

Magazine March 2014 No.176



# The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

£3.25



**Inside:**

- The biodiversity value of HLS
- Barnacle Geese puzzle
- Bird of the Year - 2013

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## Cover photograph:

The increasingly uncommon Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), the traditional harbinger of spring.  
Photographer: Ian Goodall, Lakenheath RSPB on 1st May 2009  
1DMklll with Canon 400f5.6 L 1/2000 @ f5.6

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All material for the June 2014 Harrier should be with the editor no later than w/e 30 May.

## Subscription rates (2014)

SOG: Adults - £15.00; Family £17.00

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

Website: [www.sogonline.org.uk](http://www.sogonline.org.uk)

Email: [info@sogonline.org.uk](mailto:info@sogonline.org.uk)

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group Registered Charity No. 801446



# The Harrier

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## Here's to a healthy spring

Thus far this winter, in relation to the south-west, Suffolk has escaped relatively lightly. Although the winter began ominously with December's tidal surge, there hasn't been any sustained winter cold snap since (yet?). So, hopefully, the 2014 spring migrants will fare much better than 2013's. A repeat of last year's poor breeding performance for the Stone Curlews and a further decimation of Suffolk's Barn Owl population could be disastrous for the county. So here's to a healthy 2014 spring, which by the time you read this, will be well under way.

To be positive we have another healthy issue for you. We've some valuable insights into how best to feed our farmland birds and bridge that late winter 'hunger-gap'. There is also an interesting question and answer session concerning the

Barnacle Goose's growing Suffolk presence, conducted between the LBO and the BTO. Then there's an introduction to an easily accessible source of useful data that's now available for some of the commoner Suffolk birds, via BBS. There is also the result of Bird of the Year 2013. We have several trip reports, the Minutes of the SOG AGM and our regular 'Looking back' article. Next, sadly, we go on to say goodbye with two obituaries, one to a long-standing SOG member and the other a Suffolk birding stalwart. Then we reveal the answers to Clive Collins' fiendishly difficult Christmas Quiz.

Finally, we have enclosed a SOG merchandise order form so you can purchase the gifts and clothing we've sourced for members. Remember, every item you buy contributes to SOG's funding.

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

Patrick Barker & Phil Brown

## Profitable farming minimising its environmental impact

### EJ Barker & Sons - an update on their HLS scheme's progress

**As Patrick Barker reported in The Harrier #158 of March 2009, EJ Barker & Sons had signed up for the ten-year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) in 2007. Now that the farm is seven years into this scheme, we thought it timely to report on its progress and highlight the farm's achievements on the scheme to date.**

But, before we review the farm's achievements, we wondered if for some of our readers it might be useful to summarise what this scheme is designed to do.



## EJ Barker & Sons, Westhorpe, Suffolk

### *Business objective*

This arable business's aim is to farm in a profitable and intensive fashion, whilst minimising impact on the natural environment.

### *Farm - scale and nature*

EJ Barker & Sons farms 513 hectares on a heavy boulder clay soil in the North Suffolk and South Norfolk Claylands. The main farm is located on a watershed and, through thorough ditching work the land drains well. 91% of this land area is actively farmed for a variety of crops, including winter wheat, barley, oilseed rape, spring oats, spring beans, linseed and herbage grass seed. Some sheep are regularly brought in to graze sections of grassland and help with scrub control around ponds. In addition the business also works two further farms - Suffolk Wildlife Trust's 34 ha Grove Farm at Norton and land at Shelland (a further 76 ha) close to Stowmarket

The farm now has 43 kms of hedges and ditches, 31 ponds, plus about 30 hectares of woodland edges and rough grassland permanently or semi-permanently set aside for the benefit of wildlife.

### *Awards*

The farm is a LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) Demonstration Farm and was recognised at the national level when it won the coveted National FWAG's Silver Lapwing Award for farming and conservation in 2009. Subsequently in 2013 it won the prestigious Suffolk Agricultural Association Farm Business Award, in the large farm category. Finally the two cousins, Patrick and Brian Barker, who were jointly named Countryside Farmer of the Year by the Farmers Weekly in 2010, now run the business.

## What is HLS?

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) is Natural England/Defra's main mechanism for delivering a suite of sympathetic farm management practices to assist some range-restricted and declining birds associated with arable/mixed farmland in England. The species concerned include Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Tree Sparrow, Turtle Dove and Yellow Wagtail. In addition, it is recognised that HLS agreements targeting these species will also greatly assist efforts to conserve more widespread but declining farmland birds, such as Linnet, Reed Bunting, Skylark and Yellowhammer. All of these species appear on the 'Section 41' list of 'priority species' that HM Government considers are of "principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England", and all but one (namely the Reed Bunting) also appear on the UK 'Red' list of birds of conservation concern. So, potentially, the HLS could be vital for the future of farmland birds.

The arable options adopted for farmland birds should usually amount to between 7% and no





HLS: assisting birds of conservation concern

more than 10% of field area: When deployed together these options should provide the critical resources that farmland birds need to survive and breed successfully on a farm, i.e. the 'Big-3' issues, viz. over-winter seed food, spring/summer invertebrate food and places to nest. In return for implementing effective environmental land management measures, farms with HLS agreements receive payments. A new agri-environment scheme will be launched in January 2015 to replace HLS and ELS and the regulations governing this scheme, and of course the environmental benefits accruing from them, might then be subject to change.

HLS, as distinct from Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) schemes, involves more complex types of management and all farm agreements are tailored to local circumstances. To facilitate this, and as part of the agreement, farms are obliged to draw up a Farm Environmental Plan (FEP) – the Barker family produced their own without the assistance of authorities or consultants.

The specific target species the farm signed up to support are Grey Partridge at Westhorpe and the protection of a county-important breeding colony of Great Crested Newts (GCN) at Great Ashfield.

EJ Barker & Sons also committed itself to HLS theme 8, designed to improve people's enjoyment and understanding of the farmed environment.

## What's been achieved with HLS so far?

A variety of benefits have arisen from the farm's commitment to fulfilling its HLS requirements:

### 1. Economic returns

Most important of all, adoption of the HLS scheme has not damaged the business's returns. The application of the HLS-driven practices has seen crop yields over the last four years maintain and, on average, remain ahead of the typical UK yield levels. So, when factoring in the 9% of land now dedicated to wildlife, the farm's average yield still remains healthy:

Crop	UK (T per ha)	EJ Barker & Son (T/ha)	% EJB/UK
Winter wheat	7.9	9.27	+17.3
Oil seed rape	3.4	4.63	+36.2
Spring barley	5.5	7.6	+38.1
Spring beans	3.5	3.4	-3
Herbage ryegrass	1.1	1.2	+9
Spring linseed	1.75	2.25	+28.6

An additional benefit for the farm has arisen from the spread of crops. As a result of the long rotation they involve, and of growing herbage grass seed undersown by spring crops, beneficially the soil remains undisturbed for three years. Consequently there has been a noticeable improvement in the farm's soil condition. A good indicator of the high quality of Westhorpe's soil condition is the large numbers of gulls (and latterly even Buzzards) following the farm's plough for worms.

## 2. Conservation benefits

As the primary drive of the HLS is environmental improvements, not surprisingly the scheme has triggered a wide range of improvements at Westhorpe and Great Ashfield:

### 2.1 Farmland bird populations more robust

The total species count for the main site had risen from 84 in 2008 to 95 by 2013. However, as a measure of the farm's success with bird conservation, these totals are not all that meaningful as they include a goodly proportion of vagrants such as Hen Harrier and Black Redstart passing through.

However the site's ringing records provide a much better indicator. In total over 4600 birds, comprising 52 different species have now been caught and ringed around Westhorpe. The year-on-year data right-top is consistent with the farm's introduction of bird-friendly measures having an increasingly positive impact on the farm's bird populations. The figures for key species are as follows:

### Year-on-year totals of new-for-the-year birds

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Yellowhammer	24	8	134	256	258	187*
Duncock	4	26	49	66	96	112
Reed Bunting**	3	0	1	3	10	26
Linnet***	0	1	70	50	6	0
Blue Tit	20	85	90	70	219†	331††

\* It is suspected the hard winter reduced numbers

\*\* A non-breeder, slow to find the site and start feeding, but numbers now growing

\*\*\* Quickly became wise to the ringing net and thus elusive. Apparently there are two flocks on site comprising around 100 birds each.

† Some pulli were ringed as an experiment, hence the step-change in numbers ringed

†† All pulli ringed

### Key species improving...



Barn Owl



Grey Partridge



Yellowhammer

The farm has been especially concerned to assist in overcoming the plight of farmland birds and, to that end, has put in hand a range of measures to support them:

### Feeding - three different tactics

Too often new farming techniques and regimes only serve to deprive farmland birds of vital food during the critical 'hunger-gap' season - late winter. EJ Barker & Sons policy towards farmland birds addresses all of the 'Big 3' issues - i.e. provision of winter feeding, chick food and nesting habitat.

With regard to winter-feeding, which is critical for most farm birds (especially first-year fledglings), the farm has adopted two tactics:

1. First are the establishment of wild bird seed mix plots, of which there are six scattered around Westhorpe. The largest is a 2.83 hectare block, divided into four equal sections and adjacent to

... and more vagrants attracted



Hen Harrier

the main farm buildings, that serves as a feeding test bed and is subject to a four-year sowing cycle.

- developed own wild bird seed mix -

Up until 2013 the seed mix used on these plots had been an off-the-shelf mix from a local seed merchant. But, as of this year, based on the interim findings of the 'Foraging Farmland Bird Project' and Westhorpe's own experiments, a new 'Suffolk-mix' is now being applied and consists of:

Red millet, white millet, mustard, triticale, fodder radish, Japanese reed millet, king's sorghum millet and linseed

### Foraging Farmland Bird Project

Along with 25 other farms in Suffolk, EJ Barker & Sons is participating in this three-year research study. This study is concerned with five key bird species (Duncock, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer) and is designed to monitor each species' response to different winter-feeding regimes and seed mixes.

The study commenced in winter 2011/12 and a host of factors are being investigated. To do so involves catching, ringing and measuring birds as well as monitoring their reactions to different crops and seed mixes, plus noting the impact of predators upon them. Naturally the effects of weather are also being factored in to provide useful indications for future feeding regimes.

It is hoped the full research results will be published late in 2014.



Black Redstart

2. The second tactic is to sow the seed mix around the farm on a number of suitable sites. This is as a general contribution towards the farm's all-year-round bird-feeding intentions<sup>1</sup>.

Both the plots and the suitable sites are spring sown, some drilled, the rest broadcast (i.e. the seed scattered on the surface). After application the seeded areas are also rolled in order to control slugs, flea beetle, game birds, Wood Pigeon, Rooks, but mainly to increase soil-seed contact and assist moisture retention.

3. Turning to the second of the 'Big-3', the provision of chick feed, the farm is ensuring a summer food source for insects by broadcasting a nectar flower mix on two less accessible sections of the farm (this mix comprises alsike clover, birdsfoot trefoil, common vetch, fenugreek, lucerne, phacelia, red campion, red clover, sainfoin, sweet clover, white campion and yellow trefoil). These flowers are principally sown for the sake of the Grey Partridge chicks. A five-year mix is applied that is only worked once a year although, when first sown, several mowing cuts are required to keep nettles and thistles at bay until the nectar plants establish themselves - thereafter the less disturbance, the better!



Wildflower meadow area - sunflowers

### *More wildlife refuges*

The long game-shooting tradition on the farm had already meant a number of 'wildlife refuges' had been established to provide game cover well before the HLS scheme kicked-in. Now, as a result of the farm's current policy of looking for more efficient and thus economic approaches to crop management, a number of additional wildlife patches have been added around the farm. Such operationally marginal sections of fields are now planted with birdseed mixes instead of crops. Importantly this occasions no overall loss of productivity, as this decision has enabled the rest of the farm's operational work to be conducted more efficiently.

In the course of setting these areas aside from crop production the farm has also learned that square areas tend to hold birds longer than strips.

### *Favourable farming practices*

Further, EJ Barker & Sons has deliberately adapted their farming practices to become more bird-friendly. Haymaking and margin maintenance are all nesting-considerate, with mowing being undertaken as late as possible in the year to ensure animal and bird disturbance is minimised.

