September 2011 Magazine No.166

The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover photography – Young Swifts on nest
Photographer: Erich Kaiser, taken in late June 2004 using a Minolta DIMAGE Z

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Welcome to the latest Harrier

To begin with I'd like to bring you up to date with the SOG members' survey that well over one in four of you contributed to. First many thanks for all of your valuable input. Second, since June several Council members have been working on the data your responses generated. Preliminary findings were presented to the full Council earlier in September and in December we intend publishing a short review of these findings and some initial conclusions. Then at the AGM next February we'll give an indication of where we might go in the future.

So let's turn to this issue – what will you find? As some of you may know, Richard Rafe the previous editor recently retired from Natural England. Latterly he was responsible there for the team considering the possible reintroduction of the White-tailed Eagle to Suffolk. Now the heat has died down I asked him for his thoughts about this species and the likelihood of it ever nesting in the county.

Our members' survey clearly demonstrates the issue of conservation is a SOG concern. SOG's President Steve Piotrowski demonstrates this by providing a fascinating introduction to the Swift, an iconic summer bird, plus a thought-provoking article dealing with Swift conservation in this county.

Next up, the BINS summer show reveals a surprising level of rarities. Not the usual summer doldrums, but a real 'summer delight' instead!

Then, thinking to the future, is part 2 of 'Suffolk and sea erosion' where we explore this topic further. We show how one reserve is combating coastal erosion and then reveal which species will be winners as well as which losers. When we receive more information about how individual reserves are anticipating contending with it then we'll be publishing more later in this respect too.

Talking of publishing more, the Harrier is the members' own magazine and, as such, it needs more stories from you. So get your pens out, or your keyboards fired up, and send the Editor something.

Finally, a special thanks is in order for the rest of the team who get each issue to you – they are Adam Gretton who checks the text and proofs for me, Mike Gaydon at Healeys who copes with my artwork demands (sadly he is retiring this year and we all wish him well for the future) and, at the end of the line, are the sterling efforts of Jean and Richard Attenborrow who oversee the magazine's distribution.

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue will be 18 November.

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

Richard Rafe in conversation
with Phil Brown

White-tailed Eagles – could they nest in Suffolk?

Editor: Before we consider the Suffolk angle, can you tell me a bit about White-tailed Eagles.

Richard: The White-tailed Eagle, alternatively known as the Sea Eagle[1], is one of the biggest eagles in the world and, by wingspan and weight, the largest eagle in Europe.

Editor: So what sort of wingspan are we talking about?

Richard: I've included some comments on size at the end of this article, but its wingspan can be around 220 cm – that's between seven to eight feet in old money. So they're huge.

They inhabit sea coasts, lake shores, extensive wetlands and large river valleys. Although nesting on cliffs or crags in some parts of their range, these eagles prefer to nest in the crowns of mature trees.

Editor: Where are they presently to be found?

Richard: White-tailed Eagles are widely distributed across northern Asia and Eastern Europe, but there has been a marked decline in range since the 19th century due at least in part to human persecution, although with some recovery in recent years in Central and Eastern Europe (chiefly the old 'GDR', Poland and the Ukraine). Northern populations are migratory, in response to freshwater freezing and waterfowl prey being absent in winter. Over most of Europe adult pairs are strictly resident all year, though juveniles and immatures wander extensively – which is why we tend to see them occasionally over the East of England.

White-tailed Eagles are predators, scavengers and kleptoparasites (stealing prey from other predators) taking fish, water birds, mammals and carrion; they are much less active hunters than Golden Eagles. They are one of those birds which when seen can't fail to impress.

Editor: I understand you were involved in the recent discussions about the possibility of reintroducing White-tailed Eagles into Suffolk.

Richard: That's right. For many years there had been talk about the idea of reintroducing White-tailed Eagles to England. In 2006 various interested parties came together in a partnership to take this forward. The

[1] *Editor:* Actually this name is something of a misnomer. The German name Seeadler, from which we derive Sea Eagle, has been misunderstood. While it is true the White-tailed Eagle can be found on the coast, the German word 'see' is actually defined two ways, meaning either the sea or lake/pond. Cramp *et al* (BWP) bear this out when they wrote that this species is "generally linked with sea coasts, lake shores, broad rivers, islands and wetlands where fish and other aquatic prey are plentiful", i.e. it is more of a continental than oceanic bird.

partnership core members throughout were Natural England (formerly English Nature) and RSPB; other partners variously involved were Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water, Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Forestry Commission.

Editor: So what did this partnership do?

Richard: First, in 2007 it conducted feasibility studies that identified the Suffolk coast as the most promising area for a potential reintroduction in England – its extensive wetland areas, suitable habitat, and year-round food supply made it ideal.

Editor: So what was your role in this Richard?

Richard: At this stage I was asked to chair a steering group to look at the practicalities of a reintroduction in East Anglia – we considered possible release locations from the Wash to the Thames, but Suffolk remained at the heart of the studies.

Editor: Things didn't go exactly smoothly did they – I seem to recall some pretty hostile stories in the press.

Richard: Too true. In 2007 and 2008 concerted opposition to the project arose and, as a consequence, the complexity of what we were trying to do increased substantially. The project commissioned research into a whole host of issues relevant to whether it was appropriate to reintroduce White-tailed Eagles and how they might fit into the Suffolk landscape. There were some very challenging issues; although White-tailed Eagles in Eastern Europe live in lowland landscapes very similar to Suffolk, there are no really comparable places with such a density of outdoor livestock – the evidence indicates that effects on livestock would be minimal but emotions ran high and some opponents managed a very effective media campaign against the idea.

Editor: It struck me at the time that the partnership was completely outgunned on the publicity front.

Richard: That was possibly the case, but in 2010 it became clear that, as Natural England was under considerable financial pressure as part of widespread government budget cuts, funding for this project would be problematic.

Editor: So what happened?

Richard: Well the next step in the project process would have been to run a consultation exercise, but it was decided it would be inappropriate for Natural England to front such a consultation when all the signals were that we would be unable to fund any reintroduction project anyway. So, in early 2010, Natural England announced that it would not continue to lead or fund the project into the future. The RSPB subsequently announced that a White-tailed Eagle reintroduction into England remains an aspiration but will not be pursued in the short-term.

Editor: What evidence is there that White-tailed Eagles ever bred in this area?

Richard: Under accepted international convention, reintroductions should only occur

for species within their former range. As a breeding species these eagles disappeared from England early in recent history before the advent of natural history recording, so there is little written evidence of them breeding in southern England. A few old definitive records exist (e.g. a last nest on the Isle of Wight in 1780) but most of the evidence for them being widespread in England comes from archaeology and place names suggesting that at one time White-tailed Eagles bred in heavily wooded river valleys throughout southern England. Opponents of the proposal to reintroduce them suggested that a species that had been absent for 200 years should stay absent; but the counter argument is that they should be here if it were not for past persecution, that they could fit into the modern landscape of East Anglia and that we should welcome them back.

Editor: So a reintroduction is unlikely in the near future – any chance that White-tailed Eagles may breed naturally in Suffolk?

Richard: One of the reasons a reintroduction was considered is that White-tailed Eagles are unlikely to re-colonise southern England naturally in the near future.

Editor: You said earlier that they are largely sedentary as adults.

Richard: Yes, although young birds may wander widely, they usually return to the area in which they were reared, so any outward spread of the population tends to be extremely slow. To give an example, following a reintroduction on the west coast of Scotland, the first successful breeding pair was in 1985. There are now some 40 pairs but still largely confined to the Mull – Skye area. A second reintroduction is currently underway on the Scottish east coast. A pair first bred in Holland in 2006 well west of the main European

Steve Piotrowski

Some Swift facts

A quick introduction to this iconic Suffolk summer visitor:

Swifts should not be confused with Swallows as they are plain sooty brown in colour and have a pale chin, which is more pronounced in young birds. In flight, their long, scythe-like wings and short, forked tail distinguishes them from Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins.

Members of the latter group have large pale areas, whereas Swifts are all dark. They neither perch on wires, nor fold their wings during wing-stroke, while their exuberant screaming parties, racing down high streets at roof-level, are a summer feature in many Suffolk villages and towns. They arrive in the UK in late April and early May, staying until early August before returning to tropical Africa.

population but this was after many years of large numbers of wintering birds. We have the occasional winter and spring birds here in Suffolk, so I don't think breeding is likely in the near future – but I would love to be proved wrong!

