potential for damage to trees and crops is substantial. Also this culling is thought to reduce the scale of road traffic accidents involving deer across the Estate.

- Flora - as important as the fauna is the diverse range of rare plants to be found across the Estate. Many of the County Wildlife Sites were designated for their floristic value and over twenty rare plants such as Small Alison, Lizard Orchid, Perennial Knawel, Spanish Catchfly, Breckland Thyme and Purple-stem Cat's-tail can be found on them. While some are purely Schedule 8, others are Red Data Book species. All these sites are monitored and many require the

Estate to perform a range of careful management practices, from considerate mowing to more drastic actions to encourage particular plants - such as recently the removal of several hundred square metres of topsoil at one site.





3. Public engagement

- Staff environmental training is on-going.
- Dialogues with the public, especially communities adjacent to the Estate, are regularly undertaken.
- Interpretation is planned, for the area around the Restaurant and Food Hall.

The differing impacts of the newly duelled A11

The re-aligned A11 now amounts to a much wider corridor dissecting the Estate. While some habitat has been lost to it⁴, the added farm access roads, bridges and underpass will hopefully bring some operational benefit to Elveden Farm. Apart from this development, the upgraded road has raised two conservation/public engagement issues:

 Despite the trade interruptions arising from the duelling work, because of its convenient position in relation to





the new A11 junction, Elveden Estate Shops, Café and Inn is probably now in a healthy position to attract many more visitors (it possibly being the perfect half-way house between London and the North Norfolk coast). This situation presents the Conservation Team with an opportunity for further significant public engagement and education.

• The impact of the pedestrian/equine underpass at the Elveden War Memorial, by connecting two previously separated sections of the Estate, may have the potential to funnel more visitors through the Estate, thereby raising disturbance levels. In due course this might also have a deleterious impact on the Estate's conservation efforts. Consequently there could be a need for enhanced control measures and further interpretation/education activity around this significant north-south route in the Estate's centre.



⁴Through mitigation measures at Deadman's Grave SSSI, viz. the clearance of 'The Willows', Stone Curlews are expected to benefit from the provision of additional breeding habitat. And a BTO observer has already pointed out that this clearance seems to have been of benefit to Woodlarks in 2014.

Conclusions

Today Elveden Estate is a massive enterprise both in terms of its farming and conservation operations. Undoubtedly the visionary decision by the second Earl to promote Elveden's wildlife legacy and actively seek to protect it, set the Estate's impressive evolution in train. And now almost a century later it is still evolving, for the partnership between farming and conservation is of necessity a dynamic one.

The catalyst for the most recent step-change appears to have been the Estate agreeing to take on responsibility for monitoring and maintaining the Stone Curlew project in 2002. This decision involved the farm and its Conservation Team working even more closely together. With this increased

involvement on both sides came a better understanding that has served to accelerate this process of change still further.

Now, with the farm's help, the Estate's substantial Conservation Team is not only improving the status of iconic birds like the Stone Curlew, Barn Owl and Goshawk, but protecting bats and rare flowers as well as even assisting the humble Rabbit. Nearly every aspect of Elveden's flora and fauna continues to benefit from a mix of considerate farming practices coupled to careful conservation measures.

Importantly the farm remains extraordinarily productive, not despite the Estate's conservation efforts but perhaps because of its partnership with them - long may this continue.



Edward Jackson

'SoS Swifts'

Most of Suffolk's Swifts left their breeding sites around the county in August, although a few were still being seen in early September.



Adults, non-breeding adults (most don't start breeding until they are four years old) and this year's juveniles are now ridina hiah in the African skies of distant places such as The Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi, up to 8000 km from here. As we await the welcome return of these iconic summer visitors next May it's worrying to note that fewer and fewer are returning to breed each year - not just in Suffolk, but across the UK. British Trust for Ornithology surveys indicate a 40% decline over the past 20 years.

SOG and SWT initiative

So SOG is now working closely with Suffolk Wildlife Trust in a project we call 'SoS Swifts' - Save Our Suffolk Swifts! It's designed to raise awareness of these concerns and to give a local dimension to the fantastic work you can find on the Swift Conservation and the Action for Swifts websites.

Our first public event took place in Stowmarket on 8 July. Over 40 residents, many of them SOG or SWT members, enjoyed an illustrated talk on the amazing natural history of Swifts and what could be done to halt their decline. There may be several reasons for the decreases, but designs for modern buildings and refurbishment of older buildings often unnecessarily deprive Swifts of suitable nest sites. Including artificial nest chambers in new buildings and attaching special nest boxes to older buildings are positive steps we can take to reverse the trend.

After the talk we were able to step outside the hall and watch Swifts over and around St Peter's Church, where a group of residents had recently put up special Swift nest boxes under the eaves of the chancel. By playing loop recordings of the birds' screaming calls for a period each evening, it's hoped that first-time breeders will be tempted into using these artificial sites when they return next year. One established pair was seen using a crevice in the Church nave, but we were delighted to learn that yet other Swifts had started to show interest in the new boxes within just a few minutes of starting to play the recordings!

Next year

More events are now being planned for other Suffolk communities in spring and summer 2015. These will be advertised as widely as possible through the media and on the SOG and SWT websites. Also, if you would like to help organise an event in your local town or village, we would be very pleased to hear from you. Just leave a message on SOG online

BINS Summer

June 2014

A singing **Quail** was heard just west of Westleton village on 1st, two adult **Spoonbills** were also present on the scrape at Hollesley Marsh RSPB 1st. Further **Spoonbills** were seen on Hollesley Marsh 7th, south over Walberswick, with three in off at Southwold and one on the scrape at Minsmere all 8th.

A smart **Pectoral Sandpiper** was present for four days on the winter at Trimley Marsh SWT 3rd-6th. Two **Common Cranes** were seen from Whin Hill, Minsmere for several days early in the month that may have indicated that something was going on?

A **Black Stork** roaming the UK finally entered Suffolk airspace on the 5th, initially being seen south over Lowestoft, then Kessingland and finally Covehithe before drifting off north-west and disappearing. Yet another **Raven** was seen, this time north over Woodbridge 7th, the same day also saw a first-summer **Montagu's Harrier** over Island Mere, Minsmere.

A singing **Savi's Warbler** took up residence at Westwood Marsh, Walberswick from 8-15th at least, also noted from this site were **Great White Egret** over 9th and **Spoonbill** 10th and **Marsh Warbler** on 13th.

The 13th saw two **Black Kites** in the county, one over Westwood Marsh, Walberswick and a lingering bird over Bawdsey–Alderton area that turned out to be an escapee bearing a ring!

A smart adult **Rose-coloured Starling** took up temporary residence along Pinewood Avenue, Lowestoft from 15-30th at least and was noted roosting in the Lowestoft harbour.

The 19th saw several **Bee-eaters** reported, one south over Dunwich Heath then west over Minsmere, then two together over

the reedbed by Island Mere Minsmere and Eastbridge; a **Glossy Ibis** was also noted on the scrape.

What was presumably the same Glossy Ibis was now at Boyton 21st then Hollesley the following day, before being seen briefly at Trimley Marsh also on 22nd.