### *Breeding support*

There has also been a programme of nest box installation. Almost 100 have been placed around the site - mainly tit boxes. Additionally there are 11 boxes for Barn Owls, to cope with the site's regular breeding pair; two pairs of Kestrels nest here too, along with two pairs of Tawny Owls, plus a Little Owl that is regularly present. All of these boxes are monitored, any young birds ringed and the results sent to the BTO.

### *Bird outcomes*

The outcomes of all of this bird-friendly activity are satisfying. Grey Partridge breeding numbers are slowly rising. Yellowhammers and Linnet numbers are holding up well and, reassuringly, Turtle Doves, which are known to be declining elsewhere, are maintaining their presence around Westhorpe too.

<sup>1</sup> Field observations have noted a further benefit of the millet. Apparently it attracts Harvest Mice in good numbers, not only as they can feed on seeds, but chiefly, to employ the plant's stalks for nesting purposes.





Azure Damselfly

- benefits for other taxa -

### 2.2 Insects more abundant

Counts of butterfly species and odonata are also showing healthy increases. Twenty-four species of butterfly, along with sixteen species of dragonfly and damselfly have now been found around the site.

### 2.3 Flora - a growing asset

As an example of arable reversion, a four-hectare grass meadow was also created – ultimately this will become a wild flower meadow. This was seeded from hay gathered from a nearby village common that is also a County Wildlife Site (CWS).

Within a year over 60% of the local common's species had been successfully transferred to Westhorpe.



Bales of hay were rolled to release the flower seeds



Before and...



...after

### 2.4 Ponds improved for Amphibia

When the HLS scheme began there were 31 ponds scattered across Westhorpe and Great Ashfield farms. However, a number of these were so overgrown that their potential wildlife benefit was not being realised, accordingly a programme of pond reinstatement got underway. This restoration activity is chiefly confined to the winter period and, to date, has concentrated on the removal of scrub from the margins and the extraction of leaf litter from the pond itself to improve light levels and thereby benefit the aquatic plants. As these ponds are mostly to act as Amphibia refuges, no fish are introduced and ducks actively discouraged.

For the Great Crested Newts (GCNs) at Great Ashfield the reinstatement of Brick Kiln Pond (see pictures above), which was already underway in 2009, was seen to pay dividends during 2013 when some GCNs were found to have migrated to one of the reinstated ponds.



Great Crested Newt



The Creation of a “Green Corridor” through the heart of the farm

Road and track-side hedges are however dealt with annually by a “light cut”, with the base and a one-metre margin not being flailed out so that, in particular, the Grey Partridge retain cover and small mammals (notably Harvest Mice) can feed and shelter safely in it too.

All of the ditches are on a constant cycle of cleaning to ensure rapid run-off from the claylands at all times.

### 2.5 Hedges and ditches enhanced

Hedge management is recognised as being a crucial feature for the provision of good breeding areas for farmland birds. When it joined the scheme there was already a substantial 40kms of hedges and ditches on the Westhorpe and Great Ashfield site. Through planting in 2008 this was increased by a further 2.5kms.

A process of experimentation on the farm has concluded that the following hedge species provides almost all-year round the optimum amount of fruit and flowers: Alder, Blackthorn, Buckthorn, Crab Apple, Dog Rose, Hawthorn, Holly and Privet.

Early on in the scheme Westhorpe created a ‘Green Grassland Corridor’ through the middle of the farm to link habitats and thus allow safe wildlife passage across the farm.

But maintenance is no less important than hedge creation. For the hedges a three-year cutting rotation is operated with the treatment delayed until winter (December through to February) to allow the berry food source to be stripped and the hedge wood to dieback to its most brittle.

### 3. Personal benefits

The two cousins have both found engagement with the HLS scheme put them on a surprisingly steep environmental learning curve. Their blog (which might be called the Fabulous Barker Boys!) describes Brian as a farmer conservationist and Patrick as a conservationist farmer. These descriptions sum up their primary drivers well.

Brian is very keen to push the business forward with crop production always paramount, but still looks to find a balance between this economic drive and the needs of the environment.



While Patrick puts the needs of the environment up front and now sports some serious birdlife conservation credentials. From being a birding novice in 2007 he can now hold his own with senior members of the Suffolk birding community. His credentials include being a BTO Licensed Ringer, the area coordinator for 130 boxes in the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project, a member of Waveney Bird Club committee and Chair of the Waveney Ringing Group, plus being a 'Wild of Wednesday' contributor to BBC Radio Suffolk.

The pair also agreed that their personal development has benefitted considerably from the advice of many professionals, including Juliet Hawkins and SOG's Steve Piotrowski and Derek Moore.

#### **4. Improved public access**

In order to engage with the public and improve their countryside understanding, both of the Barkers have given many talks to local groups and schools and have hosted over 100 visits to the main farm.

In addition, eight kms of permissive paths have been added to the existing 5kms of footpaths and bridleways to create a valuable access network around Westhorpe. Note HLS withdrew from public access support after 2010.

Sadly, associated with this positive is a negative - increasing levels of disturbance. In common with the rest of the country, some dog walking has led to ground-nesting bird disturbance. To cope with this the farm has installed a number of information boards to alert the public to important environmental features and issues.



## **Conclusion - the HLS benefits**

Commitment to the HLS scheme has not damaged EJ Barkers & Sons' business viability. The farm's record of arable yields ahead of the average UK farm crop performances, in four out of six cases by a double-figure margin, is extremely healthy. Even with almost 10% of its hectareage now dedicated to wildlife, the farm remains well ahead in the economic stakes. And, when the additional benefit of enhanced soil condition is taken into account, then clearly the farm's involvement in conservation has not detracted from the farm's performance - quite the contrary.

But the wildlife benefits are even greater. Not only does EJ Barker & Son's farming practices and increased wildlife habitat area support more birds, small mammals, amphibians, insects and flora, but also the farmland birds in particular are being actively sustained all-year round by virtue of the positive feeding programme, hedge improvements, plus the installation of a wide range of nest boxes.

Unlike a number of neighbouring farms, Westhorpe's farmland bird populations are holding their own and, in some instances, their numbers are rising. So, with HLS, EJ Barker & Sons is profitably farming whilst additionally providing a positive environmental impact.

***Editor: The issue of farming and conservation is a vital one that merits greater publicity. So, if members know of other Suffolk farms equally as involved in significant conservation activity, then please contact the Editor and we'll try to get interviews with them too and publish the results in subsequent Harriers.***

***Meantime we hope more of Suffolk's farms would aspire to adopting EJ Barker & Sons' positive policies and make similarly valuable environmental contributions - as the county's bird life would benefit enormously.***

Nigel Odin

# Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) at Landguard Bird Observatory



## - Does anyone know what's going on?

Barnacle Goose incidence at Landguard has risen rapidly. The first site record at Landguard was of 74 moving south on February 21<sup>st</sup> 1981, with only two more records of singles for the rest of that decade.

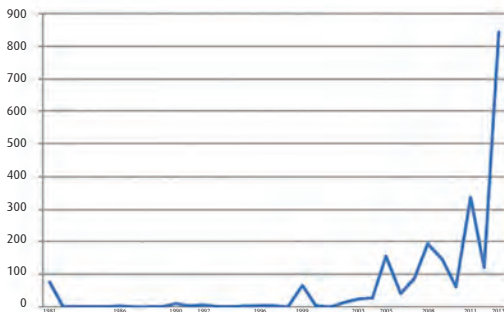
In the 90s numbers were still low until a couple of gaggles of 28 south on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1999 and

38 south on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1999. In the mid 00s numbers increased reaching an annual total of 846 in 2013.

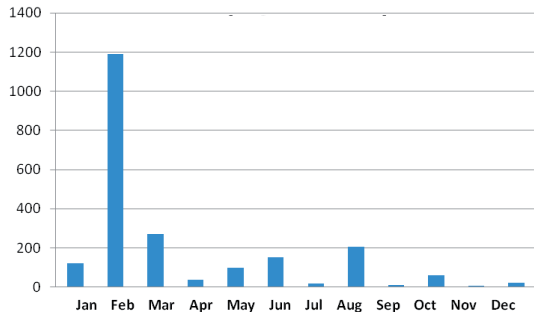
### Nature of observations

Of the birds noted 75% are flying south and 24% north. Most records in August are of birds moving north. The bulk of records of larger gaggles are from late January to mid-March. Although May records are fairly numerous, their group size tends to be low, see below:

**Barnacle Goose annual totals 1981-2013**



**Barnacle Goose monthly totals**



## So what's going on?

Barnacle Geese are divided into several distinct well-studied groups. Different populations breeding in East Greenland and Svalbard winter exclusively in separate parts of Northern Britain and Ireland, while geese from Northern Russia (and more recently since the 1970s from the Baltic) are wintering in the Netherlands (Owen 2002).

In addition to these populations, a further estimated 900 pairs nest in the UK (Musgrove et al 2013), plus 8300 pairs in the Netherlands (Voslamber et al 2010). An overview of newly established breeding sites in north-western Europe suggest 12,000 breeding pairs were outside arctic Russia in 2005 (Feige et al 2008). These populations are less well studied and are treated as second-class citizens by British birdwatchers, presumably due to them being seen as “feral” or “naturalised”. Traditionally the three “wild” populations have been separate and distinct. However, recent studies suggest that Barnacle Geese are breaking migration traditions with some of the non-migratory populations in the Netherlands being characterised by high emigration into the other populations (Jonker et al 2013).

### Three distinctive waves of birds

It is hypothesised that the increase in these naturalised populations in the Netherlands may be the origin of some of the birds passing Landguard. Small numbers do nest in Suffolk, with most records from Minsmere, but these birds surely cannot account for the large flocks seen on this part of the Suffolk coast from August to March (see various Suffolk Bird reports).

Flocks going north past Landguard in August could well be heading from the Continent up the Suffolk coast. While from late January to mid-March the much larger numbers past Landguard, mostly going south, could be the autumn group returning to the Continent to breed. With the May and June birds being quite possibly part of the naturalised British stock wandering about having failed in

breeding attempts elsewhere in East Anglia. Alternatively they could be immature birds going on ‘walkabout’, as this species does not breed for the first time until two or three-years old (Cramp et al 1977).

### Ring evidence

A couple of Suffolk ringing recoveries are of one from Sweden in July 1989 to Fritton in June 1993, then April 1994 and 1995 and relocating to Hickling, Norfolk in July 2004. A second from Spitsbergen in 1986, to Lound in 1993 (Marsh 1994, BTO website). Also a leg with a Dutch ring on was found at Havergate in April 1991 that had been ringed in December 1988. The only ringing recovery in Suffolk from the naturalised population in Britain was of a feral bird ringed at Slimbridge in July 1947 that was subsequently shot at Lowestoft in January 1949 (BTO website) back in the days when Barnacle Goose barely existed in Suffolk. In earlier Suffolk Bird reports birds were recorded as “wild” or “feral” depending on the personal preference of the report editor. Due to the mixing of populations, a Barnacle Goose seen in Suffolk, could come from anywhere at any time of the year!

### UK population

Only 20 years ago the British breeding population was categorised as borderline, it being debatable as to whether the population was viable or self-supporting (Vinicombe et al 1993). The national index for naturalised Barnacle Geese rose to its highest ever level in 2009/10 with similar increases in the Netherlands (Holt et al 2011). Bird Atlas 2007-11 states that the naturalised population has expanded in range by 88% throughout Britain since the 1988-91 Atlas (Balmer et al 2013). Numbers seen in Suffolk are clearly increasing (Suffolk Bird reports) and continue to do so although it is obvious that only an unknown (small?) number originate here. Presumably due to increasing numbers, when they will start to come into conflict with farming interests, they will hopefully become as well-studied as the so-called “wild” populations.

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Chas Holt

## Barnacle Geese at Landguard – a contribution from WeBS to the question of ‘what’s going on?’

As described in Nigel Odin's article, the UK hosts three relatively discrete populations of Barnacle Goose: two migratory populations that breed in Greenland and Svalbard, respectively, and a third naturalised population that is steadily spreading across lowland Britain.