Editor: So what do you take away from your involvement in the project?

Richard: Two things. First, a reinforcement of how strong feelings can be about birds of prey. Some of the concerns about possible impacts of White-tailed Eagles were genuine and needed to be listened and responded to, but a great deal of opposition was simply a deep-rooted hatred of predators. Second, a sadness – a reflection on the wider world I suppose. If we cannot consider living with White-tailed Eagles, what chance have big animals got across the rest of the world – how long will local people tolerate tigers, lions or elephants – will they become confined to nature reserves in the future?

Editor: Thank you Richard, but that's a bit of a downer to end on. Could you be a bit more positive and, just in case White-tailed sightings should increase over Suffolk, could you pass on some top ID tips?

For Richard's tips and more images see page No.1 of the colour supplement.

Immature White-tailed Eagle with Buzzard to scale

The White-tailed Eagle is virtually twice the size of a Common Buzzard. The Eagle's head protrudes more markedly than other Western Palearctic eagles, plus there is the almost vulture-like wing shape and a relatively short tail.

Swifts eat, drink, preen, sleep (as high as 3000m), mate and even collect nesting material on the wing. Swifts are permanently airborne for most of the year[1] and are thought to fly at least 500 miles a day. That amounts to over 200,000 miles a year and some

– To the moon and back – four times –

two million miles in a lifetime – equivalent to four trips to and from the moon! They have rapid wing beats (eight beats per second) and can approach their nests at speeds exceeding 40 miles per hour.

For such small birds they are exceptionally long-lived, with the oldest known individual reaching 21 – although the typical life span is nearer seven years. The Latin name for Swifts is *Apus apus*, which means "no foot no foot" but, in fact, they have small feet with needle sharp claws as any bird ringer, who has handled Swifts in any numbers, will readily testify! Such sharp claws help them cling onto sheer faces of buildings when nesting. Most birds don't breed until they are three or four years old, although life-long pair bonds may be formed after their first year. Young Swifts return to their nuptial areas with the adults the following year to prospect their nest sites. They fly around in screaming parties and investigate potential nesting holes. These birds are sometimes called "bangers" as they constantly bang against their nest site.

– Solitary and colonial nesting –

Swifts can nest alone or in loose colonies,

[1] In fact it is believed that young swifts do not land at all for their first two to three years.

depending upon the availability of nest sites. They nest under roof tiles or in holes and apertures of buildings and walls and are faithful, returning to use the same nest year after year. The nest consists of a small cup formed from material such as feathers, paper, straw, hay and seeds, collected on the wing and glued together by saliva. They only have time to rear one brood during their short visit to the UK, laying a clutch of 2-3 pure white eggs. After 19-25 days incubation, the eggs hatch, with chicks fledging six to eight weeks later.

– Voracious insect consumption –

Swifts eat a wide range of invertebrates (312 different species having been recorded) and a single bolus (food ball) brought to chicks may contain between 300-1000 individual insects and spiders. These chick balls are collected in a pouch under the adults' beaks and contain insect prey that includes: beetles, aphids, flies, hoverflies, craneflies, moths, butterflies, thrips, leafhoppers, ants and lacewings. During bad weather, eggs may be abandoned, while chicks have the ability to survive without food for several days. They achieve this by becoming semi-torpid and slowing their rate of development.

Steve Piotrowski (with additional notes from Philip Pearson)

Flying start to Swift conservation in Suffolk

As I sat in my Bungay garden at the end of July, squadrons of 30-40 Swifts were circling overhead and screaming as they dipped down to swoop low over rooftops in which they were nesting immediately opposite my house. I wondered how long they would stay before making the long journey to their African wintering grounds, a distance of about 7,000 miles.

In 2010 flocks were still screaming in Bungay on August 1st, but the next day there was an eerie silence for they had suddenly disappeared overnight – not one single straggler remained! Sure enough, this year the Swifts departed on exactly the same day

(August 1st/2nd), although this time a lone bird did remain until at least August 8th.

Swift population trends

While Swifts remain a common sight across the UK, colonies have disappeared from many traditional breeding areas. The European Swift population is estimated at between 4.4 and 12 million pairs, with the UK standing at 85,000 breeding pairs (N.B. figure from 1988-1991). According to the BTO Breeding Bird Survey, the Swift population appears to be stable in the East of England, although it declined 44% in the South East between 1995 and 2008.

– Loss of nesting sites one reason for the Swift's decline –

The cause of the declines is still being investigated, but loss of nesting sites is thought to be a significant factor in the decline in the UK breeding population. It is also an issue that can be rectified with the provision of new nest sites at the design stage of new builds and retro-fitting of existing buildings; a number of effective products are available on the market. Applying these measures in Suffolk will contribute to a network of similar plans across the UK and help develop a more co-ordinated approach to swift conservation.

Action for Swifts

A small group of people, mostly based in Cambridgeshire, have set up a blog (please see http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/) to post information that might prove useful to others wanting to help Swifts. The group offers advice and last autumn the author was privileged to be taken by Dick Newell and fellow Swift enthusiasts on a tour of Swift sites in and around Ely and Cambridge. Swift nest boxes in church towers, new developments and schools were being monitored to determine occupancy levels.

Suffolk – playing its part

There is much enthusiasm for the conservation of Swifts in Suffolk too, but we have a lot of catching up if we are to match other counties. Philip Pearson of RSPB has circulated his local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for final comment and some work on Swifts is already underway in West Suffolk. "Action for Swifts" has fixed eight new boxes in the tower of All Saints.

– West Suffolk –

Church at Worlington this winter, taking the total to 17 boxes in the belfry. Swift calls are being played daily. The first Swifts bred in 2010, in only the second year of the boxes being installed, and again in 2011. There is potential for the expansion of this colony.

Adrian Mann is championing the Swift's cause in Bury St Edmunds and has been playing his Swift calls CD since mid-April to attract Swifts to three experimental boxes fixed in St John's church tower. He reports that Swifts are in the neighbourhood, but so far there have been no sightings of them at the boxes.

"Action for Swifts" was asked by local farmer, Swift enthusiast and church supporter, Robin Upton, to advise on Swift boxes in the belfry of St Ethelbert church, Herringswell. The belfry looked less than suitable, as there are no louvres, however, the eaves under the roof of the south transept looked an ideal opportunity. John Stimpson, of Wilburton, was commissioned to make four custom-built boxes to fit between the joists extending beneath the eaves. Swift call-playing equipment has been installed by Robin inside the church behind the boxes.

– East Suffolk –

On the coast, Maggie Grenham is championing the cause for swifts at Stanny Farm, Iken and near her home at Stone Common, Blaxhall. At Stanny Farm, a large red

brick barn is being developed as a field study centre for Swifts and the provision of Swift boxes are being considered at the early stages of this development. At Stone Common there is a group of houses that have hosted Swifts in the roof spaces for well over 11 years. Although they failed to breed in 2009 and 2010, they have returned this summer and moved from one roof, their traditional site that has been re-roofed, and into one of the houses that has retained its old roof. Care was taken with this re-roofing work but, unfortunately, it didn't meet the requirements of the Swifts when they returned to investigate their nesting site for the new season.

– Churches throughout Suffolk –

To promote Swift conservation throughout Suffolk, meetings have taken place with representatives of the Diocese of Ipswich and St Edmundsbury to investigate ways forward. These meetings have been very positive and significant progress has been made. Churches are invariably listed buildings, as well as being a wonderful feature of our heritage so, as with any nest-box scheme, it is important not to affect the external appearance of the buildings or the environment in general. This has been achieved at Herringswell and Worlington.

Predictably perhaps, there have been some negative responses. When Jan Tomlinson, a swift enthusiast from West Suffolk, asked about erecting Swift boxes on the church of St Peter and St Paul in Bardwell, she was told it was impossible, as according to the church warden, *"respecting the seasons of both bats and Swifts in other churches has prevented maintenance and repair schedules"*. Jan is also a keen bell ringer, a hobby that takes her to many towers with nesting Swifts. She believes that bell-restoration projects present the ideal opportunity for Swift boxes to be erected in towers. For church towers, perhaps provision for Swifts could be made during any bell restoration work, which it is understood, still receives significant lottery funding.

Local problems aside, the challenge of erecting more boxes shouldn't be too onerous. Action for Swifts has forged extremely good relationships with the Diocese and the Spotted Flycatcher churchyard nest box project launched earlier this year was outstandingly successful. The Suffolk Wildlife Trust's (SWT) churchyard project has been ongoing for many years and is a shining example of the Church of England working well with conservationists throughout Suffolk.