The escaped **Black Kite** from Alderton was now being widely seen in the county, with sightings from Theberton, Dunwich and Reydon on 21st before the bird settled down in the Wrentham area from 22nd until the month's end.

A second-summer **Caspian Gull** was seen on and off from Botany Marsh, Snape, Walberswick and Minsmere towards the end of the month.

A **Great White Egret** spent one day on Orfordness 27th and finally good numbers of **Red Kite** were noted throughout this period.

July 2014

The adult **Rose-coloured Starling** continued to prove popular in Lowestoft and was finally seen on 19th on Burnt Hill Lane. The wandering **Black Kite** was noted along the A146 Burnt Hill Lane, Lowestoft 3rd before returning back to Wrentham 5th.

Suffolk's highest count of **Mediterranean Gull** was achieved with 310 birds being seen in fields at Walberswick 11th, also several sightings of **Caspian Gull** were forthcoming from this area throughout the month of various ages/moults.

A white colour-ringed **Glossy Ibis** spent an evening on the scrape at Carlton Marsh 6th. A **Storm Petrel** was noted north off Corton late afternoon 9th and a **Great White Egret** was at Minsmere 11th presumably north over Ashwell, Sizewell the following day and a colour-ringed **Great White Egret** spent two days 12-13th at Trimley Marsh SWT.

Up to five Wood Sandpipers were on the

newly formed scrape at Carlton Marsh SWT 12th along with eight **Garganey.** Twenty-one **Little Gulls** graced the scrape at Minsmere on 12th, this number was to rise to 75 birds by 25th of which most were in full summer plumage.

BINS broke big news early morning of 14th concerning a report of an adult **Great Knot** on Breydon Water! The bird spent two days mainly on the north side of the Breydon channel but, on two occasions, ventured to the south shore and therefore those lucky enough to be present added it to their Suffolk list!



The 15th also saw a top-drawer wader grace our county in the form of an adult **Collared Pratincole** that spent thirteen days on the scrape at Minsmere finally departing on the 27th, only to be seen in Northumberland the following day! This is the first sighting of this wader in the county since 1996.

Quails were heard from Wrentham 17th and two birds at Timworth 17th until the month's end.



What was probably the ornithological event of the birding calendar was the discovery of a family party of **Black-winged Stilts** (two adults and four juveniles) at Cavenham Pits 19th! Although the nest was apparently not seen, breeding of this Mediterranean wader must have occurred somewhere near-by, as small chicks had been seen earlier.

Great White Egrets were seen north offshore from Kessingland 19thand two birds at Lakenheath Fen RSPB from 22nd. A **Balearic Shearwater** was noted close north offshore from Thorpeness 20th.

A colour-ringed **Bufflehead** was discovered on the reservoir at Trimley Marsh SWT 22nd. This bird has previously been seen in both Norfolk and Lothian, and a juvenile **Black Tern** was also present on 23rd.

A **Purple Heron** was seen at the west end of Oulton Broad 26th, a **Honey Buzzard** was also reported the same day over Kyson Point, Woodbridge. An interesting report of a **Corncrake** was forthcoming from Battisford near Stowmarket 27th.

A female **Red-footed Falcon** spent ten minutes over Minsmere sluice before drifting off south-west.

Throughout the month there were good numbers of passage waders along the coast involving **Wood Sandpipers**, **Spotted Redshank**, plus the odd **Curlew Sandpiper**.

August 2014

A moulting adult **Franklin's Gull** was seen on Breydon Water for two hours on the 1st but was never seen on the Suffolk side and then flew north. The escaped **Black Kite** continued to show very well at Wrentham.

A **Pied Flycatcher** was a notable early migrant at Thorpeness Caravan Site 2nd.

Good numbers of **Caspian Gull** were reported throughout the month, mainly from the Blyth Estuary and inland at Great Livermere. 70+ **Little Gull** were noted off Sizewell feeding off the rigs 2nd plus two **Arctic Terns**.

The scrape at Minsmere was alive with waders with many passage waders coming and going, notably **Wood, Curlew, Green** and **Common Sandpipers, Curlew, Knot, Ruff** and a good number of **Dunlin**. A **Pied Flycatcher** was a notable early migrant at Thorpeness Caravan Site 2nd.



A **Great White Egret** was seen at Thorpeness late in the day 3rd and again Lakenheath Fen RSPB 4th. The **Black-winged Stilts** from Cavenham remained, though became rather mobile with an individual being noted at Great Livermere 3rd.

A probable **Hen Harrier** passed through Hazelwood Marsh all too quickly before identification could be confirmed 6th; however the **Honey Buzzard** that passed through on 8th was safely identified.

The first report of **Sooty Shearwater** was forthcoming on 9th as it flew north off Ness Point, the following day saw a large **Shearwater sp** off LBO and six **Black Terns** along with three **Manx Shearwaters** passed Southwold.

Spoonbill numbers peaked at 27 on Havergate Island with up to seven at Minsmere 14-15th and six over Carlton Marsh 16th. **Great White Egrets** were noted north over the reserve at Minsmere 15th, then from Whin Hill 18th and Carlton Marsh 19th.

Wood Warblers were seen at LBO 12th, Falkenham 14th and Shingle Street 20th. A **Black-necked Grebe** drifting south

offshore at LBO was unseasonal on 13th. Five **Garganey** were present on the reservoir at Trimley Marsh SWT 18th and a **Short-eared Owl** was seen the same day at Shingle Street.

Two **Whinchat** at Shingle Street 13th were the first of several reports for the month. A **Barred Warbler** was seen at Thorpeness 15th though generally elusive and it or another was reported from the beach at Minsmere 19th.



An **Osprey** spent most of the month on the River Alde viewable from Hazelwood Marsh with a further bird being spotted south over Falkenham Marsh 22nd.

The 20th saw a female **Ferruginous Duck** on Island Mere that remained until 31st at least, though it would disappear for long periods as it spent time within the reeds.

Long-tailed Skuas were seen off Sizewell with three juveniles north 20th, the following day two birds passed off Kessingland.

Things started to liven up when favourable sea-watching conditions prevailed on 26th resulting in several Long-tailed Skuas being noted along the coast, also good numbers of both Great and Arctic Skua were observed along with the odd Pomarine Skua, Sooty Shearwater and up to three Sabine's Gull (adult and two juveniles).









An Icterine Warbler was seen within the compound at LBO late in the day 26th, the following day a Barred Warbler was seen at LBO and Wryneck trapped along the north wall at Minsmere. There was a good influx of Pied Flycatchers at coastal locations with the highest count being of five at Thorpeness and good numbers of Whinchat throughout.



The following days and (28th–30th) produced some notable birds now that the rain had stopped! The north of the county produced both **Red-backed Shrike** and **Icterine**

Warbler at Corton; Southwold chipped in with not one but two Greenish Warblers, Minsmere held up to three Wryneck, Felixstowe produced an educational Subalpine Warbler and a Blyth's Reed Warbler was trapped on Orfordness.



September 2014

Early month saw good numbers of common migrants along the coast that included Whinchat, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Common Redstart and Willow Warbler.



The **Eastern Subalpine Warbler** remained at the Customs House along View Point Road, Felixstowe until 2nd, although it often remained very elusive during its stay.