The Greenland population winters almost exclusively in Ireland and western Scotland (where the peak on Islay can reach over 50,000 birds), while the Svalbard population winters primarily on the Solway Estuary (c.30,000 birds) with a smaller number at Lindisfarne and Loch

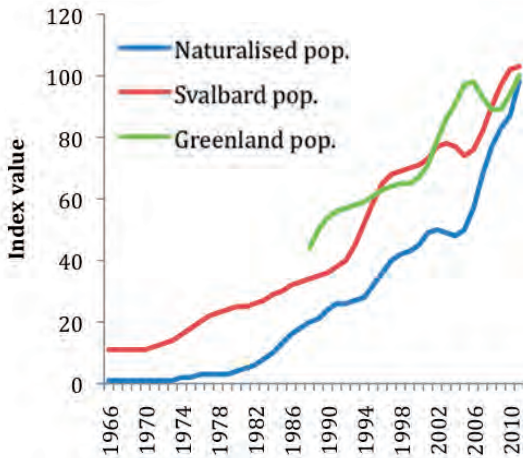


Fig. 1 - Population trends for bio-geographic populations of Barnacle Goose in the UK, 1966/67 to 2011/12 (Greenland population censused annually since 1988/89).

of Strathbeg. Both the migratory populations and the naturalised population have increased in recent decades (see Fig. 1).

A quick search of the new online WeBS report (Austin et al. 2014), now searchable by county, reveals that the number of Barnacle Geese recorded during WeBS counts in Suffolk has increased in recent years. This concurs with Nigel's summary of counts as sourced from Landguard Bird Observatory's records. Favoured WeBS sites in Suffolk are Minsmere, North Warren, Benacre and Lound Waterworks. The suggestion that the east coast of England may receive birds from the growing Dutch population seems reasonable, and this would also help to explain the increasing numbers that have been observed in some other areas, particularly the Humber Estuary where annual maxima tend to peak in autumn or early winter. In the most recent WeBS report, covering 2011/12, the highest count of naturalised Barnacle Geese in the UK was 812 on the Humber Estuary in October (for additional evidence supporting this estimate, see [STOP PRESS](#) below).

To summarise, it is therefore likely that birds seen passing Landguard may represent a combination of birds from the Netherlands, with movements of a more 'local' population that tends to be centred on the Minsmere area.

### WeBS report

Austin, G.E., Read, W.J., Calbrade, N.A., Mellan, H.J., Musgrove, A.J., Skellorn, W., Hearn, R.D., Stroud, D.A., Wotton, S.R. & Holt, C.A. 2014. *Waterbirds in the UK 2011/12: The Wetland Bird Survey*. BTO/RSPB/JNCC, Thetford. <http://blx1.bto.org/webs-reporting/>

**STOP PRESS** In a recent *British Birds* article it was stated that Musgrove et al (2013) derived their breeding estimate for the naturalised population from the number of apparently naturalised birds counted in the winter. RBBP (Holling et al 2014) data records a minimum of 164 pairs but, as breeding pairs are poorly recorded, considered that an estimate of around 1000 breeding pairs was not unrealistic.

Holling, M. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) 2014 'Non-native Breeding Birds in the UK, 2009-11' *British Birds* 107: 130-131.

# Field Trip Reports

Steve Fryett

## SOG field meeting to Holbrook Bay

14<sup>th</sup> December 2013

**Leader: Steve Fryett**

Last year's final field meeting at Holbrook Bay was attended by fifteen members.

Breezy and a bit on the cool side but the sun was shining as we left the car park and headed upstream on the Stour passing the sailing club. We arrived at high tide and an abundance of birds were in front of us. Firstly the ducks were well represented with Wigeon, Shelduck and Pintail. To the east, along the fringes amongst the Eel Grass, were a small flock of Brent Geese. Although distant, further out in the river, at least four Slavonian Grebes were noted with seven Great Crested Grebe. The high tide roost of waders contained relatively small numbers of Knot, Redshank, Grey Plover, Oystercatcher and Turnstone, with just two Black-tailed Godwits. Behind us several Curlew preferred feeding on the sheep pasture to roosting on the river.

### On to the sewage works

A single Rock Pipit called from the marsh as we left the river and headed for the sewage works. It took some time to find the Grey Wagtail but we did eventually succeed along with Pied as well. The call of a Redpoll was noted overhead and two birds were located dropping into a birch tree nearby. We were able to get good views through telescopes to enable positive identification that one was Lesser *Cardulis caberet* and the other slightly paler larger bird was Mealy *Cardulis flammea* the nominate race. Whilst the latter species has spread its range northward and

eastward in recent years, it has become non-resident and a declining winter visitor in Suffolk, therefore it got our vote as bird of the day.

### Alton Water

For lunch we headed to Lemons Hill car park at Alton Water. From the bridge a distant female Goosander was the most noteworthy species spotted as we were heading towards Tatingstone Hall. Beside the Hall a singing Goldcrest caused a stir ensuring that we checked thoroughly so that we did not overlook something else. In front of the Hall we noted a single Pochard, Teal, Tufted Duck and a flock of 15 Great Crested Grebes. The meeting finished on a rather seasonal note with three Santa Clauses noted on paddle boards at the far end of Alton Water in front of the sailing club.

## Field meeting to Orfordness

8<sup>th</sup> February 2014

**Leader: Steve Fryett**

The weather changed the course of this meeting.

I had always planned a weather check with the members and the warden of Orfordness on the quay before embarking to the Ness. Very sensibly, with very strong winds and squalls forecast most of the day, we decided not to go, furthermore some parts of the Ness were under water and the lighthouse area was now roped-off, plus our usual route around the East Lagoons out of bounds.

### Change of plan

Therefore we headed to North Warren to look for Geese.

### Gaggles of geese

Parking near Thorpeness Mere we walked south to overlook North Warren marshes from the road. We noted a sizeable flock of feral Barnacle Geese and a number of Eurasian White-fronted



Geese, *Anser albifrons*, dotted about. Two darker individuals were deemed to be of the *flavirostris* race from Greenland, in which the bill colour is normally more orangey/yellow. But, in the strong sunlight, this proved to be an elusive diagnostic feature.

We then headed off west past Marsh Cottage to look over the geese again, noting a couple of calling Bearded Reedlings on the way. This time we located the Lesser Canada Goose, origin unknown, but alone without any other Canada Goose for comparison - as the size matters greatly in identification. Although this was almost certainly the bird in question, it was a long way off and it caused some debate amongst our party.

### **Waders, ducks & raptors**

Over on the marshes good numbers of Black-tailed Godwits, Teal and Wigeon were noted. Continuing our walk along the old railway line to North Warren reedbed we at last noted the first raptor of the day, a male Marsh Harrier before ending back at Thorpeness Mere.

Gi Grieco

## **Hemley - River Deben**

1<sup>st</sup> February 2014

**Leader: Justin Zantboer**

After the wet, windy weather so far this winter it was nice to arrive at Hemley Church for the start of the trip in relatively calm conditions and some bright sunshine.

What was even nicer was seeing Ivan, who was greeted warmly by the assembled members, on his first SOG trip since being unwell.

Around the church several House Sparrows called from some bushes and a Blue Tit was very vocal. Everybody, bar one, had sensibly worn wellington boots and, as we walked down to the river, the sole non-welly wearer had to be careful skirting the puddles.





Scanning the grazing marshes adjacent to the river a group of Curlews were feeding, a distant Marsh Harrier on the far side and a couple of Brent Geese flew down river. Walking along the footpath by the saltmarsh some Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and some smaller birds flitted amongst the Sea Purslane and Samphire. With patience, with the birds often dropping down before we got a good look, we picked out two Twite among some Goldfinches.

Scanning around we picked up a number of Common Buzzards, in ones or twos over different wooded areas, with a flock of four also seen. The same or possibly another Marsh Harrier caused a large group of frightened Lapwing to fly up, along with a smaller party of Golden Plover and Curlew. The group retraced their steps this time heading south along the footpath towards Kirton Creek. Groups of waders and ducks were on the far shore and included Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Wigeon and some Black-tailed Godwit flew down river. Justin then found a lovely male Red-breasted Merganser mid-river; a species that is very scarce on the Deben compared to the Orwell and Stour. On an area of saltmarsh close to Kirton Creek, at least two Jack Snipe and eight Common Snipe were encountered. At the Creek itself it was very quiet bird-wise and a discussion was triggered about the removal of the scrub and bramble from the river wall by the Environment Agency, including a section of scrub that historically supported roosting Long-eared Owls.

The grazing marsh at the back of Kirton Creek was also quiet with just a couple of Curlew, Greylag Geese and some Teal, although a Marsh Harrier quartered the reedbed and more Buzzards circled overhead. Taking the track back toward Hemley village, a flock of finches were present on the edge of woodland, some dropping down into the ditch below.

Scanning revealed a mixed flock of Chaffinch and Brambling, with at least twelve of the latter being noted - a nice surprise find.

Carrying on, the Buzzards now totalled six and a Jay was heard, plus a large group of small birds flew from a hedgerow adjacent to a fallow field. This included the Chaffinch and Brambling along with at least one Greenfinch and Yellowhammer, as well as several more unidentified as we were looking into the sun as they flew past.

Back at the church, the House Sparrow were still calling as we decided to finish off further up river at Waldringfield. By the time we arrived the tide was high, with the central island almost covered. As a consequence few birds were about with some Redshank and Dunlin, along with Wigeon and Little Grebe nearer, while across the river a group of Pintail, Shelduck, four Goldeneye and, surprisingly, few Great Crested Grebes (only a handful were counted). Justin again picked up the Red-breasted Merganser, this time up near Kyson Point - this was most likely the same bird seen earlier in the day that had drifted up river with the tide. This was a treat for me as it was now in the area that had been my old patch for fourteen years and was the first time I had encountered one there! Our leader then found another good bird for the river, a female Common Scoter, that proved difficult to pick up as it was diving in the distance in an area of swell with the rushing tide; though eventually everybody got to view it as it drifted into slightly calmer waters. As the tide was so high, small groups of waders, such as Redshank and Dunlin were seen flying down river, trying to find somewhere to roost.



Brambling

# The Brecks - from dawn

16<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Leader: Gi Grieco

Sunrise over the Ouse

A glorious morning greeted us at Santon Downham for an opening walk along the Little Ouse, glad that the strong winds and rain had abated.

The area is always alive with birds and this was no exception with various finches in the surrounding gardens and scrub by the Forestry Commission car park, including at least four Brambling. Heading down to the bridge to get on the river path, the rising sun beamed through the trees as we saw a Grey Wagtail flying down river.

We had been unsure of the river level with the recent flooding in parts of the UK, but the path was passable, if sometimes covered in puddles or fallen tree branches. As we proceeded lots of birds were present, including Reed Bunting, Siskin, Nuthatch, Water Rail, three Bullfinch, lots of Wren singing, plus a few Song Thrush too. Great Spotted Woodpeckers occasionally drummed and some territorial squabbles were witnessed more than once. A Cormorant was on the river with another one flying over, a Mute Swan was by a fallen tree that stretched across the river that seemed to be blocking its way. But we were soon to return as the path was deteriorating with deeper flooding and fallen trees - access would have been possible, but difficult.

On the return two of the group were lucky to hear Willow Tit briefly while another heard and saw a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The Great Spotted Woodpeckers were still being vocal and a couple of Marsh Tits were found, plus some Redwings were seen near the bridge area.

## Mayday Farm delivers

Our next destination was Mayday Farm in Thetford Forest and, with the change in weather, we were hopeful for a good raptor day and we were not to be disappointed. Setting up alongside a section of clear-fell with a view across the forest, we were initially treated to a pair of Common Crossbill that perched on the upturned trunks in the clear-fell area looking resplendent in the sunshine. Nearby Meadow Pipit were also seen as well as a Brimstone butterfly, our second butterfly species of the day having seen a Small Tortoiseshell earlier. A brief view of a raptor, a Goshawk, was only seen by some, but fortunately another was soon spotted, this time with its slow wing flaps as it drifted across the tree line. Other raptors encountered included Buzzard and Red Kite, the latter showing really well.

Alongside the clear-fell site we also came across lots of smaller birds including a star, at least one Parrot Crossbill, as well several more of

# to dusk



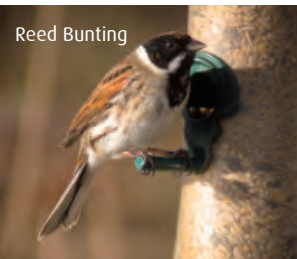
Sunset over the Fen

their native relative, Common Crossbill, several Siskin, Goldcrest and Coal Tit, along with Green Woodpecker and Jays. A few Woodlark, a couple of which were singing, were nice to connect with as well.

## Lakenheath Fen

The final destination of the day was RSPB Lakenheath Fen where, outside the visitor centre, the feeders were attracting lots of Reed Bunting, Blue and Great Tits and several Goldfinch.