– Swifts and other buildings –

Although Swifts have traditionally favoured churches for nesting sites, the use of church buildings to site Swift boxes is only part of the solution. Swifts once nested in holes in cliffs and trees, but are now closely associated with the built environment. Modern construction techniques have considerably reduced the availability of breeding sites. This problem has been exacerbated by building refurbishments, roof insulation and re-development of traditional nest sites. The main targets of the Swift BAP is to ensure that no existing nest sites are lost through inappropriate development during the plan period of 2011 to 2015 and that all new development projects incorporate a specified minimum number of boxes per project depending upon

its size. By ensuring nesting features are built into the building structure, by being permanent, the need for maintenance is avoided and the result will be in keeping with the aesthetics of the building.

– Reversing the decline –

Swift conservation is quite labour intensive and it is not just a case of manufacturing boxes of standard design, finding sites, fixing them and then walking away to hope for the best! To persuade Swifts to pioneer new sites, it's essential to install audio equipment to play their piercing screams. The CDs have to be played from mid-April through to early August, so a power supply is also essential. Most of all, it's vital to have a local enthusiast who is dedicated to the cause to keep a watch over both birds and the equipment. Once everything is in place, Swifts can be persuaded to nest but, for the project to succeed, the cooperation is needed from county planners, the Diocese and the local community. So come on Suffolk let's wake up and help reverse this catastrophic decline in Swift numbers to ensure that our children are able to watch the spectacular formation flights in our skies as we do today.

– Get involved –

Suffolk Swift Group

There are plans afoot to form a Suffolk Swift Group to look after the needs of Swifts, help communities with the conservation of Swifts, protect existing breeding sites and attract Swifts to new ones.

A new SWT project, Networking Nature, is being launched in the very near future and it is hoped that Swift conservation will fall under this umbrella.

For more information and to see how you can help Swifts go to:
http://www.swift-conservation.org/
http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/
http://www.elyswifts.org.uk/
http://www.rspb.org.uk/applications/swiftsurvey/

Roy Marsh

Suffolk BINS –
Summer Delights

Following on from the amazing start to the year, and it being the traditionally quietest time for passage migration, summer is a time for enjoying resident breeders, survey work etc, with the hope of an oddity or two to set the pulses racing, but was it a summer to remember…?

High Roller!

June – The 1st of the month started in good form, with a Broad-billed Sandpiper being discovered at Breydon Water, initially on the Norfolk side prior to showing on the Suffolk side, just down-river from Humberstone Farm. This individual was thought to be a different bird to the May sighting, although it was only present until the 2nd. Monday 13th, and for many, the highlight for June was the stunning adult Roller on Upper Hollesley Common. Sadly this was a one-day wonder, although we have included a cracking shot from Lee Woods in our colour supplement for your enjoyment.

Other June highlights: Roseate Terns were noted on several days throughout the month from Minsmere, with a Purple Heron giving itself up occasionally, a female Ferruginous Duck also noted during June from the same site. Two Quail were heard calling from wheat field off Angels Way, Beccles on the 10th, with other singles noted at Needham Market, and

Benhall. A female Red-footed Falcon was noted in-off the sea at Corton on the 12th, a Bee-eater was heard calling as it headed south over Dingle on the 14th, with a Ruddy Shelduck noted in-off at Minsmere on the 30th to round off the month.

July – The 11th saw the first of several sightings of a possible Eastern Common Tern, form *longipennis* (see colour supplement #4), with this adult amongst 30 Common Terns on Pakefield beach on the 14th. Further sightings of possibly the same birds were noted at Alton Water on 11th, 18th, and at Minsmere on the 22nd and again reported at Alton on the 24th.

Other July highlights: A Black-winged Stilt was reported from Hazelwood Marshes on the 3rd, a drake Ferruginous Duck was discovered at Minsmere also on the 3rd, with the female remaining around the reserve throughout the month. A White-rumped Sandpiper on the airfield Orfordness on the 6th, and a Bee-eater over Stowmarket on the 12th. A Cory's Shearwater was noted SE past Hopton on the 27th, and three Honey Buzzards, one at Lakenheath on the 5th, one over Carlton Marsh on the 8th and one south over Breydon on the 20th. The 30th saw the discovery of a Cattle Egret at Minsmere, ensuring the month ended on a high note, although it was somewhat elusive and flighty. Unfortunately there was no sign of the Egret on the 31st, but a Black Kite was picked up just west of Covehithe Broad as it headed towards South Cove.

An uncharacteristically busy August

August – A surprisingly good month: The 1st saw a female Montagu's Harrier south over Woodville, Ipswich, with a second noted over Minsmere on the 2nd. Also on the 2nd was the discovery of a male Red-backed Shrike at Carlton Marsh that remained until the 5th. The star bird for the month would be an adult Sooty Tern, noted South past Kessingland on the 10th, yet sadly not rediscovered.

Other August highlights: the female Ferruginous Duck continued to please at Minsmere, Black Kite over Stutton Mill on the 8th, a juvenile Purple Heron was seen to fly in off at Benacre on the 16th. An unexpected juvenile Woodchat Shrike was discovered at Pipps Ford, near Needham Market on the 20th, six Bee-eaters at Ashbocking briefly on 21st, and a Great White Egret on the Stour estuary between Holbrook Creek and Cattawade, also on 21st. The 23rd was a bumper day, as a juvenile Red-necked Phalarope was found at Great Livermere, a Dotterel was flushed from the common at Landguard, a further Red-backed Shrike was discovered at North Denes, an Icterine Warbler noted in the sluice bushes, and again present on the 24th, where a Wryneck joined the party, while a cracking 33 Black Terns were feeding off the rig at Sizewell.

Wrynecks a plenty

The 24th also provided a further Wryneck at Pakefield. The 26th saw a possible Greenish Warbler at Thorpeness caravan-park and, despite also heard calling but never pinned down, a Wryneck was noted on the beach, with a further Wryneck found in the SW corner of Corton Wood. A Hoopoe was seen in flight at Helmingham on the 27th, and possibly the same Wryneck or a further individual was picked up at Thorpeness on the 29th. Probable 1st winter Citrine Wagtails noted at Boyton on the 28th, and at Landguard on the 30th brought August to an exciting conclusion.

So after a surprisingly memorable summer we now enter the autumn period. For many, this is the most exciting time of the birding year and we need to keep our fingers crossed for a few decent rarities. But most importantly, let's all get out there and enjoy our bird watching in what is a tremendous home county with many fantastic areas to explore. Though don't forget to submit those all-important records via your area recorders,

including a SORC form for the county rarities.

As always I would like to pass on my continued thanks to all our BINS members for their tremendous and ongoing efforts. For any of our SOG members reading this, and wanting to enjoy daily updates, superb photography and much more, feel free to visit the Suffolk BINS website at: http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding/

Field Trip Report

Jonathan Lawley (Leader: Paul Holness)

Stanford Training Area

2 July 2011

There was a full complement of 15 members for this year's visit to the British Army's 'Battle' Area north of Thetford (known as STANTA).

It was a beautiful day and Paul Holness was present to meet our minibus at West Tofts, so we were soon on our way into this superb bit of unspoilt England.

First stop was Frog Hill where, beyond the Scots Pines we disembarked and enjoyed the wonderful long views over heath and native forest. There were a good number of birds around including Garden Warbler, Yellowhammer and Willow Tit. Proceeding down a track we stopped to watch a Stonechat moving between gorse bushes and showing beautifully.

Stooping Hobby

Next we moved on to arrive at a shallow lake where, besides a pair of Egyptian Geese and some Little Grebe and Tufted Duck, we were entertained by a Hobby swooping low over the water in its hunt for dragonflies. On the way back to the minibus we heard the call of the Curlew and saw two as we set off on foot in search of Stone Curlew in an area where Paul had recently seen them.

There were more stops where we heard Stonechat and Woodlark and then we drove through superb countryside before crossing the wonderfully clear-flowing River Wissey. Here we munched our lunch and watched trout and wagtails from the little bridge, as well as spotting no less than seven Common Buzzards circling a couple of thousand feet above us.

Stone Curlews at last

Following lunch we set off again in search of Stone Curlews. On the way we stopped at a spot where there was a veritable meadow of beautiful deep blue Viper's Bugloss. It was quite a sight and the party spent some time photographing the flowers. As we were about to move on a Hummingbird Hawkmoth was spotted feeding off the flowers, which was an excuse for more photographs.