Minsmere produced a juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** which spent an evening on Island Mere 2nd, the female **Ferruginous Duck** remained and also juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** seen offshore, further **Long-tailed Skuas** were noted off LBO 3rd and Thorpeness 7th and 14th.

Wrynecks were well represented in the county with single birds being seen (unless otherwise indicated) at Aldeburgh, Bawdsey, Dingle Marsh, Minsmere (two), LBO (three), Benacre (two), Westleton Heath, North Warren (two), Orfordness and finally Thorpeness Common.

An **Ortolan Bunting** was found late in the day at LBO 5th also a **Great White Egret** (south over Southwold) and **Honey Buzzard** in off at Dingle Marsh were found the same day.



A female **Lesser Grey Shrike** was found early on 6th along the river wall between Shingle Street and Hollesley Marsh that remained until 7th and proved rather popular during its two-day stay.

Two **Barred Warblers** were found at Thorpeness 7th with one bird remaining until 18th. **Ospreys** were seen over Bawdsey 6th, Stour Estuary and Kessingland 7th, Minsmere 18th & 19th.

Two juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes** were found at Gun Hill, Southwold 8th, with one bird still present the following day. A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was present at Minsmere on 10-14th and again 18th. Dark morph juvenile **Honey Buzzards** were seen at LBO before flying north-west along the Orwell 11th and Alderton 14th.



Red-backed Shrikes



Finally, a first-winter **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was trapped at LBO 15th and another was found by the allotments on the evening of 17th at Thorpeness and a **Red-backed Shrike** was present at LBO 19th.

Field Trip Reports

Gi Grieco

Havergate Island

9 August 2014

Leader: John Grant

A bright, breezy day greeted the members congregated at Orford Quay for the annual trip to Havergate Island.

After boarding the boat Dave Fairhurst the warden piloted us to the island for the day. With the tide high and still coming in we didn't see the usual waders from the boat en route, but a shout did alert all to seven Spoonbills flying in.

Storm surge damage

This was our first visit here since the tidal storm surge last November that caused damage to the hides, so Dave suggested we head to the hide to the north. It was sad to see the demise of the old visitor centre, although the attached hide was still standing, if somewhat uneven!

As has been the usual practice in recent years, our leader John suggested we each pick species to count, thereby at the end we were able to hand over a full species count to the wardens - an interesting as well as useful contribution. What was prevalent was the number of gulls present and we were told that there had been a good breeding season for Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Common Terns had also bred there and we found at least two families with young, one of which had quite small, downy chicks. Also present in good numbers were Avocet and further waders including three

Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlin, Redshank, Curlew, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit and a good count of 22 Greenshank that then flew off to the south.

Good counts

Visiting the other hides we picked up more species with some nice Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, lots of Little Egrets and at least sixteen Spoonbills. A couple of Kestrel hunting over, along with a Marsh Harrier and, in the distance, up to three Common Buzzards.



One of the highlights of the day occurred during lunch when a Chinese Water Deer was seen heading along towards the front of the hide. Those outside were called in and all had superb views of this deer, more often seen across the channel on Orfordness, but occasionally occurs on Havergate. Another five Greenshank flew in and Sandwich Tern was noted.

Some headed up to the cottage to see if any Hares were present, fortunately some had survived the storm surge, but we were unlucky this time. A Whimbrel was heard and there were again numerous gulls toward Dovey. Before long it was time to head back to the jetty to be picked up by Dave to return us to the quay, where we handed over our list of species with count totals and gave our thanks both to Dave and our leader for the day, John.

STANTA visit 2014

July 5th 2014

Leader: Paul Holness

Unlike last year it was not a blazing day as the hire bus progressed to West Tofts to meet up with the other SOG members and our leader Paul Holness. Shortly before the



coach's arrival at the camp a Siskin flew over the waiting SOG West Suffolk contingent, followed shortly after by a Pied Wagtail.

The best view in East Anglia

As usual first stop was Frog Hill and, as the party admired the best view in East Anglia, while the sky looked threatening the rain stayed away. At first the birds preferred to be heard rather than seen. However we were rewarded by a Spotted Flycatcher active in the upper branches (surprisingly Paul's first of the year - Editor: but, as Jonathan's other article in this issue shows, they do seem to have

been running late this year). In addition the following bird species were noted: Yellowhammer, Skylark, Wren, Blackcap, Dunnock, Carrion Crow, Woodpigeon, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Pheasant, Common Treecreeper, Magpie, Linnet, two Kestrels and several Long-tailed Tits. We re-bussed and drove slowly across the grassland towards Fowlmere, where the water level rises and falls in apparent inverse proportion to the rainfall. We debussed and walked amongst numerous stands of colourful Wild Thyme in the short

sward. Suddenly the rain arrived and we had to scurry to the shelter of nearby trees. When it stopped we had good views of the mere, though it proved somewhat shrunken. Here the birders noted Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Redstart (adults and young), Goldfinch, Tufted Duck, Coot, Little Grebe, Moorhen, Mallard, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and a hunting Hobby. We then took a roundabout route back to the bus via a large oak where an Egyptian Goose last year had used a hole previously occupied by a Barn Owl. On the final leg back to the bus we skirted a large pond attended by abandoned APCs.

Now we headed for Smokers Hole where attention focussed on Stonechats and in particular one male unusually perched at the very top of a large oak tree. In addition several Meadow Pipits were noted, along with a Common Buzzard.

Next we moved on to a scenic ride, during which various birds were sighted, including Sand Martin and Swallows, until we reached the bridge over the Wissey flowing clear and strong. There we processed up and down the river and watched a pair of Grey Wagtails,

plus a Jay, a pair of Buzzards, a Hobby (detected through local House Martin alarm calls), a male Sparrowhawk, Marsh Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, with a Kestrel family party on the nearby church roof.

After lunch it was Stone Curlew time however, this year, we were unlucky and drew a blank. But compensation came in the form of a Woodlark, fluttering near the dark woods, who proceeded to serenade us from on high as three Roe Deer crossed in front of us.

Next at the Harrier Landing Strip, he noted that Viper's Bugloss continued to dominate and commented that the plants on this calcareous ground were as good as ever. There in addition to the Bugloss he recorded: Restharrow, Bladder Campion, Greater Knapweed, Sickle Medick, Basil Thyme, Wild Carrot, Kidney Vetch, Self-heal, Wild Parsnip, Knapweed Broomrape, Zigzag Clover (not noticed here before) and Wild Privet. Earlier in the day at Barnham Common from the coach he had noted the Breckland speciality Hoary Mullein. Not a bad haul for the day.



Butterflies galore

This has been a splendid year for butterflies and the total for the day recorded by the members was eleven species thus: Small Skipper, Essex Skipper. Large Skipper, Small Blue, Small Heath. Meadow Brown, Large White.

Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Ringlet and Small Copper. In addition a Five-spot Burnet Moth and numerous Cinnabar Moth caterpillars were spotted.

A truly rich habitat

In spite of the weather it had been a good day eliciting well over forty bird species, eleven species of butterfly and almost thirty different notable plants detected - a truly rich habitat. Many thanks once again to the MOD for preserving this valuable stretch of Brecks countryside and our leader and escort, Paul Holness.