We headed straight to the end of the reserve and the Joist Fen viewpoint as further raptors, this time Harriers coming in to roost, were one of our goals and we were treated to some fine views (although we had missed the Cranes that had been visible a couple of hours beforehand). On first arriving we were informed that a Bittern was close in the reeds, but we didn't realise how close until it started clambering through the reeds to eventually show amazingly well. We were also fortunate to see a second Bittern fly past us later.

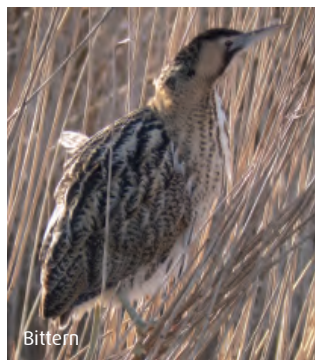


Reed Bunting

A Cetti's Warbler was very vocal close by and we also heard Water Rails and Bearded Tits in the reed bed, while circling the reeds were a number of Marsh Harriers. In the distance and overhead, birds were starting to congregate and move and these included lots of gulls, Starlings and Wood Pigeons, with Tufted Duck, Greylag Geese and two Egyptian Geese also flying over, plus two Kestrels seen by the riverbank. As the light started to fade, first one, then a second Barn Owl emerged hunting over the area and then, distantly, a smart male Hen Harrier flew across.

We were alerted to another treat by nearby birders, also scanning, who picked up two Otters at the far end of a dyke with brief views managed before they too disappeared.

Time to head back as the sun was setting and the reserve was locking the gates. We finished with an amazing spectacle of masses of Rooks and Jackdaws coming in to roost in one of the plantations, a great cacophony of calling as they settled down - a really wonderful sight to behold.



Bittern

## BINS Review of 2013

Looking back over the past twelve months it was another good year for the county in terms of both rare and scarce birds. While this report is not a complete list of species discovered during 2013, it does include some of the year's birding highlights - enjoy!

The early winter months consisted of the usual wintering geese, grebes and divers in the county that kept us busy, however, no doubt the highlight during this period, was the **Black-bellied Dipper** that frequented both sides of the River Little Ouse, Thetford.

Spring was certainly in the air and the stakes began to rise; a **Great Bustard** that was photographed at Lavenham would have proved highly popular had it stayed!

At Landguard Bird Observatory an **Eastern Subalpine Warbler** was found on the common and delighted the hordes that travelled to see this confiding individual.



A stunning adult male **Red-footed Falcon** put on an amazing display at Lakenheath Fen RSPB for several days from late May, unlike the **Pacific Swift** that was seen briefly over the lagoons at East Lane, Bawdsey!





June 15<sup>th</sup> proved to be a red letter day; a **Pacific Swift**, thought to be the same individual as the East Lane bird which also visited Spurn, East Yorkshire, was re-found over the reserve at Trimley Marsh SWT and stayed for two days, much to the delight of the hundreds that travelled far and wide.

Two immature/female **Two-barred Crossbills** put in a brief appearance on Havergate Island RSPB on 20<sup>th</sup> July before moving off inland, these birds are the first since 1894, so technically a first since 1900.

Classic fall conditions over the August bank holiday weekend resulted in good numbers of migrants being encountered which included; **Common Redstart**, **Whinchat** and **Pied Flycatcher** as well as scarcer birds such as three **Greenish Warblers** and up to fifteen **Wryneck!**

The **Lesser Grey Shrike** on Aldringham Walks, that was the county's eighth record, was the highlight for September. A **Siberian Stonechat** that was found at Trimley Marshes early October was the first occurrence of this species since being recognised as a full species, and therefore well worth the long walk to the reserve.

During October, a combination of easterly winds and light precipitation over the weekend 12-13<sup>th</sup> resulted in great birding along the coast with **Great Grey Shrike**, **Yellow-browed Warbler** and **Ring Ouzel** being the main species from the fall out. A first-winter female **Red-flanked Bluetail** (the county's twelfth) was present 14-17<sup>th</sup> at Dower Hose, Sizewell and a **Radde's Warbler** was found at Shingle Street 16<sup>th</sup>.

The final highlight of the birding year saw the arrival of several **Parrot Crossbills** into the county; initially being seen on Tunstall Common during November. Further birds were then seen at Mayday Farm, Breckland in December. This is the first invasion of this species since 1990.



## BOTY 2013

Although not put to a vote this year, the BINS Bird of the Year for 2013 was unanimously agreed to be the Eastern Subalpine Warbler discovered by Paul Holmes in April. Well-done Paul.

Paul Holmes receiving his award at the SOG AGM



## BINS Winter

2014 pretty much started off as 2013 ended, with a continuous stream of low depressions battering much of the UK, resulting in extremely high winds and record levels of rain.

### January 2014

Those hardy souls who braved the weather during the annual New Year's Day Bird Race struggled in the inclement conditions that resulted in one of the lowest scores for some years. That said, highlights from the day included an immature **Glossy Ibis** which was present all month on Oulton Marsh, 42 **Snow Bunting** on the beach at Pakefield, female **Long-tailed Duck** on Covehithe Broad, two **Caspian Gull** (adult and first-winter) were noted on the scrape at Minsmere whilst offshore a first-winter **Glaucous Gull** drifted south. In the south of the county a **Black-throated Diver** was on Alton Water and a **Great Northern Diver** was seen from Stutton Ness.

Waxwing



An adult **Caspian Gull** was present on the practice ground at Southwold 2<sup>nd</sup>, other birds of note seen on this day included three **Tundra Bean Geese** on North Warren, five **Velvet Scoter** off Slaughden, a **Rough-legged Buzzard** on Orfordness, two **Water Pipit** on Hollesley Marsh, two adult **Black Brant** on Orwell Estuary, viewable from Hares Creek, and a single **Slavonian Grebe** on Alton Water.

Great Northern Diver



The 3<sup>rd</sup> saw a juvenile **Iceland Gull** off the rigs at Sizewell, which remained on and off throughout the month often frequenting Minsmere South levels, two **Great Northern Divers** were now off Stutton Ness, Stour Estuary, three **Greater Scaup** were present on the lagoons at East Lane, single **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** on Slaughden Marshes and the number of **Velvet Scoters** offshore from Slaughden had risen to 10+ birds.

A second-winter **Iceland Gull** was present on Botany Marsh, Snape 4<sup>th</sup> and was seen intermittently throughout the month, also two 1<sup>st</sup> winter **Caspian Gull** noted 4<sup>th</sup>. The two adult **Black Brant** were again seen at Hares Creek on the 4<sup>th</sup> and nearby a **Black-throated Diver** was seen along The Strand.

The first **Waxwing** sighting of the year came on the 5<sup>th</sup> with three birds being seen along the Leiston-Saxmundham Road, also seen on the same date were eight **Parrot Crossbill** at Spinks Lodge, Mayday Farm and a first-winter **Caspian Gull** along the A11 Red Lodge bypass. An unseasonal **Garganey** was noted on the reservoir at Trimley Marsh SWT and nearby a **Jack Snipe** was at the retreat.



Male and female Parrot Crossbills

A **Long-eared Owl** was seen along the approach track to Trimley Marsh SWT 7<sup>th</sup>, nearby seven **Snow Buntings** were present at Landguard throughout the month that rose to ten birds. Wild swans present at Minsmere included nineteen **Bewick's** and two **Whooper Swan** on 7<sup>th</sup> with three **Tundra Bean Geese** also being present on the levels.

Three **Short-eared Owls** were seen in the Hollesley Marsh/Shingle Street area 10<sup>th</sup> with two birds regularly seen at Shingle Street thereafter, two **Little Stint** were seen on the Deben Estuary from Stonner Point 10<sup>th</sup>. A **Great Northern Diver** was present and showing well on Alton Water from 11<sup>th</sup> until the month's end.

The continued invasion of **Parrot Crossbill** into the UK resulted in two birds (male and female) being seen in Waveney Forest 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> and up to six birds were again noted at Spinks Lodge, Mayday 26<sup>th</sup>. Nearby two **Siberian Chiffchaffs** were seen at Oulton Marsh mid-month. **Twite** numbers also peaked mid-month with 62 birds on the beach at Dunwich.

Two **Caspian Gull** (adult and third-winter) were seen on the Blyth Estuary 15<sup>th</sup>. A **Mealy Redpoll** was noted at North Cove 18<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>. A **Red-necked Grebe** was seen along The Strand 18<sup>th</sup> and again 28<sup>th</sup> and what was most probably the same bird seen flying out of the river mouth from Landguard the next day.

A steady southbound movement of **Little Gulls** was noticed with 31 birds being seen offshore from Ness Point 19<sup>th</sup> and then 25 individuals off

Landguard 22<sup>nd</sup>. A female **Goosander** was present on the wilderness pond within Christchurch Park, Ipswich 20<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> and provided some excellent views.

A single **Waxwing** was seen by The Douglas Bader public house 21<sup>st</sup>, this then increased to seven the next day, to peak at ten birds by the month's end. A single bird was also heard over Cove Bottom 25<sup>th</sup>. **Slavonian Grebes** continue to be seen in their regular wintering grounds at Holbrook Bay.

An impressive flock of **Brambling** (up to 200 birds) were seen just south of Friston 25<sup>th</sup>, also five **Long-tailed Duck** were noted south off Landguard on the same date. A **Little Stint** was seen on the Orwell Estuary in Thorpe Bay 27<sup>th</sup>.

The first **Smew** of the year were the two redheads present on the scrape at Minsmere 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, and a **Hooded Crow** was seen on Dingle Marshes 29<sup>th</sup>.

## February 2014

The prolonged wet weather continued well into the month making birding difficult as many sites were well under water - that said the month still produced some nice birds for all to see.

The juvenile **Iceland Gull** was again present at Sizewell 1<sup>st</sup>, and then further sightings of this mobile individual came from Minsmere 10<sup>th</sup>, Sizewell 19<sup>th</sup> and finally Thorpeness 22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. The second-winter **Iceland Gull** also continued to show on and off at Botany Marsh, Snape.



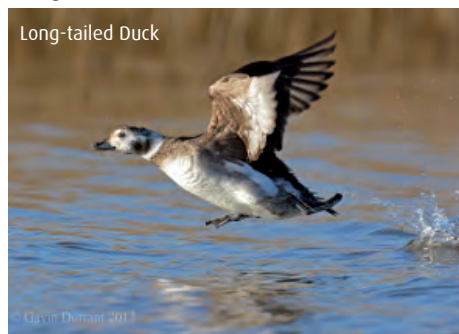
A **Canada Goose sp** on North Warren from 1<sup>st</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> caused some debate as to it's true form, but there was no doubting the two adult **Greenland White-fronted Geese** that were present at the same site 9-20<sup>th</sup>.



Staying with Geese, there was a single **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** at Trimley Marsh 9<sup>th</sup>, adult **Black Brants** were seen at Kirton, Deben Estuary also 9<sup>th</sup> and off Collimer Point, Orwell Estuary 21<sup>st</sup> and singletons of **Pink-footed** and **Eurasian White-fronted Geese** noted at Kirton Marsh 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Slavonian Grebes** were noted off Landguard 1<sup>st</sup>, Hockwold Washes, Lakenheath 2<sup>nd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> and nine birds in Holbrook Bay, Stour Estuary 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Great Northern Divers** were noted at Alton Water 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, Stutton Mill, Stour Estuary 13<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> and off Landguard throughout the month. A **Black-throated Diver** was present offshore at Landguard 13<sup>th</sup> and then 19-20<sup>th</sup>.



The long-staying female **Long-tailed Duck** remained on Covehithe Broad all month. Five **Waxwing** were seen on Lattice Avenue, Ipswich 3<sup>rd</sup>, then the flock increased to eight birds the next day and remained until 17<sup>th</sup>. Single **Waxwing** was seen along The Drive, Reydon 16<sup>th</sup>.



The immature **Glossy Ibis** that was first seen on Oulton Marsh remained all month and was then joined by a second individual from 19<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>. Two **Jack Snipe** were seen at Hemley Marsh 1<sup>st</sup>.

Probably the biggest discussion of the month concerned a **Sandpiper sp** that was present within the dock complex at Felixstowe, as viewing was very distant for most, access was granted to a few to establish the bird's true identity, but after much debate the bird was concluded to be a **Common Sandpiper**.