As we moved back across the area we again stopped and walked through woods to an open area where immediately someone spotted a Stone Curlew, appropriately on stony ground, about 100 yards away. As we all watched another three birds appeared and, although obviously conscious of our presence, they remained undisturbed. It was an excellent sighting.

Feeling fulfilled we set off back to the main camp, stopping at a mud bank full of Sand Martin nest holes. The birds have had a good breeding year. We paused near a patch of trees and some members saw a pair of Redstart, while others had clear views of another male and female further up the road. A single Spotted Flycatcher also put in an appearance.

Finally, back at West Tofts camp, we thanked Paul for what had been a highly stimulating and enjoyable day. We are most fortunate that training commitments by the Army permit an annual visit to this uniquely beautiful and unspoilt wildlife area.

Book Review

Adam Gretton

Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo

Michael McCarthy (John Murray 2009, £16.99)

There can be few SOG members who haven't been concerned about the decline in once-common migrants such as Turtle Dove (highlighted in this issue by Steve Abbott), Spotted Flycatcher and Cuckoo.

This wonderful book crystallises this concern in an elegant and readable way, combining some of the science with the equally important emotional response people have to such a profound loss.

Michael McCarthy is the Environment Editor of The Independent and he describes himself as "merely a person, rather than a birder" and therefore when he spent a year looking at key British migrants he sought advice from a range of experts and guides including Nick Davies (Cuckoo), Mark Avery (Wood Warbler), Angela Turner (Swallow) and Mark Cocker[1] (warblers). The result combines many insights into a dozen featured species with visits to a range of locations in the company of a fascinating selection of people.

The total number of spring migrants that nest in Britain is estimated at 16 million birds, though this number is reducing annually. For Eurasia as a whole the number of summer migrants is thought to be a mind-boggling 5 billion! McCarthy concludes that, having flowed since before human memory, the reduction in this river of migrants would be "a loss of meaning on an enormous scale."

Rather than this just being yet another conservation problem, Mike McCarthy concludes that the impact of such a loss will go much deeper – "what if one of the world's profoundest motions, a living announcement of spring, were to come to an end? A Europe without its spring-bringers is almost as unthinkable as a Europe without its cathedrals." This is the dark side of Ted Hughes' observation in his poem Swifts: "They've made it again, which means the globe's still working…" If 41% of the country's Swifts failed to return (as they did between 1994 and 2007) then can we really say the globe is still working?

In the closing section of the book McCarthy deals with the huge amount of work being done to find out more about these declines. At the same time as this research, many farmers are doing what they can to provide more bird-friendly habitats. But will all this activity be enough to stem the huge declines described in this book? The current evidence is not encouraging and the next 10-20 years will be vital in seeing if the tide of loss can be turned.

I warmly recommend this book to anyone who has lamented the loss of 'their' Cuckoos or Turtle Doves (along with too many other species), and also to those who may be lucky enough to still have them in their area – but for how much longer?

[1] Reminder: You can meet Mark as he is the speaker at SOG's November 24th Indoor Meeting.

White-tailed Eagle

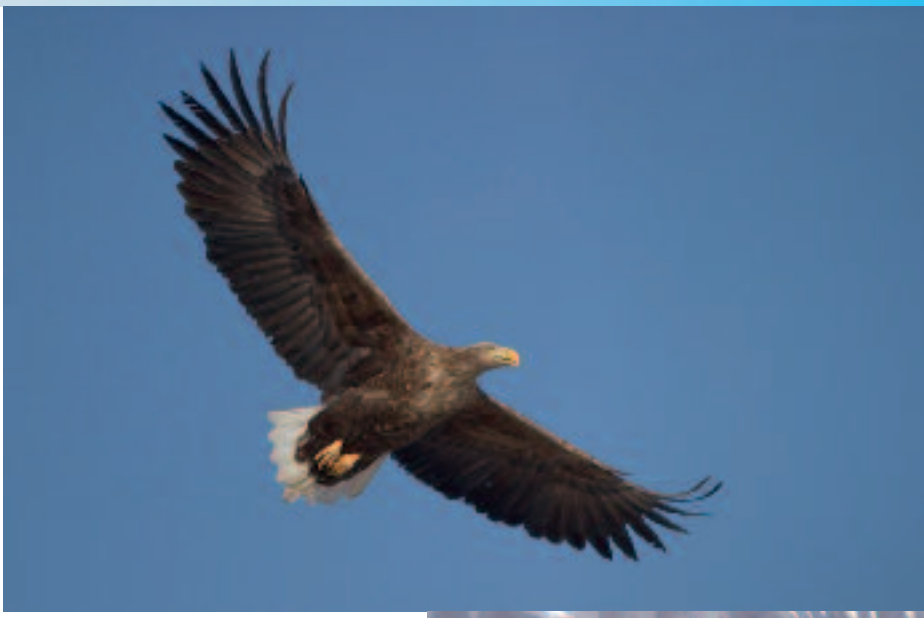

Photo: Richard Saunders

Shot taken at Hokkaido. Camera: Canon **EOS10D** hand-held, autofocus, 500mm f4 @ 1/3200sec, ISO200

ID Tips:
A White-tailed Eagle is huge – size alone rules out other species apart from the largest eagles and vultures (unlikely in Suffolk!). Adults with a white tail cannot be confused.

Juveniles and other immatures, which are most likely to be seen in southern England, can cause problems, especially when seen at a distance with nothing to compare them with – but, once a more familiar species such as Buzzard comes into view, then the bulk becomes immediately apparent – the White-tailed Eagle is virtually twice the size of a Common Buzzard.

Illustrations: Szabolcs Kokay

You are looking at three classic habitats: the Brecks, Sandlings heathland and a coastal reedbed – all quintessentially Suffolk.

Hollesley Heath

Here, if Nature had been allowed to take its course, we would be looking at a landscape of forests and glades. Instead extensive grazing and occasional scrub clearance maintains Suffolk's Sandlings heathland.

Again, sadly, what we see today is just a remnant of the extensive heathland that used to be here – over 80% has been lost since the turn of the twentieth century, with Suffolk now containing between 5-6% of the UK's total. Fortunately numerous authorities are working to restore this heathland habitat across the Sandlings.

Hen Reedbeds

Several of Suffolk's reedbeds date back less than one hundred years and those at Walberswick and Minsmere are actually man-made. They are the outcome of flooding coastal grazing meadows in the early 1940's to forestall the expected seaborne invasion by Axis forces. Spring and stream water created freshwater lagoons that the reeds could colonise.

Suffolk contains about 10% of the UK's reedbeds. Of the county's coastal sites (Westwood/Walberswick @190ha, Minsmere @ 155ha and Easton Valley @ 140+ha) are presently the first and second largest reedbeds in England, while Easton is Suffolk's third largest.

Hen Reedbeds, photographed by Steve Aylward in April 2008 using a Canon EOS 400D Digital, focal length 11; F # 9; exposure 1/100. Shot in RAW file format and then converted to a JPEG using Adobe Lightroom.

al' natural habitats

At first sight they strike you as being completely natural, when all three are actually unnatural habitats – each a relatively recent post-glacial environment that has been shaped by man.

Wangford Warren

It is hard to believe that the Brecks natural state was probably an active and extensive dune system. Here man's intervention, in the shape of millennia of clearance and agriculture, has produced the Brecks' patchwork of fields, pastures, heaths and woodland. And where agriculture ends silviculture in the form of Thetford Forest takes over.

Between 1934 and 1980 86% of Brecks heathland was lost. Now little more that 2500ha remain in Suffolk, despite a Forestry Commission programme of heathland creation.

Wangford Warren, photographed by Steve Aylward in November 2009 using a Canon EOS 5D, focal length of 17; F # 16; exposure 1/30. Shot in RAW file format and then converted to a JPEG using Adobe Lightroom.

Hollesley Heath, photographed by Steve Aylward in August 2008 using a Canon EOS 5D, focal length of 17; F # 18; exposure 1/10. Shot in RAW file format and then converted to a JPEG using Adobe Lightroom.