Botanical bounty

One of the great features of STANTA is the profusion of plants untouched by farm sprays. At Smokers Hole our botanist Adam noted Weld, Wild Mignonette, Biting Stonecrop and Canadian Fleabane. En route to Fowlmere he commented not only on the Common Thyme, but recorded Ladies Bedstraw, Viper's Bugloss, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Henbit Dead-nettle, Cotton Thistle, Water Forget-me-not, Toadflax and Marsh Bedstraw. Then at Langford he recorded Black Mullein, Meadowsweet and Pink Water Speedwell.

Our countryside - an alternative present

Since the Second World War the way we farm the land has changed radically. Intensification has increased yields to levels that would have seemed impossible then, but this has been at the expense of biodiversity.

Indeed, in Breckland much of the countryside had already been reshaped even before then, because large areas of poor grazing land were purchased by the state to create commercial coniferous forest in the 1920s. So the Breckland we know today is nothing like the Breckland of a hundred years ago. Gone are the endless warrens and dunes where Ringed Plovers nested.

But one corner of Breckland largely escaped these radical changes. In 1942 120km² of land north of Thetford was taken over by the army to create the Stanford Training Area [*Ed: i.e. STANTA*]. Four villages were evacuated in the process, and little remains of them except their forlorn churches that the army were forbidden from demolishing.

The whole area is still very much in use by the military to this day.

The view from the low wooded hills near the centre of the range is unlike anything else in East Anglia. Looking out through a gap in the trees rough pasture and scattered gorse stretch literally as far as the eye can see. The well-travelled birder finds himself scanning his memory to recall a similar scene. Perhaps the closest is the Spanish dehessa, and you could be forgiven for expecting a Montagu's Harriers to float past. But no this is a softer land, and you remind yourself that although the scene before you does not match your image of the English countryside, this is still East Anglia.

You might be tempted to think then that you were looking at Breckland as it was in 1942, when the army moved in. But that would be a mistake. True, there are very few buildings except those constructed purely for army training purposes, and, joy of joys, the natural Breckland meres and marshy hollows have never been drained for intensive agriculture. And the lanes are narrow, largely devoid of traffic, and at least in some areas have flower-rich verges with masses of showy Dark Mullein and an abundance of butterflies.



These verges are similar to those beside the wider tracks in Thetford Forest, which have the same profusion of flowers and butterflies for the same reason: they have never been 'improved' by addition of herbicide or fertiliser, and they have never been reseeded with vigorous agricultural grasses. But in other ways the use of the land has changed to meet modern demands. There are sheep everywhere [Ed: 8000 **head**], surely at far greater density than would have been possible a hundred years ago when the farmer was reliant on the hay cropped from his own pasture to see them through hard winters, and before EU subsidies encouraged overstocking. So, although full-scale modern farming is not possible in the training area, the farmland has changed enough to limit the rarer Breckland flowers to a few pockets of unfarmed land. Consequently this land is not pristine Breckland, but it does have benefits for wildlife. It is a big enough area of less intensively managed land to allow some species to hang on here. Amongst the birds. the best example is the Redstart. Even in July, when the dispersal from breeding areas is already underway, you can see them flitting along the hedges. Between 50 and 100 singing males have been counted here in recent years, virtually all the Redstarts in Norfolk. Clearly this is evidently a big enough area of suitable habitat for a viable population to survive. There are still isolated pockets of good habitat in Thetford Forest for Redstarts, but none big enough for more than two or three pairs, which simply isn't big enough for long-term survival.

Other birds have not been so lucky. Whinchats hung on here for a few years longer than in other Breckland areas, but alas they have all gone now, and the once common Wheatear is now also all but lost as a breeding bird. Spotted Flycatchers seem to do no better here than anywhere else.



Site management is primarily for military training purposes, secondly for agriculture and thirdly for nature. Despite that, there is little obvious sign of military wear and tear in most of the training area. Indeed, more bare ground would benefit nature: it is so valuable for rare plants and invertebrates and it is almost disappointing not to see bomb craters and tank churned ground everywhere. In fact the majority of the land is quite manicured. It looks as though agriculture is if anything a rather strong second objective. And why is there a requirement to re-turf patches where military training causes loss of vegetation? If left bare these would surely be of benefit.

No doubt if the management priorities were changed, more could be achieved for wildlife. But the message seems clear enough: large blocks of relatively good habitat such as this can benefit certain species, but for many they cannot act as refuges from the changing world around them. Whilst this training area might superficially look like England in the 1940s, and certainly seems to have changed little since the 1960s when Captain Mainwaring marched his 'troops' along these lanes, the reality is that it is an alternative present. Admittedly, a present that is kinder to biodiversity than unhindered intensive agriculture, but one that is still very much affected by the 21st century.

Birding from town to country

Having recently made the short (and hopefully one-way) migratory journey from West London to the village of Dalham in West Suffolk, and with a life-long passion for birds and wildlife, getting to know the local birding hotspots was as important to me as re-establishing my landscaping business. Immediate novelties for an urbanite were Red Kites and Buzzards over the cottage while moving our furniture in, later followed by heart-warming sights of House Martins rebuilding their nest under the eaves of the thatch and a Spotted Flycatcher hunting from our TV aerial.

London local patch

In London my local greenspace of any ornithological interest was Wormwood Scrubs, an 183-acre site perhaps better known for its jail-birds, but regularly watched by the dedicated David Lindo (aka 'The Urban Birder') and his band of merry 'Scrubbers'.

With a list of over 150 species since 1980, including surprising rarities for an urban area such as Great Grey Shrike, Dartford Warbler, Rosefinch, Ortolan Bunting and Richard's Pipit, we 'Scrubbers' never quite managed to reach our illusive annual target of 100 species.

Thus to see 115 in my first four months of sporadic birding at my now-favoured Cavenham Heath was quite a revelation. I'm avoiding the use of the word 'patch' here as, for me, it suggests some kind of ownership and from my experience in the London area especially, this seemed to lead to spats between birders and an aggressive competition that I was uncomfortable with. I'm also not a great keeper of 'lists' though I do believe in the importance of good record keeping, and would encourage anyone who does not already submit sightings to the BTO's 'BirdTrack' to do so, especially now it's possible to submit even casual sightings in the field with their 'App' for Android and iPhone. [Ed: But for the County recorder's sakes make sure you get the record's location correctly labelled.]





A new favoured site

Of all the potential West Suffolk sites, Cavenham Heath quickly became my most regularly visited, largely because of its proximity and pushchair accessibility (as I usually have my one-year-old son in towhopefully a birder in the making).

Cavenham, with its mix of habitats: heathland, grassland, wetland and woodland, attracts a wide variety of birds (over 200 species I've been told) and other wildlife. While its sheer beauty and tranquillity was another draw.

As well as its key breeding species such as Stone Curlew, Woodlark and Tree Pipit, I've also recently watched Little Ringed Plovers in their bat-like display flight, displaying Goshawk, roding Woodcock, day-time hunting Little Owl, passage Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Grey Plover and Green Sandpiper. I've yet to find a Nightjar, though perhaps the weather just needs to warm up a bit for them to show.