The small flock of **Snow Buntings** continued to show well at Landguard throughout the month, as did the three **Firecrests** at Bawdsey quay picnic site.

The star bird of the month was the discovery of an **Olive-backed Pipit** at Leiston. The bird was found mid-afternoon 15<sup>th</sup> and only showed itself to one lucky observer before moving on.

The invasion of **Parrot Crossbills** continued with no fewer than eighteen birds present in Waveney Forest 22<sup>nd</sup>, with single birds being noted at Spinks Lodge, Mayday Farm 16<sup>th</sup> and then in King's Forest 20<sup>th</sup>.

The wintering **Rough-legged Buzzard** on Orfordness was only reported once this month from Crag Farm, Sudbourne 18<sup>th</sup>. A **Black-necked Grebe** was present for one afternoon only on 19<sup>th</sup> from Stutton Mill, Stour Estuary.

The lack of any real cold weather meant the number of saw-bills were hard to come by, only three redhead **Smew** were present at Minsmere for most of the month and the only **Goosander** away from their traditional sites were the three redheads that were seen off Lemons Hill Bridge, Alton Water.

# What do we really know about common breeding birds in Suffolk?

*At a national scale, the changing fortunes of different bird species' populations are well documented and widely publicised. Readers of The Harrier will undoubtedly be able to list a number of species that are in trouble, plus several 'success stories' too.*

However, the picture isn't always as clearly defined at a local level. Some regional publications are prone to generalise and/or extrapolate from anecdotal evidence, particularly when attempting to make meaningful statements about the status of common and widespread species. Obviously care needs to be exercised over doing this. A way of better anchoring such assertions in reality could be to examine alternative data sources that are not in common use.

Here in Suffolk we are lucky enough to have reasonably good Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) coverage, thanks to about 50 dedicated volunteers who survey a 1-km square twice during each breeding season. Square selection for this structured survey is randomised, removing the bias inherent when trying to understand what is happening to local bird populations using *ad hoc* records from observers. There is no risk of weighting towards coastal localities or 'honey-pot' birding destinations such as species-rich nature reserves.

This short article presents some information from an oft-overlooked (by me, at least!) BBS output that can be used to show some basic local level analyses that are possible where BBS coverage is good enough. Hopefully it will also inspire more Suffolk birders to take on a BBS square... while those who already participate might consider adopting another!

## BBS & BirdTrack - two useful additional sources of information

BBS methodology involves walking two 1-km transects, counting and recording all individuals of each species. Bird song plays an important role in detection and identification. Naturally, some species are well suited to being detected on BBS transects while others, such as aerial insectivores, habitat specialists, and scarce or sporadically distributed species are less well represented by this random sampling approach.

The output mentioned in this article is freely available in the 'Latest results' section of the BBS website [<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/latest-results/species-lists/county-species-lists>].

BirdTrack also has the potential to offer a measure of species' frequency of occurrence and changes thereof, particularly where there are large volumes of data. The proportion of 'complete lists' that include a given species can be compared within and between years to provide measures of detectability. It is likely that sizeable population changes could be identified in this way, perhaps even for some of the species less well covered by BBS. Quite how sensitive this approach might be for tracking local-scale population changes has yet to be determined – perhaps an exciting research opportunity for a pioneering SOG member?

The BBS output offers two useful county-specific metrics for Suffolk:

1. The number of BBS squares in which each species was recorded each year
2. The total number of individuals of each species counted each year

The total number of BBS squares covered each year is also provided on the BBS county results pages. This means that two between-year comparisons can be made, with the help of the following simple calculations:

**1. The percentage of BBS squares in which each species was recorded each year:**

$$\frac{\text{Number of squares in which species was recorded}}{\text{Total number of squares surveyed}} \times 100$$

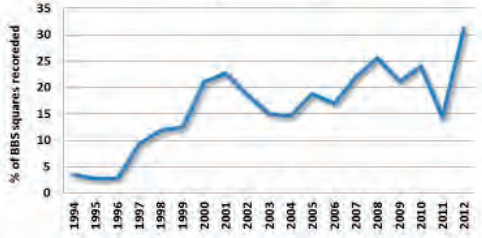
**2. The average number of individuals of each species counted per square each year:**

$$\frac{\text{Total number of individuals counted across all squares}}{\text{Total number of squares surveyed}}$$

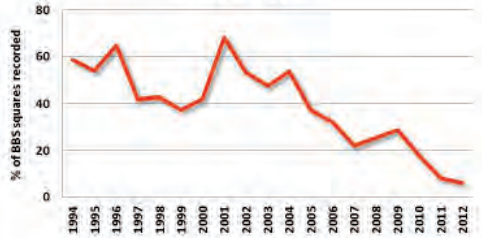
The graphs below illustrate the type of information that can be derived for Suffolk. No attempt has been made to interpret the information; instead these few examples illustrate what can be done. Species have been selected that are common and widespread but have a story to tell. In most cases, the percentage of BBS squares in which the species was recorded each year is used – providing a basic measure of occurrence.

**Suffolk species occurrence graphs**  
- based on % of BBS squares

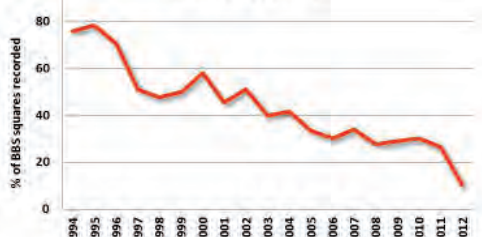
**Oystercatcher**



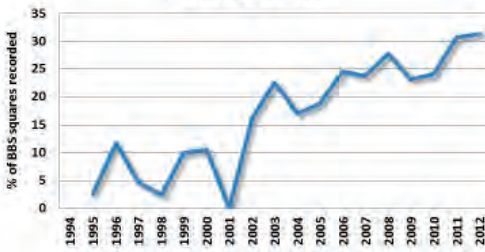
**Turtle Dove**



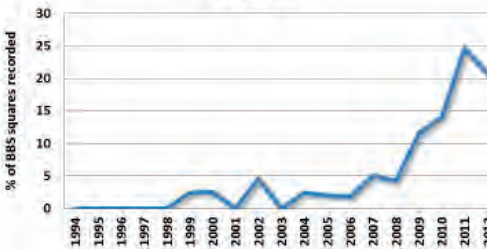
**Willow Warbler**



**Greylag Goose**



**Buzzard**



**Starling**





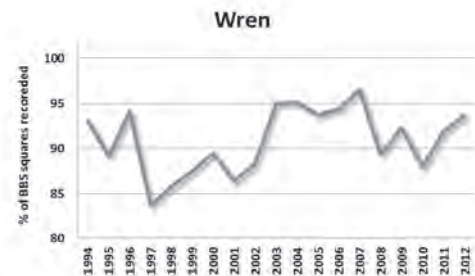
In the case of Wood Pigeon, a species routinely recorded in 100% of BBS squares or thereabouts, the average number of individuals counted per square each year is also included. This provides an interesting comparison – whilst the distribution has remained constant over the twenty-years in which BBS data has been collected, there is a marked increase in the average number of individuals counted per square. Both graphs are also shown for Wren, to highlight the similarity in the pattern of the proportion of squares in which it was recorded and the average number of individuals counted per square.



These graphs provide a snapshot of the readily available wealth of information on the fortunes of Suffolk's common birds, as well as highlighting the value of the type of long-term monitoring that BBS volunteers provide. Annual updates of these patterns would surely be worthwhile, perhaps as an addition to the species accounts in the Suffolk Birds report?



**Editor: If you'd like to take up a BBS square (or even take on a further one) then please get in touch with Mick Wright who is still SOG's BTO contact. His email is [kupe1515@sky.com](mailto:kupe1515@sky.com).**



*Photo credits:*  
 Brian Barker (pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 & 9); Bill Baston (pages 20, 21 & back cover); Gavin Durrant (page 23); photographs courtesy of East Anglian Daily Times (page 36); Andrew Easton (page 22); Malcolm Fairley (page 27); Lee Gregory (page 28); Ian Goodall (front cover & page 26); map courtesy of Google (page 8); Gi Grieco (pages 15, 16, 17, 24 & 25); Isabella Grieco (pages 20, 35 & back cover); Ian King (page 10); Chris Lansdell (page 27); Scott Mayson (page 18); Malcolm Raines (page 7); Tim Scrivener (page 8); John Richardson (pages 14, 18, 19, 21 & 23)

*Illustration credit:*  
 Su Gough (pages 30, 31 & 32)

Phil Brown interviews Lee Gregory

## Meet Lee Gregory

**Biographical note:** Lee is 43, single, a specialist welder by trade and lives in Thetford. Currently he is actively seeking a career change and is considering a range of options in the Natural History field.

Lee Gregory re-joined the Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee in 2013. His recommendation was based on his consistent track record for submitting records - a substantial one that continuously grows as he chases rare birds on his home patch and around the county (as well as across the country and around the globe).



heightened my interest. In between them and the Barnham jaunts, I read my father's small library of bird books cover-to-cover and absorbed as much as I could. But it was Richard Millington's book, 'A Twitchee's Diary', that opened my eyes to the excitement of finding rarities and it was this pursuit that, to be frank, led to my becoming a "bird obsessive".



Intrepid Italian birding - wading the Brabbia Marsh for a Vinous-throated Parrotbill

### How'd you first get into birding?

My passion for birds started early. As a nipper of five or six I used to follow my father around his local patch - Barnham Cross Common to the south of Thetford. My dad was a fairly keen birdwatcher and, once a year, he also took me on an annual birding pilgrimage, either to Cley on the north coast of Norfolk or Minsmere. I really looked forward to these trips and they certainly

But it wasn't just a case of birding. At 14, while at school, I became a volunteer at East Wretham Heath and began surveying on the CBC (Common Bird Census), as it was then called. During this period I also made an effort to learn as many bird songs and calls as I could - a great effort at the time that today really pays dividends. Then, at about 17, I became involved in serious conservation work with the legendary Ron Hoblyn of the Forestry Commission and the RSPB at Santon Downham, who were jointly protecting the last Breckland breeding Red-backed Shrike and Goshawks.

### So where'd you do your birding?

I left school at 16 and took up a welding apprenticeship with a local company. While this work initially curbed the time available for birding, the wages did let me finance a moped that allowed me to considerably enlarge my birding area. While I roamed most of the East of England, I tended to concentrate my efforts on north Norfolk, quickly compiling a list of 375 species.

Unfortunately, as the apprenticeship progressed, work steadily took over and I was reduced to just basic birding locally. But, in time, work also allowed me to fund a car - a Morris Marina to be precise. Which was just as well, as at about the same time I discovered twitching and Birdline and quickly needed to travel much further afield - often quickly.

Nowadays though I mainly confine my attention to the local area, comprising Great Livermere Lake, Lackford, Hockwold Washes/Lakenheath Fen and Nunnery Lakes.

**Talking of lists, what are yours currently standing at?**

To begin with I didn't have a Suffolk list, but to date my "West Suffolk patch" has yielded an impressive 231, while my Breckland count is just below 250. Currently my BOU British List stands at just over 500, with my European list at 607 and my Western Palearctic is now 775.

**Ed: That's pretty impressive Lee!**

**Do you have you any special interests?**

As time has gone on I've become interested in all aspects of natural history, especially moths of late. I must also admit to getting a bit obsessed with photographing everything with my SLR. And digiscoping has also become something of a passion.

On the birding front I became pretty interested in inland gulls some time back. In fact I've been studying them for over 10 years now. I'm particularly interested in Lesser Black-backed and Caspian Gulls. I've tended to concentrate on pig farms (especially as there are a number around my west Suffolk patch) as the gull's rings are much easier to read in that environment.



A clearly ringed Caspian Gull - Feltwell

**What would you describe as your greatest birding moment?**

Actually there isn't one, but several. And it's all about context really. Any sea duck inland is of note, so an Eider at Lackford in an evening gull roost was pretty memorable. As also was the Dusky Warbler at Lynford in October 2012. Further afield was the 2010 Siberian Rubythroat on Fair Isle. I was with Lee Evans at the time aiming for the Savannah Sparrow when we were lucky to be on board a boat ten minutes away when the Rubythroat call went out - that was a very memorable occasion. As was the Lesser Frigatebird, an Asian/Pacific vagrant, that I was really pleased to bag when I was in Kuwait - it was only the third for the Western Palearctic.