Summer delights

1 Roller, Upper Hollesley Common, Lee Woods
2 Red-backed Shrike, Carlton Marsh, Ian Clarke
3 Eastern Common Tern, Pakefield, Andrew Easton
4 Purple Heron, Minsmere, Jon Evans

Suffolk and sea erosion: Part 2

Editor: To illustrate its impact on Suffolk we open Part 2 with a short reminder piece about Dunwich, demonstrating the power of sea erosion in the past. Next there is an article by Robert Coleman, the RSPB's manager at Titchwell Marsh, that illustrates one coastal reserve's efforts to combat the sea today. This is followed by pieces on possible future changes to birds/birding and access in Suffolk if and when coastal erosion occurs.

Phil Brown

Dunwich – a losing battle with the sea

Suffolk has suffered land loss by the sea for millennia. We probably all have a vague idea about the medieval city of Dunwich being swamped by the North Sea. Nevertheless it is worth repeating this tale in a little more detail, as from it we can gather a better idea of how dramatic sea erosion could be on the Suffolk coast.

In the twelfth century Dunwich was, surprisingly, then the sixth largest town in England. It was a prosperous port dedicated to trade, fishing and shipbuilding. At that time it had a population of around 4000.

Today this once thriving town lies almost completely beneath the waves. But this ancient port[1] did not disappear overnight. This tale of Dunwich and sea erosion is one of repeated erosion events. A freak tide, similar to that we witnessed along the east coast in 1953, is said to have caused significant damage in 1014 and gave the town a foretaste of what the sea would later deliver.

The biggest single event came on the night of New Year's Day 1287[2] when chroniclers recorded a massive storm striking Suffolk. Ipswich and Yarmouth were damaged that night, but at Dunwich, driven by the storm's strong winds, the sea tore into the soft cliffs to the east to wreak catastrophic damage. In the early hours of the morning the protective belt of trees (East Wood) that had traditionally shielded the town from the winter easterlies was swept away. With it went a 100-yard slice of the town containing around 200 houses. In all a quarter mile deep stretch of land disappeared into the North Sea in the space of a few short, horrendous hours.

In 1328 north-easterly winds again created a sea surge that caused extensive damage, this time sweeping another 200 houses into the sea. Over the next fifty years the impact of erosion was fairly steady so that, by about 1400, the town's population had shrunk by almost a half to 2000. Many more minor storms followed, notably that of 1570, after which Stow in 1573 was to write, "there is three parts of the town [Dunwich] drowned in the sea…" History repeated itself again in 1677 with yet another violent storm destroying further houses and reportedly removing the mariners' last landmark, the

[1] It was probably both a port and the site of a fort 2000 years ago during the Roman era.
[2] In medieval England New Year's Day was celebrated around the time of the spring equinox, so in 1287 this Day would then have been equivalent to 23 March.

ruins of St. Peter's Church. Then in 1702, 1729 and 1739/40 were a further series of significant erosion events. Over the next two centuries many more minor events followed, until the twentieth century when several more significant erosion episodes were witnessed.

Today in the twenty-first century only a narrow sliver of the once great medieval town of Dunwich remains inside the Palesdyke[3]. The present seacoast is now a mile inland from where it was 800 years ago and, with a further metre or so being lost every year, the days are numbered for even this fractional remnant of Dunwich. So sadly Suffolk must expect to suffer from on-going erosion and, intermittently, from major coastal erosion events for the foreseeable future.

Editor: The RSPB reserve at Titchwell Marsh is a mix of saline and freshwater marsh on the North Coast of Norfolk that is facing a similar coastal erosion threat to Suffolk. But, unlike historical Dunwich, Robert Coleman's article demonstrates that it is possible to adapt to or mitigate this threat.

Robert Coleman, Senior Sites Manager, Titchwell Marsh and Snettisham

RSPB Titchwell Marsh – managing a fresh water habitat in the face of coastal erosion

Although the detailed causes of coastal change vary between Norfolk and Suffolk, this article demonstrates that change can be managed and still secure positive effects for both wildlife and those that enjoy watching wildlife.

The RSPB has owned and managed its reserve at Titchwell Marsh since 1973. During the past 38 years it has grown to support significant populations of breeding, wintering and passage bird species. But, since 1996, the reserve has been under increasing pressure from coastal erosion.

In fact a combination of coastal erosion and rising sea levels could culminate in the inundation of the reserve with saltwater, dramatically changing its wildlife interest. This circumstance has triggered a three-year project (the Coastal Change Project) to realign part of the sea defences. This is due to be completed in October 2011.

The Reserve

Between 1973 and 1982 the warden Norman Sills worked tirelessly to 'turn back the tide'. Since the destructive tidal surge of January 1953 it had been reverting to saltmarsh. The plan at Titchwell was to build new seawalls to exclude seawater from certain areas whilst capturing the fresh water from the abundant springs which rise from the chalk to the south of the reserve. This proved very successful and created the reserve, as it was until 2009 (see Figure 1 opposite), with freshwater reedbed, freshwater lagoon and brackish water lagoon, surrounded by saltmarsh to the east and west, plus the beach and the North Sea to the north.

[3] The old town wall thrown up to ring the town in 1070, originally started much earlier to protect Dunwich from the Danes.

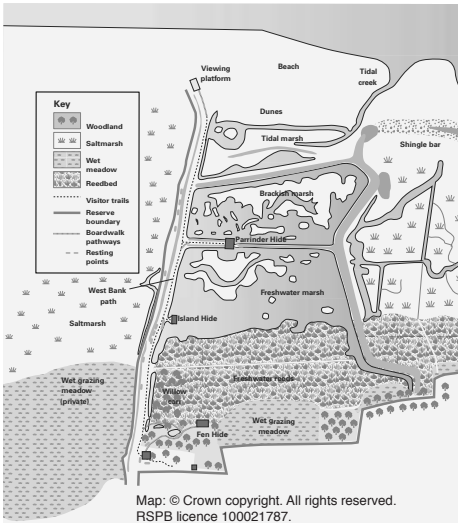

Figure 1: Titchwell Marsh pre 2009.

As a consequence of this mix of habitats the reserve holds significant populations of breeding bird species including Bittern, Avocet, Marsh Harrier, Bearded Tit and Ringed Plover. Wintering species include Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Pintail, Wigeon and a significant wader roost[1] that uses the islands on the brackish lagoon during hide tides. Other important wildlife includes nationally important populations of Water Vole, assemblages of reedbed moth species and internationally important plant communities.

Like most of the East of England coastal reserves, the RSPB has legal obligations at the site, as it is subject to a range of national and international conservation designations. It is also part of a network of outstanding wildlife sites across Europe called Natura 2000[2], so any solutions to the problem of coastal erosion had to avoid impacts on the surrounding habitats and species.

The problem

On 19th February 1996 a large surge tide threatened to flood much of the Norfolk coast. In fact the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Cley-next-the-Sea was inundated, with hides moving some distance and all freshwater habitats being affected. Titchwell was lucky and escaped the worst of this flooding. However, this event caused concern for the RSPB and, after a few false starts and nine years, the Coastal Change Project was begun.

The first job was to identify the problem and this was confirmed to be the rapid erosion at the site. Figure 2 overleaf shows two aerial photos of the reserve separated by 65 years. On both pictures the line of the current northern sea defence (dark blue) and the Parrinder line (light blue) are marked. It can be clearly seen that a large amount of foreshore has been lost since the 1940s. As this process is greatly affected by sporadic storm events an annual rate of reduction cannot be calculated but, overall, it amounts to over 200m of it disappearing in 65 years.

The solution

Clearly the natural processes driving this erosion at Titchwell needed to be understood. Accordingly a more detailed study was commissioned. This showed that the localised rapid loss of beach sediment was due to two long-shore drift systems meeting off the foreshore at Titchwell Marsh – some of the 'lost' sediment being carried west along the coast in the direction of the Wash, whilst the remainder headed east towards Brancaster Bay. A proportion of this latter sediment was found to be contributing to the extension of Scolt Head Island westwards. This relative movement of Scolt Head will in time shift the erosion pressure along the coast so that, approximately 50 years hence, the threat to Titchwell Marsh will be much decreased – in

(Continued on Page 17)

[1] The high tide roost mainly comprises Bar-tailed Godwit and Knot.

[2] The Natura 2000 network helped with the funding for this project through support from the EU LIFE+ fund.