[Ed: They were subsequently heard - M. Taylor pers comm]

West Suffolk gems

As with most birders, I was already aware of the importance of West Suffolk and some of its unique habitats. I made at least annual diversions, from my journeys to see family in Norwich, to visit Lakenheath Fen, for the chance of Cranes, Golden Orioles, Bittern and Hobby's as well as nearby Weeting Heath for Stone Curlew and Woodlark. But it is only since moving here that I've discovered gems such as Lackford Lakes, Chippenham Fen, Livermere Lake and nearby Micklemere. May Day Farm and the marked bird trail was also a new find and, on my first two visits, I was rewarded with great views of Parrot Crossbill, displaying Goshawk, singing Woodlarks, Tree Pipits and lots of Common Crossbill.

I'm still a 'newby' with hopefully lots more to learn and discover of what the area has to offer, but having just joined SOG, and with the help of friendly local Group members, I've had a fantastic introduction to West Suffolk, and will resist the lure of the coast and it's 'rares' to concentrate on getting to know the west better still.

Editor: And now for another of my hobby horses, a major persecutor of our bird life...

Phil Brown

Cats - domesticated pet or wild killer?



For years a finger has been pointed at the domestic cat as a bird assassin in our midst. Over ten years ago the late Chris Mead of the BTO arrived at a figure of over twenty million bird deaths per annum that could be attributed to UK cats (pers. comm.).

Cats are undoubtedly extremely proficient hunters and many others since have hazarded a guess as to the annual total. For instance Chris Packham in 2012 asserted UK cats were responsible for 50 million bird deaths a year. As will emerge, the issue of measurement in this area is a fraught with

problems. Estimates of cats' impact on bird numbers have consequently varied widely over the years and, speaking globally, the humble cat has also been blamed for the actual extinction of many bird species - 33 in all⁵. To confuse matters still further the

Mammal Society has published a figure of 275 million animals being killed each year by pet cats in Britain⁶. Whereas the animal behaviourist John Bradshaw in his excellent book 'Cat sense'⁷ in 2013 moderates this estimate with a much lower total, close to 130 million.

Domestic cats

Surprisingly there is even debate concerning

the total population of the domestic cat in the UK. John Bradshaw judges the total to presently be around 9 million⁸, but there are recent signs this total is rising. As the paragraph above demonstrates, estimates of their impact on birds vary even more widely. But, over the last five years, both here and in the States, there have been attempts at more rigorous research.

Recently the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI), along with the US Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a review of studies that had examined cats' predatory prowess. Disturbingly this review concluded that cats "are the top threat to

Memorably the lighthouse keeper's cat, 'Tibbles', who single 'handedly' saw off the nocturnal, flightless passerine, the Stephen Island Wren in 1894. But rats have also proved no less problematic, being responsible for or contributing to many other island species extinctions.

⁶ This figure is widely cited, even though the basis by which it was calculated has been shown to be flawed and grossly exaggerates their kill rate. In fact in 2003 a revised-down total of 92 million for a five-month period was issued.

^{7 &#}x27;Cat sense. The feline enigma revealed' by John Bradshaw, Allen Lane 2013

In 2005 the market research company Mintel calculated it to be 7 million cats, then a telephone survey in 2007 estimated the UK households owned 10.3 million cats, whilst in 2013/4 the Pet Foods Manufacturing Association (PFMA) concluded there were 8-8.5 million. So Bradshaw's estimate of 9 million seems a reasonable compromise.

US wildlife"9. They estimated that the total numbers of birds killed was four times as many than had previously been calculated. Unfortunately this estimate appeared under the banner headline 'Cats killing billions of animals in the US'. This type of inflammatory journalistic headline does not encourage a more balanced view of this issue emerging. Fortunately British researchers seem to have been providing a more equable perspective. But, as these have all arisen from small-scale studies, care still needs to be exercised over extrapolating from this data to provide UK level figures.

One 2009/10 study was conducted by Rebecca Thomas of Reading University over a two-year period and involved fitting various measuring devices to over 200 local pet cats. This found that each cat returned an average of 4.39 animals across a year. This, if true for the UK's estimated nine million cats, would result in a kill total of 39.51 million mammals, birds and amphibians.

But to arrive at a realistic UK kill total you also have to factor in the kills that are not returned, something that is yet to be definitively investigated. Although one study estimated a 'return rate' of 30 per cent, but this was only based on data obtained from 11 cats!

Still, using this indicative figure as a starting point, you arrive at an annual killing rate of almost 120 million animals. As birds commonly represent between 20 and 25% of the catch, this would suggest the average avian kill to be of the order of 25 - 30 million - reasonably close to the 'Venerable' Mead's earlier estimate.

A second study, featured in a BBC Horizon programme¹⁰ in 2013, fitted 50 cats in the village of Shamley Green, Surrey with GPS collars and cams. After a week it emerged that by no means all were hunters and that a total of only fifteen prey items had been returned, of which about a quarter were birds. As noted above, we believe this return possibly represents between a quarter and a third of animals actually caught, thus the total bird kill would have been of the order of 12 - 16 in a single week, equating to 0.2 to 0.3 per cat. On this basis the UK population would account for 93.6 million bird kills per annum. But such a simplistic extrapolation as this is dangerous as it does not allow for the lower kill rates attributed to urban cats as evidenced by the Reading cats (the majority of 'moggies'), nor for the known reduced kill rate operating during the winter. So we conclude the top-end figure in the Reading study's overall lower estimates are probably a better reflection of the real situation.

However, Rebecca's latest conclusions (published in 2012) for her Reading study remain disturbing as to the real effect of even this lower figure, namely: "Comparisons with estimates of the density of six common bird prey species indicated that cats killed numbers equivalent to adult density on c. 39% of occasions. Population modeling studies suggest that such predation rates could significantly reduce the size of local bird populations for common urban species."

So even at the lower level there is still a significant problem.

Quote from Dr. Pete Marra of SCBI.

^{&#}x27;The secret life of cats' was aired on 13 June 2013



Feral cats

If the above population figures have been debated, then those for feral cats are open to dispute. Estimates for the total population vary even more widely. The only published figures noted by the author have

been around one million with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust estimating the population at 800,000, the RSPCA at over one million and elsewhere up to 2.5 million. Sadly the latter figure did not explain how the estimate was arrived at, so it is difficult to light on a reliable total, but around one million may be a safe guesstimate. However this figure is being increased as we speak with reportedly, due to the recession, more owners abandoning their cats.

What is certainly known about feral cats is that they tend to hunt twice as often as the domestic cat, that they display more hunting prowess and can roam further afield. As a consequence they have much greater impact as, of necessity, they are extremely effective killing machines. Fortunately for birds this feral cat diet is more likely to involve rabbits and rats than birds. And in the case of young rats this diet probably actually benefits many bird species by severely curtailing the numbers of these efficient nest robbers.

These beneficial side effects apart, the estimates for feral cats' kills suggest they could be responsible for closer to 30 million bird deaths per annum, giving a UK combined cat annual kill of a frightening 55-60 million!