While it's a "ropey" digiscoped shot, it's the only one photographed of this species in the WP so far



Celebrating the Frigatebird in Kuwait

More recently Christmas 2013 was spent in the Gambia with my good West Suffolk birding pal Maurice Offord; there we found a Hudsonian Whimbrel which appears to be a third for mainland Africa and just hours before we had to fly home.



Hudsonian Whimbrel (far left), Kartong, Gambia

### ***Have you any tips for our readers?***

They're all pretty obvious really, but still a lot of people don't seem to practise them. First, use your ears and follow up any unusual calls to identify the bird concerned - it's worked well for me. Second, take notes - the older you get the more forgetful we are, sorry what was I saying? Oh yes! And thirdly, look up - it's surprising what you can miss if you don't.

Finally, I think if you're interested in rarities, it pays to keep up to date with taxonomic developments, as there are regularly new upgraded species to consider.

### ***What's next?***

Well... 2014 could see massive changes for me as I have taken a break from welding to try and carve out a career in the Natural History field. Plus, it has given me the time to take up ringing - something I have always wanted to do.

At the moment I have several lines to follow up - for instance I have recently applied for a couple of assistant warden posts which took my fancy, if this fails then there is the possibility of setting up a Breckland Natural History tour company combined with Ecological Fieldwork, but time will tell - wish me luck!

***Editor: Thanks Lee, good to talk to you and best of luck with the career change.***

Steve Abbott, Chairman SORC

## **Changes to the recording status of some Suffolk birds**

The results of our recent review of the recording requirements of eleven species on the Suffolk list are given below. This review was initiated due to (a) BBRC removing some species from their list of considered species, (b) those species that have become rare in the county and (c) those species that may be causing ID difficulties.

**Ruddy Duck** category 3 to 2 (particularly juveniles/immatures/females) due to their growing rarity!

**Black-throated Diver** category 3 to 2 for birds seen on sea watches.

**Leach's Petrel** category 3, no change.

**Great White Egret** category 2 to 3 (already changed in Suffolk Birds 2012)

**Glossy Ibis** category 1 to 2 (now a county rarity) due to no longer being considered by BBRC.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** category 3 to 2 due to increased confusion risk with pale morph Common Buzzards (already changed in Suffolk Birds 2012).

**Grey Phalarope** category 3 to 2 for birds seen on sea watches.

**Long-tailed Skua** category 3, no change.

**Puffin** category 3, no change.

**Olive-backed Pipit** category 1 to 2 (now a county rarity) due to no longer being considered by BBRC.

**Parrot Crossbill** category 1 to 2 (now a county rarity) due to no longer being considered by BBRC.

***Editor: To the uninitiated (such as your editor), for the record, the four categories are defined as follows:***

***1 National rarity***

***2 County rarity***

***3 All records requested***

***4 Specific records***

***For details of the recording requirements for these four categories when submitting records, see the latest copy of Suffolk Birds, page 164.***

*Editor: Sadly this is Philip's last article for the Harrier (at least for the time being?) as his growing workload means something had to give - unfortunately it was his regular 'Looking Back' articles. As far as I can tell his first 'Looking Back' appeared at the close of 2006, and the subsequent 30 contributions form an impressive record - perhaps someone else would like to step into his shoes?*

*So I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Philip on behalf of all SOG members for his sterling efforts with his quarterly salutary reminder of just how many birds have been lost over the last twenty-five and fifty years. Speaking personally it always spurs me on with my conservations efforts. Well done Philip.*

Philip Murphy

## Looking Back – January to March 1964 and 1989

Selected highlights from the 1964 and 1989  
Suffolk Birds reports for the period January to March.

### 50 years ago

In direct contrast with the almost-legendary conditions of early 1963, the weather was generally very mild in the first quarter of 1964 up until mid-March, when colder weather arrived in Suffolk.

#### *Hard weather species scarce*

Given the above information, it is not too surprising to learn that hard-weather species were rather scarce. Only two Smew and one Long-tailed Duck were located. Maximum counts on the Orwell Estuary included only 30 Goldeneye and twelve Red-breasted Mergansers. The peak count of Brent Geese was of up to 500 on the Orwell Estuary; that is well below modern-day totals. Havergate Island attracted 250 White-fronted Geese and, exceptionally for the 1960s, 40 Greylag Geese.

Bewick's Swans were described as being "*exceptionally numerous*" – a herd<sup>2</sup> of 149 at Bradwell, 6<sup>th</sup> March was, at the time, the largest ever recorded in Suffolk.



Unfortunately, the most notable seabird records all involved dead individuals – Leach's Petrel away from the immediate vicinity of the coast at Henham, late January, Manx Shearwater, Minsmere, 21<sup>st</sup> February and Puffin, Shingle Street, 13<sup>th</sup> March.

<sup>2</sup> This is just one of several collective nouns for swans, others include 'a game of swans', 'a wedge' and, my personal favourite, the evocative 'a whiteness of swans'.





Scarce passerines included sixteen Shore Larks in the Minsmere/Walberswick area during the third week of January, small numbers of Waxwings on both sides of the county peaking at twenty, Minsmere, twelve, Ipswich and twelve, Newmarket, and a good scattering of Great Grey Shrikes reported from "many coastal localities and also from Breckland".

A flock of up to 200 Blue Tits in the Easton Broad reedbed, 16<sup>th</sup> January must have been a remarkable sight. The mildness of the weather was exemplified by a Song Thrush found incubating a full clutch of eggs at Worlington, 27<sup>th</sup> February.

Overwintering warblers were rare in Suffolk in the 1960s, so records of a Blackcap at Sudbury in early January and a Chiffchaff at Minsmere, 2<sup>nd</sup> February were particularly noteworthy.

Some early migrants did manage to reach Suffolk from mid-March onwards, despite the onset of colder weather. These included a Stone Curlew, Walberswick, 16<sup>th</sup>, Whinchat, Orford, 20<sup>th</sup> and a Redstart, Lowestoft, 23<sup>rd</sup>; excluding a mid-winter sighting, the above Whinchat remains the earliest ever recorded in Suffolk.

### 25 years ago

The weather in this period was benign – generally mild and settled in January and February, to become a bit more unsettled in March although, interestingly, temperatures late in the month were higher than those in the Mediterranean region at the time.

### Early breeding signs

Birds responded accordingly to these conditions with relatively few hard-weather species. However, as many as fifteen resident species exhibited early breeding behaviour and there was a marked influx of summer visitors in March. As many as eleven species of the latter were involved; highlights included three Sand Martins at Lackford, 9<sup>th</sup> (at the time, the earliest-ever recorded in Suffolk) with as many as 300 at Minsmere, 29<sup>th</sup>, the second earliest-ever Cuckoo at Haverhill, 29<sup>th</sup>, Swallows at eighteen sites and Willow Warblers at twenty-five sites in March and Suffolk's first March record of Redstart for 16 years at Bawdsey, 30<sup>th</sup>.

### Wildfowl records

However, there were some notable wildfowl records. A superb herd of 324 Bewick's Swans feeding at Sedge Fen, Lakenheath, 29<sup>th</sup> January was a record county total and probably involved birds displaced from the Ouse Washes by high water levels. Emigrating Bewick's Swans in February involved 80 north-east over Santon Downham, 16<sup>th</sup> and 35 northeast over Oulton Marshes, 5<sup>th</sup>. In recent times, totals of Pink-footed Geese in the Lowestoft/Breydon area have frequently numbered in the thousands, but 25 years ago the largest gathering was of only eighteen at Kessingland between late January and early March.

Autumn 1988 had witnessed impressive totals of Long-tailed Ducks on our coast and estuaries and these continued into 1989; peak gatherings involved eight on the Stour Estuary, 8<sup>th</sup> January including seven in Holbrook Bay, five south past Landguard, 9<sup>th</sup> March and six in Sole Bay, January and early March. The Orwell Estuary attracted twenty-five Scaup and three Velvet Scoters in January.

### Notable raptors

The White-tailed Eagle, first noted on the Butley/Boyton area in December 1988 remained there until at least 23<sup>rd</sup> February. Hen Harrier totals were well above those of recent years, with as many as 31 roosting at six sites. Although at least six Rough-legged Buzzards were located (five on the coast, one in the Brecks), single Common Buzzards were reported from only three widely-separated areas, an unthinkable situation 25 years later.

Golden Pheasant sightings are distinctly scarce nowadays so it is intriguing to read that in 1989 as many as nine males and five females were at Wordwell, 11<sup>th</sup> February. A remarkable sight was that of a Water Rail feeding with 20 Moorhens on a wet meadow beside the A14 trunk road at Haughley, 30<sup>th</sup> January.

Fagbury's days as a major site for estuarine waders were numbered, but it still managed to attract as many as 46 Sanderlings, 21<sup>st</sup> February. Interesting behaviour by Turnstones was recorded at Lowestoft Harbour, 20<sup>th</sup> March when 65 were counted as they roosted side-by-side on mooring ropes. Possible indicators of the remarkably mild weather were a breeding-plumaged Knot at Levington, 2<sup>nd</sup> January and a breeding-plumaged Bar-tailed Godwit on the Alde Estuary, 4<sup>th</sup> January. Overwintering Common Sandpipers have been scarce in recent years, but in the period under review singles were at four sites and two at each of Benacre and Alton Water.

The Iceland Gull, present at Felixstowe for its sixth successive winter, remained on site throughout this period, and up to five Glaucous Gulls were located on the coast. Wintering skuas are now a regular feature, but in 1989 two Pomarine Skuas off Ness Point, Lowestoft in February were the first Suffolk records of this species for that month.

Reports of seabirds away from their usual haunts involved an adult Kittiwake at Lackford Lakes, 15<sup>th</sup> March to 7<sup>th</sup> April and Alton Water's first record of Guillemot, 20<sup>th</sup> February.



Severe weather in January 1987 had almost completely decimated Suffolk's population of Cetti's Warblers; the only Suffolk record in 1987 had been of one at Minsmere, 27<sup>th</sup> September to 10<sup>th</sup>

October. No more were reported from Minsmere until 15<sup>th</sup> March 1989 when a singing bird was present. Overwintering Blackcaps included one taking peanuts from feeders in the Heligoland Trap at Landguard, 28<sup>th</sup> January to 2<sup>nd</sup> February; also in Felixstowe, an overwintering Chiffchaff was heard singing on 10<sup>th</sup> February.

Passage passerines at Landguard included seven Black Redstarts, 30<sup>th</sup> March and six Firecrests, 31<sup>st</sup> March; thirteen Firecrests were trapped and ringed at Landguard in March.

#### *Impressive totals*

Sparrow, finch and bunting totals were very impressive. A flock of 200 Tree Sparrows was at Stowmarket, 26<sup>th</sup> February and four flocks of at least fifty were noted at other sites. Finch totals included as many as 750 Goldfinches, Ramsholt, 18<sup>th</sup> March and 114 Twite, Sudbourne, 30<sup>th</sup> January. Another impressive sight was that of up to 140 Snow Buntings in the Orfordness/Sudbourne area in January.

Finally, the most gluttonous bird to be noted in this period was a Black-headed Gull that was seen to swallow a Field Vole at Aldeburgh, 5<sup>th</sup> February.



Phil Whittaker

## Suffolk Ornithologists' Group Annual General Meeting

Holiday Inn, London Road, Ipswich  
7.30pm 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014

**Apologies Council:** Steve Piotrowski,  
Robin Harvey, Edward Jackson.

**Apologies Members:** Morris Charlton,  
Nigel Banham, Gary Plank, Paul Gowen.

**Number of members present  
(including Council):** 35

### Minutes of the meeting

1. In the absence of the president the chairman opened the meeting, offered apologies and welcomed those present to the AGM of the SOG.

### 2. Minutes of the 2012 AGM

Minutes of the last AGM had been previously published in The Harrier and had appeared on the SOG website. No comments have been received and the meeting approved these without any amendments.

### 3. Presentation of Accounts

The treasurer presented the accounts for the financial year ending 31/12/13. He emphasised the importance of the specific items of income that had raised additional funds, including:

CSD Day (£300) L&G donations (£950) Viridor Survey not yet included (£800) The Cut event (£700) with Gift Aid (£1000 approx.) still being assessed.

From a total income of £8635 the present balance is £609.22, with some items still to be added, resulting in a healthy balance. Expenditure included: fees for speakers, meeting room hire, insurance, IT equipment, Harrier publication and distribution and website costs.