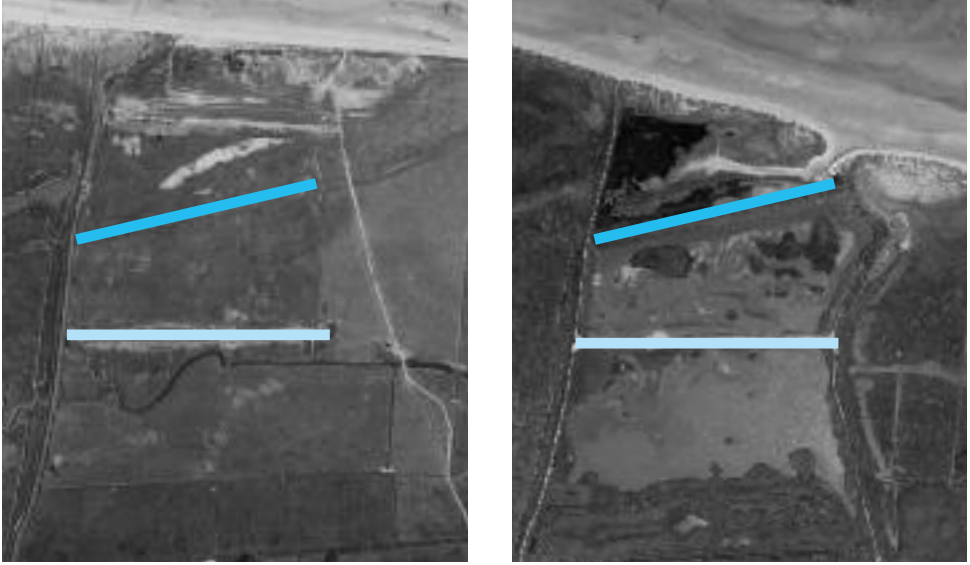

Figure 2: Relative positions of key features at Titchwell Marsh, 1946 (left) and 2010.

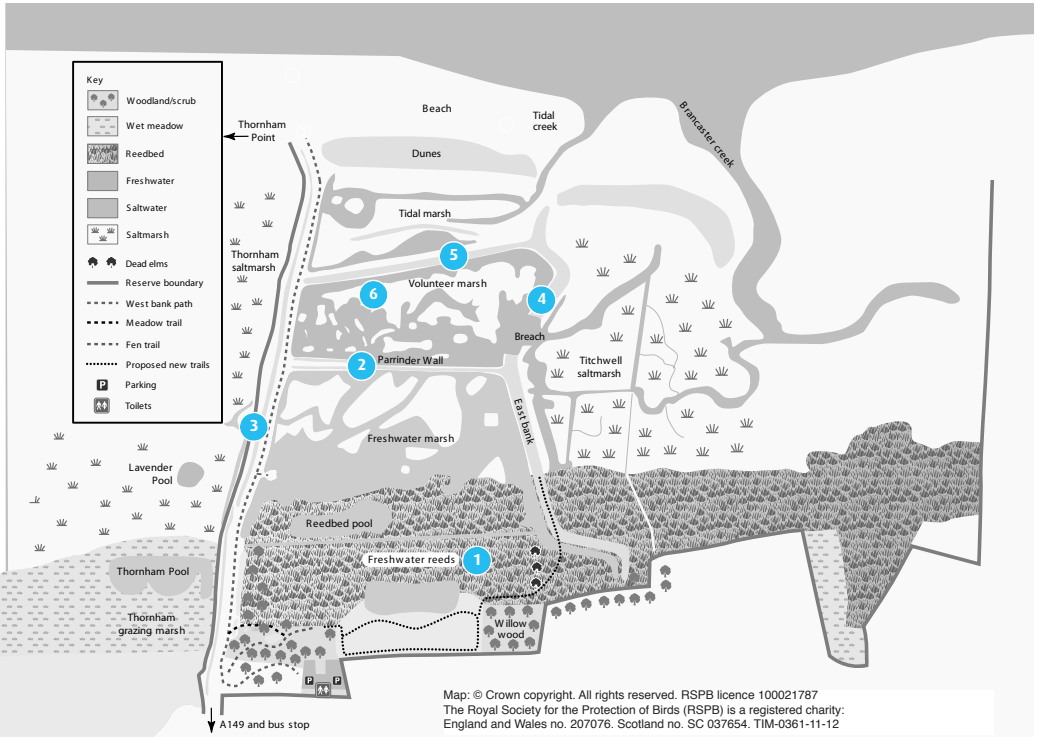

Figure 3: Coastal project planned work 2009-2011.

fact it may even enter a period of accretion. Given this finding, the decision to provide protection to the key freshwater habitats, through the construction of a new seawall and realignment of the brackish marsh (see Figure 3) was vindicated.

The new Parrinder Hide

1 ***Grazing meadow and pool***
Prior to the start of the project, this was simply a damp grazing meadow. In 2009, material was excavated from here to build up the new sea defences. The resultant 'hole' has been allowed to fill naturally with water. This new pool has been landscaped and the RSPB will encourage a reedbed to establish. This will be very valuable for our specialist reedbed birds. As this area develops, to the south of the pool, a new circular path will be created.

2 ***The new Parrinder wall***
During 2009 and 2010, the existing Parrinder wall was raised and strengthened and this 'new' wall is now an important part of our North Sea defences. Much of the material used to strengthen the wall was excavated from the grazing meadow along the southern edge of the reserve.

3 ***The west bank***
This bank protects the freshwater marsh and reedbed from tidal flooding. However, the bank was low and very weak so, in 2010, we raised and in the process strengthened the bank, widening and resurfacing the footpath.

4 ***The site of the breach***
In September 2011, the RSPB breached the existing sea defence in this location. This breach links to the existing tidal creeks in the saltmarsh to the east of the reserve. This will allow the sea into the brackish marsh, which in time will revert to saltmarsh.

5 ***The north wall***
This sea defence is coming under increasing pressure as the dunes erode southwards. It is already showing signs of erosion. It was not feasible to strengthen this wall and the management will let it erode back naturally.

6 ***The current brackish marsh***
Following the breach in 2011, the brackish marsh will gradually return to tidal saltmarsh. Tidal saltmarsh is a natural and very effective sea defence. It will give excellent protection to the reserve in front of the new Parrinder Wall from the slowly encroaching sea to the north, as well as providing a great habitat for wildlife.

The Outcomes

Even before the final year of engineering work several successes have been secured:

- 2011 has been the best year ever for breeding Avocet with 80 pairs on newly created islands within the fresh marsh
- The record of successful breeding Bittern has been maintained
- Increased bird usage on the freshwater marsh following the rehabilitation work
- 2.5 ha of new reedbed habitat landscaped from the area of site-won material for seawall creation
- Better control of water levels for vegetation control and bird usage
- Improved public footpath path access and viewing
- New viewing facility within the sea defence (see Parrinder hide to left).

And more to come?

- We have provided some shingle areas in the final year's work to encourage Little Tern and Ringed Plover to breed undisturbed
- More booming Bitterns following increases in habitat area
- Creation of new saltmarsh[3] providing breeding habitat for species like Redshank, and to provide protection to our new sea wall
- Hoping to add visitor access to previously unseen areas of the reserve
- 25-50 years more wildlife and wildlife watching

This Coastal Change Project has demonstrated that, through adaptation and working with natural processes, a positive future for some of our coastal freshwater sites can be secured. While for the time being the concerns of the late nineties about the future of freshwater species at Titchwell Marsh being short-lived have been overcome.

[3] Saltmarsh are the airbags of our coastline as they are a very robust habitat that can withstand high levels of coastal erosion and wave action.

Phil Brown & Richard Rafe

The impact of coastal change on Suffolk's birds – the winners and losers

Coastal change won't all be one-way traffic! While some change will disrupt many bird species' lives, perhaps surprisingly, other species could benefit from it.

As has already been noted, the Suffolk coast is dynamic – it is arguably irrelevant whether or not this is due to man-induced climate change, as either way it remains a fact that, in places, the Suffolk coast will erode rapidly and at some time in the future certain low-lying coastal areas will face an increasing risk of short-lived flooding, or permanent inundation by the sea.

Impact of coastal change

Any sea erosion event triggering an inundation can lead to changes in nesting, roosting or feeding areas. But it is where it occurs and at what time of year that matters most. The situation at Dingle Marshes provides us with a clue as to just how in practice mixed birds' fortunes can be.

[1] It can take up to ten years for quality feeding habitats to naturally re-establish themselves.

First, in terms of what occurs, in the case of some coastal ground nesters, such as Dingle's Little Terns, one of the recent changes proved beneficial, as public access became restricted and human disturbance was duly reduced. However, such a change might just as easily have led to nests being disastrously washed away.