Discussion

This total confirms cats are major bird predators¹¹ and thus a real problem, not just for birds but also for all small UK land vertebrates. Although domestic cats are not the main problem, especially as quite a high percentage of them are well enough fed so as not to appear to hunt at all, even the RSPCA concludes it would be prudent for cat owners to adopt some measures that could benefit wildlife. The fixing of a belled collar (using a snap-open type connector) is claimed to halve hunting capability, equally the attachment of an ultrasonic device, or a neoprene bib to their collars (to interfere with their pounce) or night curfews (when much predation takes place) will all obviously severely curtail these cats' impact on our wildlife. Frustratingly, despite many owners often acknowledging this point, very few adopt any measure whatsoever.

So, in response to the opening question, the data shows that the domesticated 'moggie' is a significant problem - although they can be controlled. The real villain of the piece however emerges as the 'wild' feral cat, which is a far more fearsome killer. Unfortunately it presents little or no opportunity to control it unless more drastic measures are resorted to - such as expensive neutering or even culling. Sadly to date there is little UK-wide action in this respect, so this damaging circumstance will persist.

As birders we have to hope the added pressure these animals jointly place on our wild birds won't prove to be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Editor: So, if you're a cat owner and have not taken any of the 'prudent' measures and you know your pet hunts, perhaps you ought to be thinking of doing something along the above lines with your own pet?

¹¹ The Mammal Society observed that this UK cat population was considerably larger than that of typical predators such as the fox (x40), the weasel/stoat (x20) and the Magpie (x5) which is thought to have a much more damaging reputation on nesting passerines than cats.

SOG and educating the young

A small team of three Council members attended the Fantastic Family Festival on Sunday 2 April to man a stand and lead some family bird walks.

The education of the young is an issue SOG are taking seriously and the Wantisden event was an excellent opportunity to make some progress.

This event was billed as: "A fun-filled day of workshops, talks and displays, stalls, performances and activities for all the family." It ran from 10am until 5pm.

The venue was excellent - a low building alongside the manor house (dating back to the fourteenth century) surrounded by farmland with a substantial play area and car parking within easy walking distance. However, sadly, the weather was indifferent, being both damp and breezy (in fact there was a significant shower just before the first scheduled walk).

Wisely SOG chose to place its stand indoors and, as ever, it looked very professional. Along with our panels, and a table loaded with the usual display of magazines, leaflets etc, there was a second 'kiddies' table with matching chairs. Many small people occupied this table for much of the day as they participated in our SOG colouring/quiz prize competition.

Over the course of the day the organisers estimate approx 125 families attended. This equates to around 400 - 500 people - certainly there were over 150 cars for much of the day. Most of the children were under 10, with a good many around the age of 5.

The three council members were Eddie Bathgate, Phil Brown and Gi Grieco. The former manned the stand from 10:00 to 15:00, while the latter two also acted as joint leaders on two birding/nature walks from the manor to Staverton lakes (the first at 11:00 and the second at 13:30). The organisers had assured us they had the necessary insurance to cover our walks. Separately we had stipulated that a parent/responsible adult must accompany all children on our walks.

Numerous farmland birds were spotted, including a distant Woodlark, and several bird issues such as migration were discussed on the way to the nearby lakes - adjacent to Staverton Thicks - the SSSI. As well as water fowl, there was a small family party of Red Deer spotted and all of the adults and children were delighted to get some good views courtesy of SOG's scopes.

Another event is planned for 2015 and SOG has been invited to attend.

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SOG attend Carlton Marsh event

In June SOG were invited to a surveying/recording event at the Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Carlton Marshes. Guides were to take members of the public around the reserve showing the wildlife present and talking about surveying and recording techniques with an emphasis on the new online recording system iRecord.

Phil Brown and I went representing SOG to do the bird guiding.



The event was a collaboration between the Suffolk Biological Records Centre (SBRC), Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Suffolk Naturalists' Society (SNS), Suffolk Butterfly Conservation and Suffolk Ornithologists' Group with Touching the Tide (TtT) (which is a Heritage Lottery funded Landscape Partnership Scheme) that sponsored the day. Touching The Tide is a three-year project that explores the changing Suffolk coast and helps people make choices about its future.

The day started with introductions from Kate Osborne, project leader of TtT who gave an overview of the project, Matt Gooch, warden of Carlton Marshes talked of the ongoing work and expansion at the site and the best areas to go for the different forms of

wildlife and finally Martin Sanford from SBRC talked about the uses of iRecord, where people can submit records, include photos that help identification and where data can be shared. The SBRC, based at Ipswich Museum, is the repository for all nature and wildlife recorded data and allows an easy way to submit records online. At the reserve centre some laptops had been set up so that after the sessions people could see how the system works and submit their own records from the day.

There were a variety of areas the public could sign up for, with morning and afternoon sessions. Along with birds, were plants, butterflies, freshwater invertebrates, coastal plants at nearby Pakefield and dragonflies and damselflies, led by SOG President Steve Piotrowski.



Phil and I took groups of seven and eight, covering more of the reserve as we wanted to view the new scrape in the far north corner. On the morning walk we did note a few warblers such as Blackcap, Whitethroat and, luckily, a very showy family of Cetti's Warbler



But as the day got hotter the smaller birds were more difficult in the afternoon. One area of reedy dyke did have a family of Reed Warbler and with patient viewing, following the moving reed stalks as the birds crept through, we all got good views.



However we did manage to miss hearing a Grasshopper Warbler nearby that both the butterfly and dragonfly groups heard! We saw both Mute Swan and Moorhen with young and explained that it is important to submit breeding records as it can help keep a reference of the breeding population for future years, we talked about the recent British Trust for Ornithology Bird Atlas and the annual Suffolk Bird report compiled by SOG and SNS.



Other bird highlights were close fly-by male and female Marsh Harriers, one in each session, Hobby and on the scrape a variety of ducks with Shoveler, Teal and Gadwall although most were in eclipse plumage. In the morning a flock of Lapwing were present and both times we saw Green Sandpiper. The warden, Matt, joined us and told the group a bit more detail on the work being undertaken at this excellent site, its expansion and to make a joint wildlife corridor with Oulton Marsh, the other side of Oulton Dyke. We also noted a few non-bird wildlife species, including a Clouded Yellow butterfly and a Sexton Beetle.

A successful day, lots of wildlife seen and recorded and the chance to promote Suffolk's varied and excellent wildlife. Further details of iRecord can be found here – www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/ and more on the Touching the Tide Project, with further events here - www.touchingthetide.org.uk/.

Ed: Despite the Spotted Flycatcher's 80% decline over the last three decades, it is good to learn that in both the east and west of Suffolk there continues to be breeding success.

Jonathan Lawley

Spotted Flycatchers at Forrold Meadow

We live at Forward Green, formerly Forrold Green in a 500-year old cottage next to our five-acre un-drained, and as yet un-cut meadow. This meadow is managed as a private nature reserve (with the support and advice of Suffolk Wildlife Trust) and on which there is a high abundance of invertebrates as well as nesting habitat - which explains why the flycatchers breed successfully every year.

For years we have been aware of these visiting Spotted Flycatchers nesting in the shrubbery that comes close to the house from several directions.



Some time ago we found that our visitors were nesting in the ivy on an old plum tree outside the kitchen window. For two years after that they were in the climbing rose against the wall a few yards from the kitchen door. The nest seemed rather exposed and we were terrified a visiting Grey Squirrel could predate it. The whole process was incredibly quick, only about four weeks from nest building to fledging.