The chairman added that the £700 from The Cut

event would be allocated to farmland birds, swift boxes, bursaries and other suitable projects.

The meeting unanimously approved the accounts.

The meeting thanked Matthew for adopting this important role and doing such a "brilliant job" despite it being a difficult task to pick up; especially when considering the many crossover issues with SNS. The chair also thanked Phil Brown for his efforts in saving approx. £1500 in Harrier production costs by finding a cheaper print firm. He also added that funds from L&G may not be as significant in the future, but Viridor income will increase.

### 4. Election of Council Members

Sadly Jean Garrod has stepped down and the AGM offered thanks for her many years of hard work, commitment and support of SOG. Edward Jackson, who could not attend the meeting, was proposed as a Council member. Edward has strong links to SWT and as already made a significant impact supporting the SOG education project work and offering sound planning advice in a number of areas. Edward passed on his apologies for not being present as he had a prior commitment arranged before he was asked to join Council. He hopes to further strengthen SOG links with SWT. Robin Harvey (RSPB) was happy to be co-opted back onto the Council and to continue his important role as an effective RSPB link.

The following were then proposed and seconded and duly elected to Council unopposed:

Edward Jackson

Robin Harvey

Philip Murphy and Mike Marsh were proposed, seconded and elected as Honorary Vice Presidents.

Phil Brown is in the process of taking on the role of website co-ordinator.

While Gi Grieco, now that Mick Wright has left Council, has adopted the role of Project Officer.

### 5. Officers' Reports

**Gi Grieco Projects:** A Rook survey has been proposed for 2015, as a comparative study for the one that took place in Suffolk 40 years ago. The

BTO Atlas will support this work and members are asked to plan/suggest possible survey sites at this stage.

**Phil Whittaker Secretary:** requested from members updates of their email addresses as many emails sent out are returned as 'delivery failed'. This could also be because members have security features on their email systems that block multiple email posts. Generally the communication systems to members were working quite well.

**Adam Gretton:** reviewed the upcoming indoor events and encouraged members to plug these in as many ways as possible. He reminded the meeting that non-members were welcome at all indoor meetings. John Grant of EADT has offered to help with the future publicity of indoor meetings.

**Steve Abbott SORC:** stated that the committee is as "strong as it ever has been" and requested that members keep sending in written and if possible photographic records of rarities.

## 6. Chairman's Report

In reviewing the work of the Council during 2013 the chairman thanked the Council for their individual contributions, attendance at six (often very long) meetings and many sub-group meetings throughout the year.

He thanked the Suffolk Birds report editor for pulling together another excellent publication. This was endorsed by the meeting, "a very professional product" was one comment made.

The chairman offered special thanks to Kathy Piotrowski for her efforts organising the 40-year Celebration event at The Cut. Kathy did much of the leg-work resulting in an excellent evening and a really significant celebration of Suffolk birding which was greatly enjoyed by all who attended. Thanks also went to Viking Optics for their donation of binoculars as prizes and also to Adam Gretton who, while he had won the Swarovski bins, has donated £75 to SOG as a result.

The CSD Families Day was also a noteworthy development bringing together families, children and SOG members for a daylong, instructional birding experience at Minsmere. The chair stressed that this was an important direction for SOG to follow and other education type projects were being developed by the Publicity

group of the Council. Volunteers from the wider membership are always needed to deliver these types of event. The Viridor Biodiversity Survey project continues for another year at least and remains an important funding stream. It has now been extended to include a more detailed Skylark and Butterfly survey. He commended the working group who have re-vamped the website which has resulted in a very professional and informative site. He thanked all involved in the planning and delivery of the outdoor and indoor events and also stressed there is still a need to recruit new members and that all members could have a role in this. There were a number of very positive comments from the members present about the overall quality and content of the Harrier in 2013.

## 7. Denis Ockelton Trophy

The Denis Ockelton Trophy was presented (in his absence) to Nigel Odin who has worked tirelessly for Landguard Bird Observatory for 25 years. SOG Council voted for him unanimously. Nigel will be presented with the trophy by the president or chairman at a later date and probably at Landguard.

## 8. BINS Review of the year

Roy Marsh and Lee Woods reviewed the BINS year with a fascinating and entertaining presentation of photographs of rare, scarce and more common birds month by month. It was noted that March 2013 produced the coldest March spell since 1910! Temperatures fell below freezing on 15 days. The other significant weather event that effected our birdlife and birding was the St Jude Storm. Roy and Lee emphasised the importance of BINS for tracking birds across Suffolk and communicating this to birders often on an hourly basis. The high quality photography submitted to the BINS website was again a very impressive feature of the year, especially the contributions of John Richardson, who spends many hours in the field and contributes much of his work to the BINS website. (Ed: [And the Harrier of course](#)) The meeting offered special thanks to John for this.

Rarities of the year included:

Eastern Subalpine Warbler (Landguard)

Pacific Swift (East Lane & Trimley)

Siberian Stonechat (Trimley)

Parrot Crossbills (Tunstall & Thetford Forest)

The Waxwing Lyricals receive their trophy



While there was no vote this year, the result of Bird of the Year was announced as:

Eastern Subalpine Warbler

The finder Paul Holmes was presented with the award.

#### 9. BINS Cup 2014

Only two teams featured in the 2014 New Year's Day Bird Race. The weather was very poor on the day.

Waxwing Lyricals scored 100 species

Pied Twitchers scored 90 species

The Waxwing Lyricals - Gi Grieco, Eddie Bathgate and Val Lockwood - were therefore presented with the BINS Cup.

#### 10. Quiz

Nick Mason presented an enjoyable and testing quiz, based around identifying birds from some (very) puzzling photographs and questions. There were 40 questions and most members present managed scores of 30 plus. The overall winner was Matthew Deans with a remarkable 38! Matthew received the prize of a Bill Baston framed Barn Owl photograph.

#### 11. Raffle

Donated prizes included drawings, wine, books and bird boxes and were won by many members present.

#### 12. AOB

Adam Gretton gave further information about the Swift Box Project and requested members to let him know of any contacts they may have with councils or building firms that may be able to accommodate boxes on their building projects. Updates on progress will follow in the Harrier.

Scott Mayson County Recorder South-east made a request for county records.

Raffle tickets were on sale at the start and bird boxes, SOG clothing and books were on sale throughout the event

Matthew Deans,  
SOG Bird Brain  
2014



# Announcements

John Grant

## John Partridge 1943 - 2013

Many SOG members will be saddened to learn of the death of John Partridge, the RSPB stalwart who ferried them safely – and with his usual good grace and kindness – to and from his beloved Havergate Island on so many enjoyable field trips over very many years.

John was a great friend of SOG – and he was a great friend too to Suffolk’s birdlife. The measure of the high esteem in which John was held, and a sign of how popular his warmth, humour and humanity was, could be seen in the wonderful turn-out for his memorial service at St Bartholomew’s Church, a few hours after his funeral service was held at Seven Hills Crematorium, Nacton.

About 200 people said a fond farewell to him at the service that celebrated his loving family life, his considerable contribution to Orford village life and, of course, his outstanding service to the RSPB. He cared for the society’s famed Havergate Island nature reserve in the River Ore for 30 years.

Orford born and bred, John lost his long battle against prostate cancer in February. He was 70.



Reg Partridge also served at Havergate - together father and son amassed an amazing sixty years of service on the island!



John Partridge at Havergate

He became the RSPB’s warden for Havergate Island in 1974 following the death of his father Reg, who had held the post for about 30 years. The work carried out by father and son on the island – creating and managing its shallow saline lagoons – was a vital factor in the return to Britain as a breeding species of the society’s logo bird, the Avocet, and its continued successful re-colonisation.

A talented artist and woodworker John served in the Merchant Navy and travelled the world from the age of sixteen, but a more local career as a ferryman with the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment on Orford Ness followed, before he began his now highly-acclaimed tenure on Havergate.

Tributes to his work on the island have been paid by leading East Anglian conservationists:

**Jon Haw**, reserves manager for the RSPB in the eastern region, described John as “a great ambassador for the RSPB and for nature conservation on the Suffolk coast”. Mr Haw added: “Havergate is an iconic nature reserve for the RSPB and, along with Minsmere, was one of the places where Avocets returned to breed in Britain in the 1940s. “Without a doubt, John’s work in creating and managing the lagoons and protecting the breeding Avocets on Havergate Island has

ensured their amazing population expansion in the UK."

Former Suffolk Wildlife Trust chief **Derek Moore** – a frequent visitor to Havergate who knew John well – said he was "one of the all-time greats of practical nature conservation in Suffolk, who contributed greatly to the success of Avocets and who provided just the right habitat conditions for them and a wealth of other waders, and other birds, as breeders, birds of passage and those that winter there".

In addition to his service on the island, John, who lived in Munday Lane, Orford, organised the RSPB's purchase of its nearby Boyton Marshes

nature reserve and the Butley River management leases and also carried out management work on the sites.

He served as an Orford retained firefighter for 14 years, was an Orford parish councillor for four years and served for five years on the Alde and Ore Association committee.

All SOG members, those who had the privilege of knowing him and those who did not, should give thanks for John's work. He is survived by Diana, his wife of 45 years, their two daughters, Karen and Julie, and two grandchildren, George and Emily, to whom our sympathies are extended.

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Steve Goddard

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## Helen Price 1941-2014

Rarely was there a good bird in Suffolk and particularly Minsmere when you didn't see Geoff and Helen Price there to enjoy it. Astonishingly, this will be no more.

Sadly, Helen passed away at her new home near Edinburgh on 12 February after a long illness and unbelievably, less than three and a half years after Geoff died. Indeed, Helen first became ill also with cancer, inside two years of his death, such is the unpredictability of life. However, despite long spells in hospital involving several major procedures and still mourning Geoff, she was determined to enjoy life as best she could.

Without Geoff and very much due to her failing health, Helen did very little birding but became more involved with the WI and became closer to her many friends in Darsham village where she lived. They all enjoyed many happy times together with Helen rising above her problems and remarkably retaining her indomitable spirit. Such inner strength would have been evident to all those who knew her from the way she dealt so positively with her breathing difficulties. This distressing condition had been brought about

from living with one lung after illness during her youth that was worsened by a serious infection contracted on a birding trip to Finland in 2000.

As Helen's cancer took hold it was these loyal friends who were to be a great comfort to her during her difficult times. However, knowing that her health would not improve in December and after much deliberation, Helen decided it was best to move back to Scotland to be close to her family. This was 47 years after she had left for England having met Geoff whilst he was working there.

Helen had purchased an apartment in Haddington, Lothian with which she was thrilled and was looking forward to getting out and about her old haunts, including birding places she had visited with Geoff. This was not to be once this pernicious disease had done its work. Helen will be greatly missed. The Suffolk and Minsmere birding scene has been strange without Geoff around. It will now be all the stranger knowing that we shall not be seeing Helen again.

*Reference: The Harrier Bulletin No. 163 – Obituary Geoff Price 1940-2010 John H Grant*

## The Landguard Community Survey

The Landguard Partnership is planning to apply for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund this year. So we need your views to shape how the project is developed in a way that meets the needs of the people who work, volunteer and visit, as well as the natural environment, wildlife and heritage found at Landguard.

If you know Landguard and want to contribute to its future, please follow the link below and complete the survey before the 1<sup>st</sup> June.

[www.surveymonkey.com/s/PMRX7LS](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PMRX7LS)

Paul Grant

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## Upcoming Surveys

### *BTO Peregrine Survey 2014*

Full details of the current BTO survey can be found on the SOG web site - <http://www.sogonline.org.uk/?p=1070>. The survey is to look for and record the presence of Peregrine in selected 5km x 5km squares, searching only in suitable habitat. The survey runs from March to July.

### *SOG Rook Survey 2015*

At this time of year Rooks are busy at their communal nest sites and this is a reminder that in spring 2015 SOG will be conducting a Rook survey to record the Rookeries within the county. It will be used in conjunction with data from the recent BTO Atlas and reference information from

the Suffolk Birds reports (including a paper in the 2009 report on rookeries east of the A12 by Jamie Bruce Lockhart, who has already been in contact and kindly offered to survey the area for the 2015 project).

The Group would like members to carry out surveys of rookeries for up to date information. Full details on methodology will be in the next issue of the Harrier along with details on the SOG web site. Later in the year we will publish a survey sheet.