For those species that are tied to saltmarshes, the impact could be mixed as coastal change at Dingle could range from an expansion of some habitat or to a contraction at other points. While, for those species exploiting reedbed habitats, the impact of ongoing erosion events could be profoundly negative. Seawater inundations would considerably reduce the value of these freshwater feeding sites. Scientific studies indicate it usually takes many years for a freshwater habitat to naturally evolve into a satisfactory brackish or saline feeding area[1]. Clearly loss of such habitat will be highly disruptive and this will considerably disadvantage some bird species, driving them away from the site concerned. But others could well benefit, such as terns, Avocets, godwits etc., by an increase in the size of their preferred habitat.

The timing of these sea erosion events during the course of a year could also be critical. At the wrong time (as if there's ever a good time) such changes could be of conservation significance by immediately impacting on a species' abundance or population size, for instance a rapid erosion event for wader chicks during breeding periods or for over-wintering ducks in a freeze up when survival is critical. The good thing is that, if there is one, such events are not normally sustained and that, in time, recovery is possible.

The winners

Any new habitats, in the shape of saltmarsh, mudflats and lagoons, can themselves be ornithologically important (once they again become viable feeding or roosting areas). Waders such as Redshank, Lapwing and Avocet should find more room to breed. Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers could benefit as well. While over-wintering waders and wildfowl could find new habitat for feeding and roosting. While Little Terns and Ringed Plovers will tend to benefit from some of the less disturbed shingle areas should beaches breach and as a consequence public access is disrupted.

Other coastal birds, such as foreshore specialists like Godwits and Turnstones plus, in the winter, shoreline passerines such as Shore Larks, Lapland and Snow Buntings, seem unlikely to be disrupted as their favoured habitat could well grow in extent if, as is expected, the coastal change leads to a more indented coastline.

The losers

From an ornithological perspective perhaps the greatest change will be to the coastal reedbeds. Large beds of Phragmites reedbed are rare in Britain but provide bird habitats of considerable value; although the diversity of bird species utilising reedbeds is low, several of the characteristic species are specialised and rare. At present Suffolk is nationally important for its extensive reedbeds at places like Walberswick, Easton and Minsmere. Together they amount to almost 500ha, which is virtually 10% of the UK's total reedbed habitat.

Three of the rare reedbed nesters – Bittern, Marsh Harrier and Bearded Tit – are more strongly associated with reedbeds than any

other birds. Reedbeds also hold important populations of Water Rail, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting, and other species such as Snipe come in where reedbeds are mixed with other types of fen vegetation, tall herbs and scrub. It is inevitable that, as some of our greatest reedbed areas lose their freshwater regime wl
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changes may prove catastrophic (in the sense of unexpected) rather than managed. Under these circumstances birds may well lose some habitats before replacements are available. But new reedbeds are already being created in areas like the Fens in expectation of the future coastal losses.

The likely loss of a considerable proportion of Suffolk's freshwater reedbed and grazing marsh is just one of many factors affecting our coastline. Alongside 'natural' habitat changes associated with Suffolk's dynamic coastline, there are pressures from increasing development and recreational uses of our coasts, along with climatic influenced changes. For example, as southern species move north under a warming climate, species like breeding Little Egrets will become more numerous and occurrences of Great Egret,

Phil Brown, with help from Kevin Verlander

Rights of way and rising sea levels – a way around the access problems

A significant implication of rising sea levels could be the loss of rights of way birders rely on to access some key coastal sites. These could become real access problems for a few reserves, whether they can respond to a loss or shift in habitat, or not.

Unless there is an active policy of replacement by public authorities, coastal paths, which are especially vulnerable, could disappear in places.

This is not a hypothetical issue. Minsmere Reserve's flood defences are being strengthened as I write and this is disrupting birders' access. The storm surges of November 2006 and 2007 damaged the dunes in the northern part of this site and, as a result, the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) allows that these will be breached in the future and the area to the north of the Coney Hill Cross Bank (known by many of us as the 'North Wall') will become saline some time after this bank is additionally strengthened.

Quite rightly, in the interests of public safety, some of Minsmere's footpaths are being temporarily closed while these repairs are undertaken (specifically to the Coney Hill Cross

Bank and the Suffolk Coastal Path, while some others will be diverted. This work started in September and, weather permitting, will be completed by February 2012, so this coastal protection work will impact on Suffolk birders throughout this autumn and winter. But frankly that's a small price to pay for safeguarding the future of a section of this valuable birding area.

In other areas it is expected that tidal surges will lead to breaches that could lead to permanent path disruptions too – as happened some time ago with the footpath alongside the Blyth estuary – now only passable at high tide if you're into bog snorkelling!

Suffolk County Council, as the Highways Authority, has responsibility for rights of way matters and this body well appreciates the potential extent of this access problem. To that end and consistent with the Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (see www.sogonline for a short introduction to this) the Authority recognises three broad scenarios where rights of way could be affected by coastal or estuarine change:

1. Improvement of sea/flood defences
2. Managed realignment defences
3. Non-intervention areas

In the case of the first scenario a 2m walkable width will be maintained or sought. For the second, as a cost/benefit based approach will underpin any investment decisions, only the more important routes will be maintained. While in the third scenario it will only rarely be where the value of a path's usage is demonstrated to be sufficiently important that intervention could be merited and an alternative route created by order.

In view of this it is clearly in the interests of birders to demonstrate and affirm the importance of some paths when they are threatened or lost. In such instances birders should access the SCC website http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/Environment/PublicRightsOfWay/ This has a range of information on rights of way on many issues, responsibilities etc which may be of use to SOG members. The contact details for reporting problems are on the site, but the telephone number is 0845 606 6067 and email address is customerservice@csduk.com

However it is a wholly different situation where private landowners are involved. When coastal erosion leads to the loss of a permissive path, as has happened with the route accessing the southern end of Benacre from Covehithe, reinstatement is a matter of negotiation not instruction. It is not uncommon for landowners being loathe to re-instate such paths once they are lost.

Subscription Rates (2012):

SOG: Adults – £15.00; Family: £17.00

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

To join SOG, contact: Bill Stone, 27 Draymans Way, Ipswich IP3 9JT

Philip Murphy

Looking back – July to September 1961 and 1986

Selected highlights from the 1961 and 1986 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period July to September.

50 years ago

Daily observations at Minsmere resulted in several notable sightings on the reserve. Suffolk's first recorded Icterine Warbler was trapped and ringed, 12th August, and a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, on 1st September was described as being "the first undisputed record for the county" – one at Breydon Water, 20th September 1843 had been claimed by both Norfolk and Suffolk.

Havergate attracted Red-necked Phalaropes on 4th to 7th and 31st July and 24th August; additional wader records at this site included two Kentish Plovers, 4th July and 300 Red Knot, 8th August. Wader highlights at Minsmere were Red-necked Phalarope, 25th to 30th August (same as at Havergate, 24th August?) and Temminck's Stint, 6th September.

Offshore records

Offshore from Minsmere, a Long-tailed Skua, 29th August was Suffolk's first twentieth century record, and a marked passage of Common Terns in late August peaked on 29th when 2000 were counted. Additional sightings at Minsmere included Caspian Tern, 16th July, two Roseate Terns, 27th August, a very early Rough-legged Buzzard, 1st September and 50 Pied Flycatchers, 3rd September.

A mid-summer flock of Common Scoters off Aldeburgh peaked at 1200 on 16th July. An immature Purple Heron was found injured under power lines at Herringfleet Marshes, 9th September and a dead female Hen Harrier at Bradwell, 13th August was "the earliest passage record for a great many years". A presumed passage Corncrake was at Shotley, 15th August.

A totally unexpected record involved a pair of Ring Ouzels at Aldeburgh, 1st July – late spring or early autumn birds? An Ortolan Bunting at Walberswick, 1st September was only the second Suffolk record, the first having occurred on 1st September 1913 at Lowestoft.

25 years ago

Warblers

The third species to be added to the Suffolk list by observers at Landguard was recorded during this period when Muriel Beecroft found a male Subalpine Warbler at this increasingly well-watched site on 25th September. This popular bird remained at Landguard until 2nd October and showed characteristics of the eastern race "albistriata". Additional notable warblers at Landguard involved single Icterine Warblers, 11th and 12th August and 23rd August, Barred Warbler, 25th August and three Yellow-browed Warblers during 25th to 28th September. Suffolk's second record of Greenish Warbler was at Lowestoft, 20th to 22nd September.