Breeding in recent years

In 2012 they chose another site, an abandoned Blackbird's nest in another plum tree up against a wall and only a few feet from our conservatory. They returned to the same seemingly ideal site in 2013 and we were expecting them back there this year.

2014...

For a week or two they flitted around the kitchen and the lawn at the back of the house and used the garden furniture on the back lawn beside the meadow to launch themselves in search of prey. However there was no sign of them in the old Blackbird's nest, as we sat in the conservatory binoculars trained. Then one morning we spotted a hole formed in the thick mature ivy on a Bog Cypress tree from the

conservatory. Now we watched the little head of the hen sitting on the eggs. Then we saw the cominas and goings in total comfort and our close presence did not disturb the flycatchers, but miaht have deterred the wicked Grey Squirrel.



...breeding success

After three weeks had elapsed we could clearly see two little heads with gaping beaks as the constant feeding by the busy parents continued. We still worried about the squirrel and at lunchtime yesterday, 1st August, we feared the worst when we saw that the nest was empty. Then, to our great relief, we spotted two chicks being fed in the nearby shrubbery. Like last year we did not expect the family to hang about. However we were in for another treat. As

we sipped our drinks in the conservatory at 9.00 pm that evening, having cut the lawn, there was one of the parents rising regularly to catch insects from the garden chair near the Bog Cypress. Then, he or she joined the family for a last night in the nest. All the while a Barn Owl crossed the meadow and a Tawny Owl hooted as the bats came out to crisscross the lawn in celebration. Today the flycatchers are gone, I imagine on their way back to Africa. We look forward to seeing them back again next year.

STOP PRESS - Jonathan reports that a breeding pair were spotted feeding a young bird in his meadow on Saturday 30 August - given the gap in time it's probably safe to assume this was another pair. Nevertheless it demonstrates the value of preserving meadows such as this as they provide excellent Flycatcher habitat.

David and Margie Carter

Spotted Flycatchers in Brettenham



For the past 30 years we have been lucky enough to have Spotted Flycatchers returning to gardens in Brettenham. They usually nest in our garden or close by.

For the last four years Simon Evans has ringed the young from the nest box on the front of our house and has encouraged us to try and find out just how many pairs breed in the village. We managed to find six nesting sites last year in the village and this year decided to make an effort to survey the whole village.

I have edited the parish magazine for over 25 years and write the monthly nature notes, so I asked people to let me have any sightings of Spotted Flycatchers, I have also during the last two years made and put up open fronted nest boxes at suitable sites.



2014

This year the first Flycatchers returned on the 9th May and I am pleased to report that in June we found eight nests in the village over a distance of 2.5km. Simon, with help from Lee Gregory, came and ringed twenty-nine young from seven nests, however one householder declined to have a further four young ringed. In general most people showed great interest in the rinaina. We also identified a further

two sites where adults were feeding recently fledged young, but were unable to find the nests. This made an estimated total of forty fledglings in the village.

Given the early breeding this year and the successful fledging we were surprised that no second bronds were confirmed in the village.

Of the eight nests found only two were in the boxes I had put up, the other nests were in the following locations: one in a drain hopper head, one on top of an outside tap, one on a ledge in a porch, one in an old blackbird nest in an open cart shed, one in the eaves of a barn and one in a more traditional position on a rose trellis. A common factor of all eight nests was that they were situated near ponds or moats.

This year our "own" pair came and investigated the box on the front of the house and promptly decided to use a new box I had put up in a neighbour's garden opposite!

We consider ourselves fortunate to have this delightful charismatic little bird returning each year.

Steve Fryett

Audacious Gull

The last day of August was a warm day and many people made for the coast, in particular Aldeburgh. Known for its excellent fish and chips it was not surprising that Crag Path alongside the beach was crowded with people enjoying a seaside takeaway.

The long line of people sitting on the seawall was well watched by a large number of

Herring Gulls strutting around the beach looking for a dropped chip or an opportunity to venture a little further in order to get a meal. One audacious adult Herring Gull made an aerial swoop on a young lady from over her right shoulder to steal a sausage, from her hand as she was about to take a bite. She shrieked as the Herring Gull made off with the whole sausage, closely followed by a bevy of squawking gulls hoping the steal would be dropped.

Cavenham Heath Stone Curlew roost 2014

Following the cool, wet summer of

2012 and the prolonged cold of spring 2013, leading to heavy adult mortality, the Breckland Stone Curlew population has suffered two consecutive poor breeding seasons.

It was hoped that 2014 would be kinder to the birds and so it has proved – unofficially, it has been one of the most successful summers, in terms of fledged young, for many years – giving the population a much needed boost.

The Cavenham roost began to build up from early July, but has proved to be quite mobile and hence this year difficult to count. The birds

appear to have completely abandoned the heathery bank below the power lines that cross the heath – a regular roost site for several years. Perhaps the heather has become too mature and thick. Instead, the roost has become more dispersed on the north side of the heath, further towards Temple Bridge, seemingly favouring areas of sparser vegetation that were cut during winter 2013/14. In addition, some birds seem to be commuting between the heath and Icklingham Plains and the quarry.

As a result the highest count to date has only been 99 birds, on 8 September.



| DA | TE | COUNT | OBSERVER |
|----|-----------|-------|--------------------------------|
| 4 | July | 11 | J.Jones (RSPB) |
| 13 | July | 25 | T. Humpage |
| 27 | July | 26+ | T. Humpage |
| 1 | August | 38 | T. Humpage |
| 3 | August | 46+ | B. Woodhouse |
| 5 | August | 60+ | J.Jones (RSPB) |
| 13 | August | 25+ | M. Wright |
| 18 | August | 20 | J.Jones (RSPB) |
| 23 | August | 88+ | T. Humpage |
| 29 | August | 34 | D. Balmer |
| 30 | | 62+ | R. Ayers |
| 1 | September | 53 | B. Woodhouse |
| 4 | September | 55-60 | P. Batchelor (RSPB) |
| 8 | September | 99 | J.Jones (RSPB) |
| 14 | September | 58 | B. Woodhouse |
| 16 | September | 70+ | Visiting birder – name unknown |
| | September | 55 | J.Jones (RSPB) |
| 23 | September | 68+ | R. Ayers |
| | | | |

However, it is likely that the actual total present in the area is higher. The table above summarises counts that have been made so far.

For the third year, Natural England and the RSPB have jointly run a series of evening Stone Curlew roost walks, which again have been very successful. Such events serve to inform the public about the work carried out by the two organisations – in protecting the birds and managing the heathland habitat to maintain it in favourable condition for nesting. The three events in early September have attracted over 100 members of the public.

Book Review

Phil Brown

H is for Hawk

by Helen Macdonald

Despite its title, *H* is for Hawk is not a conventional bird book. In fact it's not a conventional book either, because it is actually three skilfully interwoven

books - an autobiography, a biography and a falconry manual! So, at three for the price of one, it's a great bargain.

On top of this value for money it's brilliantly written with some dazzling language, providing a fascinating text that in places reads like a thriller. And if you think this is a rave review, then you should see what respected reviewers like Mark Cocker and Rachel Cooke had to say. So it's no surprise it was nominated for the prestigious nonfiction Samuel Johnson prize this year.