We're suggesting that members wishing to participate in this survey next year might find it useful to recce their area this year and make a note of the current rookeries' locations.

Nigel Odin

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## Suffolk's first Subalpine Warbler

The first Suffolk record of a Subalpine Warbler was identified, at the time by the observers, as being a Subalpine Warbler of the eastern race. A feather from this bird was saved by Mike Morley and was sent to Professor Martin Collinson for examination late last year. The feather, having been 'gene tested', the Professor has sent us his confirmation:

"We got there in the end... we treated your Subalpine Warbler (Landguard, 26 Sep - 2 Oct 1986, trapped 27 Sep) (our ref Subalp86L) like a museum bird and isolated a short fragment (227 bp) of the mitochondrial cytb gene. This clearly comes out

as *albistriata* - the 227 bp are identical to birds previously sequenced from Lesvos. Over this stretch of DNA, there's not a lot of difference (1 bp) from *albistriata* in southern Italy, so we can't totally rule that out, but Western Subalpines and Moltoni's are very different, so it's not one of them."

This feather was problematical and the examination time-consuming due to its age, but now we have a definitive decision. Landguard Bird Observatory is extremely grateful to Professor Martin Collinson for his help in examining the DNA of feathers sent to him.



# Christmas Quiz result



Clive Collins is to be congratulated for his fiendishly difficult Ornithological General Knowledge competition. While Eddie Bathgate is also to be congratulated for his winning entry and he tells me he is now much enjoying his prize of Mark Cocker's handsome book.

From the few entries we received it was clear the answers were seldom a matter of general knowledge and nor were they easy to work out - even with the benefit of Google etc. So, for those of you wanting to know where you went wrong, here are the questions again plus their answers:

- Q1:** What is the ornithological connection between Sheffield, Newcastle, Swindon and The Great Exhibition of 1851?  
**A:** Each had football teams with bird nicknames associated with them: Sheffield United - The Owls; Newcastle - The Magpies; Swindon - The Robins; The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace - the Eagles.
- Q2:** Which famous lover confused a lark with a Nightingale?  
**A:** Romeo. "Romeo and Juliet" Act III Scene 5.
- Q3:** Where could you see Great Bustards in Cambridgeshire?  
**A:** On the county crest.
- Q4:** Which is the only bird to have appeared on an English coin?  
**A:** The Wren, on the reverse of the farthing from 1937-1956
- Q5:** Which bird did Aristotle claim produced its call by farting?  
**A:** The Turtle Dove. In "Historia Animalium", Book IX, paragraph 633b
- Q6:** What links pheasants, plovers, eagles and the number 79?  
**A:** Gold. Golden Pheasant, Golden Plover, Golden Eagle and the atomic number of the element
- Q7:** Which brother and sister lived at Dove Cottage?  
**A:** William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Dove Cottage is at Grasmere in the Lake District
- Q8:** How is the wife of a Governor-General of India commemorated by a British bird?  
**A:** Lady Amherst's Pheasant
- Q9:** In which novel does Moses the Raven tell of a mysterious country called Sugar-candy Mountain?  
**A:** 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell
- Q10:** Whose punishment was to be turned into a screech owl?  
**A:** Ascalaphus, a spirit who tended the orchards of Hades. He betrayed Persephone and, as a punishment the goddess Demeter turned him into a screech-owl
- Q11:** Whereabouts do the Western Meadowlark and the Ring-necked Pheasant travel in opposite directions?  
**A:** The USA - they are the state birds of North and South Dakota
- Q12:** Which pair of mythological birds symbolised "Thought" and "Memory"?  
**A:** The ravens Huginn and Muninn, who sat on Odin's shoulders
- Q13:** What is the association of the Kingfisher with calm weather?  
**A:** A period of calm weather in spring was known to the Ancient Greeks as "halcyon days", when the sea was so calm that the

Kingfisher could build a nest on the open sea and incubate its eggs. Hence the scientific name of the White-throated Kingfisher: *Halcyon smyrnensis*

- Q14:** Which notorious prison is named after a bird? (It's not "Sing-Sing"!)  
**A:** Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. During the early years of Spanish settlement there was a colony of pelicans on the island and it was named: Isla de las Alcatrazes - Pelican Island
- Q15:** In theory all swans on the River Thames belong to the Queen. But which bird is appropriate for a king?  
**A:** A Gyrfalcon. "An Eagle for an emperor, a Gyrfalcon for a king, a Peregrine for a prince, a Saker for a knight, a Merlin for a lady, a Goshawk for a yeoman, a Sparrowhawk for a priest, a Kestrel for a knave". From the 'Book of St. Albans' 1436
- Q16:** What was the significance of Wallace's Fruit-Dove on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2012 on Yamdena in the Tanimbar Islands?  
**A:** Ticked by Tom Gullick to take his life-list to 9000, the first to reach that total
- Q17:** Which pesky corvid was celebrated in opera by Rossini?  
**A:** The Magpie. "La Gazza Ladra" - The Thieving Magpie. The bird steals a silver spoon belonging to Lucia
- Q18:** Which British bird is a spelling mistake?  
**A:** Ptarmigan. The name is from the Gaelic "tarmachan", but when this was anglicised it was mistakenly (or some would have snobbishly) thought that it should begin with "pt-" to accord with the Greek "pter", meaning "wing", as in *pterodactyl* and *helicopter*
- Q19:** Why is it a sin to kill a Mockingbird?  
**A:** "They don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy"
- Q20:** Who paid his rent with 300 birds called puffins?  
**A:** Ranulph, the Abbot of Blanchminster, who was the tenant of the Scilly Isles. In 1337 he paid his rent to the Duchy of Cornwall with "ccc volacrubus qui vocantur pophyns" - 300 birds called puffins", probably shearwater nestlings preserved by drying for consumption
- Q21:** Which bird was beaten to death on St. Kilda in 1840 in the belief that it was a witch, and was seen no more in Great Britain?  
**A:** The last Great Auk seen in Britain
- Q22:** Which American birds reappeared in 1994, having disappeared for fourteen years?  
**A:** The rock group the Eagles, who disbanded in 1980 and reformed in 1994
- Q23:** Which museum curator has birds from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America named after him, despite never having himself left Europe?  
**A:** Coenraad Temminck, Director of the Natural History Museum, Leiden, from 1820-1858. His name is remembered in Temminck's Stint (Europe), Temminck's Tragopan, Temminck's Crowned Willow Warbler, Temminck's Hornbill and Temminck's Pygmy Woodpecker (Asia), Temminck's Courser and Temminck's Horned Lark (Africa) and Temminck's Seed-eater (Latin America)

**Q24:** In which medieval poem does the Goshawk, the Crane, the Chough, the Starling, the Peacock and the Fieldfare, among others, choose their mates on St. Valentine's Day?

**A:** 'The Parliament of Birds' by Geoffrey Chaucer

**Q25:** Among British birds, what do the following have in common: Magpie, Dipper, Wheatear, Bullfinch and Lapwing?

**A:** In their scientific names the same word is used for both genus and species, respectively: *Pica pica*, *Cinclus cinclus*, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, *Vanellus vanellus*.

**Q26:** Which English county has provided names for three British birds?

**A:** Kent: Kentish Plover, Dartford Warbler, Sandwich Tern.

**Q27:** Translate: "An eagle gules addorsed and inverted armed argent".

**A:** In heraldry: A red eagle with both wings showing, the wingtips tucked back towards the body, with silver beak and claws.

**Q28:** Which bird links a poem by Shelley and a piece of music by Vaughan Williams?

**A:** The Skylark. It is the subject of Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" and Vaughan Williams's composition "The Lark Ascending".

**Q29:** Whereabouts on the Isle of Wight would you find "the nook of land frequented by buzzards"?

**A:** Wroxhall – "Wroccesheale" in 1038, from the Old English "wrocc" – a buzzard, and "halh" – a nook or corner of land.

**Q30:** Who warns housewives not to leave their washing drying on hedgerows when the kite is nest-building?

**A:** Autolycus in 'The Winter's Tale'. "My traffic is sheets; when the kite builds, look to lesser linen."

**Q31:** Which raptor first saw the light of day in 1927 in Hartford, Wisconsin, USA?

**A:** The Kissel White Eagle, a model produced by the Kissel Motor Car Company

**Q32:** Which crepuscular bird was believed to have fed by suckling on a nanny goat's teat?

**A:** The Nightjar, hence its scientific name *Caprimulgus* – goatsucker

**Q33:** Who sailed over the swan's road to kill a monster?

**A:** Beowulf, in the Old English poem of that name. He sailed from home with fourteen companions "ofer swanrade" to Heorot to confront Grendel

**Q34:** The mythological bird the Phoenix is supposed to rise again from the flames, but which winter visitor to Britain has come through fire?

**A:** The Brent Goose. The name means "burnt"!

**Q35:** Which sparrow had no painful memories, despite being raised in a brothel?

**A:** Edith Piaf, of "Non, je ne regrette rien" fame. Her real name was Edith Gassion, but she was nicknamed "La môme piaf" – little sparrow, "piaf" being French slang for "sparrow"

**Q36:** How did a dove make history on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1845?

**A:** It was the "Basel dove", the first appearance of a bird on a stamp, issued by the Swiss canton of Basel on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1845, valued at 2½ "rappen" or pennies

**Q37:** Which bird's head and foot constitute OUM 11605?

**A:** These are the remains of the dodo in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

**Q38:** In what way can the Bar-headed Goose and Brünnich's Guillemot form a contrasting pair?

**A:** Of birds that can fly, they have been observed at the greatest height above sea-level and at the greatest depth below the sea: the goose at 6500m over the Himalayas, and the guillemot at a depth of 210m (the flightless Emperor Penguin beats that with a depth of 565m)

**Q39:** Which is the only standard British bird name to have originated in the ancient Celtic language of Cornwall?

**A:** Gull

**Q40:** If an Oystercatcher catches oysters (which of course it doesn't, at least in Europe), what does a bee-eater eat – in France?

**A:** Wasps. In French it is the "Guêprier" – the Wasp.

**Q41:** Which resplendent bird can be divided into a hundred?

**A:** A quetzal, the currency of Guatemala, named after the national bird the Resplendent Quetzal. It can be divided into 100 centavos.

**Q42:** When did the snatching of a goose by an eagle predict the return of a husband to a faithful wife?

**A:** In Book 19 of Homer's "Odyssey". Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus, dreams that an eagle swoops down and kills all her pet geese, but this is interpreted to mean that her husband is about to return to Ithaca and put all her suitors to death.

**Q43:** Which bird looks out to sea, watching for returning sailors?

**A:** The female Liver Bird on the clock tower of the Royal Liver Building on Liverpool's Pier Head.

**Q44:** Where does a dirty duck look across to a swan?

**A:** In Stratford-upon-Avon. "The Black Swan" pub on Waterside, a.k.a. "The Dirty Duck", looks across the road to the RSC's "Swan Theatre".

**Q45:** When did an eagle finish off little boots?

**A:** In the account by the Jewish historian Josephus, a member of the Praetorian Guard called Aquila ("eagle" in Latin) struck the fatal sword-blow in the assassination of Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, the Roman emperor known as "Caligula" from his habit of wearing cut-down soldiers' boots (caligula) around the military camp of his father Germanicus.

**Q46:** Why did the Ancient Greeks think that the male buzzard was lucky?

**A:** They called it the "triorchis", which means: "having three testicles". (Ed: I'm not sure I'd call that lucky!)

**Q47:** Which bird nested on the walls of Macbeth's castle?

**A:** The "temple-haunting martlet" – probably the House Martin. "Macbeth" Act I Scene VI.

**Q48:** What distinction is shared by thirty-two pigeons?

**A:** They have been awarded the PDSA's Dickin Medal, for animals serving with the armed forces.

**Q49:** Which innocuous songbird is threatened with having its feet plucked?

**A:** The lark, in the French children's song "Allouette": "je te plumerai les pieds".

**Q50:** Emus are flightless, but which famous battle caused an emu to fly?

**A:** The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. John Bowman, a farmer at Richmond near Sydney, made a flag featuring a kangaroo and an emu and flew it from his house to celebrate the victory at Trafalgar the previous year. The design was later adopted for the current Australian coat of arms.

## 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: **Phil Brown**  
Website Co-ordinators: **Gi Grieco/Phil Brown**  
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

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### 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



## What we do

### Networking

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

### Media

- Strong web presence - [www.sogonline.org.uk](http://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

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