White Stork record

In what was possibly the best-ever year for White Storks in Suffolk, there were reports from four sites in July – Hadleigh, Walberswick, Flixton and Bungay – perhaps involving five individuals. An immature Purple Heron was at Minsmere, 8th July.

Three species of shearwater were noted but they included only seven Manx Shearwaters and five Sooty Shearwaters. More impressive were the three Cory's Shearwaters off Southwold, 28th August, the fourth county record and the first since 1980.

A Leach's Storm-petrel, found exhausted on a North Sea gas platform was brought ashore to Ellough Airfield, 8th September and released at Walberswick. In similar vein, a Manx Shearwater found "wrecked" inland in Cambridgeshire was released at Shingle Street, 6th September.

Semipalmated finally accepted

We were to learn in November 1986 that, after four long years of controversy and deliberation, BBRC had finally accepted the "Felixstowe stint" of winter 1982/83 as being a Semipalmated Sandpiper. As such, although an adult Semipalmated Sandpiper on the Minsmere Scrape, 8th to 15th August 1986 was the second Suffolk record, it was definitely the first to be non-contentious!

Additional waders of note at Minsmere included up to 70 Spotted Redshanks in July and August, 15 Little Ringed Plovers, 7th and 8th August and up to three Temminck's Stints, 8th to 15th August. Minsmere held a monopoly on Pectoral Sandpipers but there were problems in determining how many individuals were involved; we read "From July 18th and during August there followed a succession of reports which renders it difficult to accurately assess how many birds were involved".

Away from Minsmere, early Purple Sandpipers were noted in July at Orfordness, 13th and Lowestoft, 18th and a very early Jack Snipe on Havergate Island, 18th August. Inland, 12 Ruff were at Bury Beet Factory Pits, 8th August. Amazingly, a Great Skua inland at Ixworth, 29th August was the second such record this year, the first having occurred at Hadleigh, 31st January. An immature Glaucous Gull, which had probably been present in the Felixstowe area since 22nd November 1985 remained there until at least 24th July, a remarkably late date for this gull.

Turtle Doves then abundant

The largest post-breeding flock of European Turtle Doves involved 93 at Melton, 17th July (maximum of six in 2009). Inland records of Eurasian Wrynecks occurred at Ipswich, 12th August, and Ousden and Great Barton in late August and early September.

Impressive Landguard stats

Monthly totals of common migrants at Landguard in September included 145 Yellow Wagtails and 2800 House Martins. Other impressive figures from Landguard in September included 35 Common Redstarts, 13th and 14th (max five in September 2009), 15 Pied Flycatchers, 14th (max three in September 2009), 50 Blue Tits, 26th, 20 Great Tits, 29th and 138 House Sparrows south, 27th.

Buntings provided some sightings of interest. An Ortolan Bunting at Gunton, 22nd August made this the fourth consecutive year that this species had been located in Suffolk. A Lapland Longspur at Minsmere, 9th September equalled what was, at the time, Suffolk's earliest autumn date for this species, and the first Snow Buntings were on the coast from 13th September.

Finally, unexpected sightings of common birds involved a Common Kingfisher flying south along the tide line at Easton Bavents, 29th September, another Common Kingfisher noted catching and eating Common Newts at Great Bricett in September and a Reed Bunting feeding a juvenile Common Cuckoo at Haverhill in mid-August.

Announcements

SORC Secretary

Further to the last edition's announcement of the SORC Secretary post, there has been a slight change in personnel, whereby Craig Fulcher will now be taking on the post with immediate affect. Known to many local birders, we are sure Craig will carry on the excellent work previously undertaken by Justin. Good luck to Craig in his new role.

Also, long-serving Malcolm Wright stands down both from his position as chairman and from the committee at the end of the year. The new chairman will be Steve Abbott.

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind all our members and fellow finders to try and submit any outstanding descriptions and supporting notes by the end of the year where possible. The full list can be viewed on both the SOG and BINS websites, and will also be published in the December edition of the Harrier.

Steve Abbott

Tell your recorder what you've seen

Have you seen or heard a Turtle Dove this year?

This beautiful species, an icon of the English countryside, has been in steep decline since the late 1970s and is classified as a red list species of conservation concern. Suffolk has traditionally been an excellent county in which to see and hear Turtle Doves but, as the decline continues, it is no longer an easy bird to see. Some of us have struggled to see any this year! Indeed without making special searches I have only seen four birds this spring/summer.

Have I been unlucky or is this a common experience? Some birders report that birds have returned to their areas in good numbers. In an effort to gain a better insight into the present status of this species in the county, ahead of the BTO Atlas findings that will not be fully published for several years, SOG would be very grateful if birders would send in all records of sightings and breeding evidence for this year to the relevant recorders (see inside back cover).

Bill Stone

Gift Aid declaration form request from your Treasurer

As you will be aware SOG has been working towards making a claim to HM Revenue & Customs in respect of Gift Aid. At present for every £1 paid in membership fees SOG can claim an extra 28p through claiming Gift Aid. However, before a claim can be made against membership fees a Tax Declaration needs to be made by the member. Gift Aid forms were sent out to all members and so far, out of a potential 'Tax Membership' of 350, only 130 forms have been returned. I would, therefore ask all members who have not completed a SOG Gift Aid declaration form to do so as soon as possible. They are available for download on SOG's website or direct from me, my contact details are on page 21 of this Harrier. Many thanks, Bill.

2012 Membership Fees

At the SOG Council meeting on 15 September 2011, members of the Council agreed an increase in membership fees for 2012 was now required. As such, from 1 January 2012 SOG Individual Membership will increase from £13.00 to £15.00 and SOG Family Membership will increase from £15.00 to £17.00. For those of you who also hold joint membership of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society fees will also increase by £2. This will result in individual joint membership rising to £28.00 and family joint membership to £32.00.

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Steve Aylward (colour supplement pages #2 & #3); Ian Clarke (colour supplement page #4); Andrew Easton (pages 4, 6 and colour supplement page #4); Environment Agency (air photo of Titchwell 2010 page 16); Jon Evans (colour supplement page #4); MOD (air photo of Titchwell 1946 page 16); Erich Kaiser (cover); Jonathan Lawley (page 12); Mike Page (page 17); Richard Saunders (colour supplement page #1); Judith Wakelam (pages 6& 8); Lee Woods (colour supplement page #4)

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Council for 2011:

Officers

Honorary President: **Steve Piotrowski**
Chairman: **Roy Marsh**
Vice-Chairman: **Steve Abbott**
Secretary: **Phil Whittaker**
Treasurer/Membership Secretary: **Bill Stone**
Project Officer: **Mick Wright**
Bulletin Editor: **Phil Brown**
Website Co-ordinator: **Gi Grieco**
Bird Report Editor: **Nick Mason**
Events Organiser – Outdoor: **Jean Garrod**
Events Organiser – Indoor: **Adam Gretton**

Members

Jean Garrod [to 2014]
Robin Harvey [to 2014]
Adam Gretton [to 2012]
Roger Walsh [to 2012]
Jon Warnes [to 2013]
Paul Gowen [to 2013]

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean & Ken Garrod
Mike Jeanes
Mike Hall
Robin Hopper

Bird Recorders

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

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

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

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group
Who we are and what we do

As an independent Group, SOG provides a network and a voice for birdwatchers in the county. Administered by Suffolk birdwatchers, for Suffolk's birdwatchers, this Group keeps birders in touch with what is going on and and with each other.

Through the Group's Council, SOG has links with other naturalist and conservation organisations throughout the region.

Trips and meetings

SOG organises an extensive programme of field meetings – an opportunity for members, young or old, novice or expert, to see birds, and to share camaraderie with fellow enthusiasts.

Indoor meetings are also arranged in Ipswich with quality speakers entertaining members with stories of birds and birdwatching, both local and from around the world.

Media

The Group has a strong web presence with www.sogonline.org.uk. This site is regularly updated and is chock-full of sightings news and photography.

The Group's magazine, The Harrier, is published quarterly and keeps members in touch with what's going on – with a mixture of articles about birds, conservation, reserves, organisations and people.

Once a year the Group and its team, with the support of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society, publish the Suffolk Bird Report.

Protecting birds

SOG organises and promotes surveys and projects about the birds of Suffolk and provides an opportunity for members to participate. SOG is also able to support worthwhile projects through bursaries.

Membership of SOG is open to anyone with an interest in the birds of Suffolk.

About birds and birding – for birders

www.sogonline.org.uk