But is it a book for birders? Leaving aside the quality of the writing, my answer is still yes, as it is about three 'birds'. First there is Mabel an actual bird - a young female Goshawk. Bred in captivity but demonstrably retaining, despite taming, its wild spirit. And Helen Macdonald provides some stunning insights as to how hawks and Mabel in particular see their world.

Second there is a biography of that 'queer' old bird, T.H. White (famed author of 'The Once and Future King') the failed schoolmaster and



attempted austringer who wrote about his doomed efforts to tame one of these majestic falcons in 'The Goshawk'. Here Macdonald's biography is tellingly revealing about this author and his motives.

Finally there is the author's autobiographical account of her dealings with the almost devastating grief triggered by the sudden news of her father's early death. The author displays raw emotion here, with just a hint of madness, as Macdonald chronicles here, through Mabel's¹² help, her recovery.

I'd like to say I read this book in one sitting, nevertheless it was quickly finished on a big bird as I crossed the Atlantic this summer. And that first copy still resides in the States with a fellow birder (who also enjoyed the book enormously and has passed it on to yet another birder). So I'd strongly advise readers buy their own copy - I'm not giving any more away! And I'm much looking forward to Helen Macdonald's next book.

'H is for Hawk' by Helen Macdonald. Published by Jonathan Cape, London 2014. pp 320, £14.99.



¹² Sadly Mabel died in captivity of a fungal infection last year.

News

Birding: Past, Present & Future



Richard Crossley at The Cut

On the evening of Monday 20th October, commencing at 19:30 in The Cut at Halesworth, Richard Crossley will be entertaining us with reminiscences about his travels, the perils of global birding and explaining the thinking behind his revolutionary new field quides.

Acclaimed photographer Richard has travelled widely and, as his lecture will make plain, he has not only developed a very different approach to field guides, but he is also deeply interested in educating people about Nature - especially the young. And during the evening in addition to his new guide concept he is likely to talk about two interesting schemes.

Two important schemes

Launched earlier this year, his 'Race 4 Birds' (R4B) Foundation is aimed at young birders and is presently being enthusiastically taken up across the States. As Richard himself said, "Youth birding competitions are extraordinary fun for everybody involved - most especially the young people. Competing takes planning and study and the 'big day' itself combines the thrill of competition with the fun of being outdoors with friends." The Foundation helps people to set up and run such events.

He is also associated with the 'Pledge2 Fledge' (P2F), a grassroots organisation that aims to encourage birders from all over the world to turn to friends, neighbours or relatives and take a day out of the year to present them with the wonders of the natural world through an appreciation of birds. How this objective is achieved being entirely up to the participant - taking them birding, visiting their garden and exploring its birding capabilities or just viewing some bird books - the choice is wide.



The new quide

Richard will also talk about The Crossley ID Guide series of books, including his stunningly illustrated new British and Irish ID Guide, and the logic behind them. Aimed at beginners/intermediate birders,

he argues this guide will vastly improve birder's ID skills. The book consists of a series of large lifelike scenes (see below) that, exploiting digital technology, populate them with different sized images of birds in a variety of life-like poses - most images are obvious but, realistically, some hidden. In all 323 species are dealt with, although only three hundred and two species are illustrated in their typical habitat using a total of around 5000 of Richard's species images.

Each 'diorama' depicts a species' key ID characteristics, jizz, flight and plumage variants and moult stages. And each is accompanied by a short but authoritative text written by Dominic Couzens. In effect the book is as much a study aid as an ID quide.



There have been numerous positive reviews about this guide, but we thought it more interesting to listen to one of our younger members. Aged almost nine, Finlay Marsh is a young birder yet, since January 2013, he has already compiled a UK life list of 220! So who better as a relatively new/intermediate birder to ask for his views about Richard Crossley's Britain and Ireland bird ID guide.

"Awesome"

In a word Finlay's verdict was "awesome". Compared with the Collins guide Finlay clearly preferred the Crossley as to his mind the images were better. He especially felt the images were "more real, because they were real pictures of birds, instead of paintings". He liked the fact that each page

gave him more images to study. So he could see better the difference between, say adults and juveniles. He also thought the information that accompanied each scene was good and he said he was reading it all "bit by bit".

Would it replace the Collins guide? Finlay's father Roy didn't think so. He felt it was better to regard it as a supplement providing a new way of portraying birds that through studying them will assist birders with bird identification.

For more information about Richard's series of books you can visit his website at www.crossleybirds.com, while for the two schemes you can go to www.pledgetofledge.org and www.race4birds.org.



Plus a special event

Also, during this evening, SOG will be launching its 'Campaign against Raptor Persecution'. The noted wildlife journalist and author Simon Barnes (and self-claimed "bad birder"), who has agreed to be this campaign's Patron, will be giving the campaign's inaugural address and the RSPB's investigation team will be adding a few words too. So it is well worth attending this evening, if only to sign our online petition!'

Excellent facilities

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

The theatre offers an excellent range of facilities. The auditorium seats 220 and there is an upstairs gallery. There is also the Café (where evening meals are served prior to the event - but an advance booking is required), as well as a licensed bar.

Easy booking

Once again tickets are only £5.00 and early booking is advised. You can either source your ticket direct from the Box Office by phoning 0845 673 2123 or 01986 874264. Or book it via the Arts Festival website www.halesworthartsfestival.org.uk where the booking process is very straightforward.

Note that all funds raised at this talk will be in aid of local wildlife projects and split between SOG and the Waveney Bird Club (who arranged the event).

Ed: What are you waiting for? This promises to be an important, fascinating and convivial double-bill, so book today!

Council for 2014: Officers

Honorary President: Steve Piotrowski

Chairman: **Roy Marsh**

Vice-Chairman: **Steve Abbott** Secretary: **Phil Whittaker**

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Matthew Deans

Projects Officer: Gi Grieco

Magazine Editor: To be confirmed Website Co-ordinator: **Gi Grieco** Publicity: **Eddie Bathgate** Bird Report Editor: **Nick Mason** Outdoor Events Organiser: **Gi Grieco** Indoor Events Organiser: **Adam Gretton**

Members

Craig Fulcher [to 2015] Robin Harvey [to 2016] Edward Jackson [to 2016] Scott Mayson [to 2015]

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean & Ken Garrod Mike Hall Robin Hopper Mike Jeanes Mike Marsh Philip Murphy



Bird Recorders

North-east Area Recorder:

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

Matthew Deans, 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



Networking

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

Media

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

Trips and talks

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

Protecting birds

- Actively lobbies to protect habitats and birding amenities
- Provides a county-wide field force of bird surveyors (50+)
- Organises and promotes bird surveys
- Inspires and undertakes conservation projects
- Bursaries available
- Numerous conservation achievements:
 - Contributed to several species breeding successes (Barn Owls, Peregrines, etc.)
 - Undertakes monitoring and ringing
 - Involvement on community and education projects
 - Organises and hosts dawn chorus walks
 - Assists with fund-raising for bird hides
 - On-going participation in key bird surveys for the BTO, such as BBS, the Bird Atlas, various species surveys and WeBS
 - Provides surveys for commercial organisations, such as environmental waste companies etc.

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

For birds & for birders
SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

www.sogonline.org.uk

