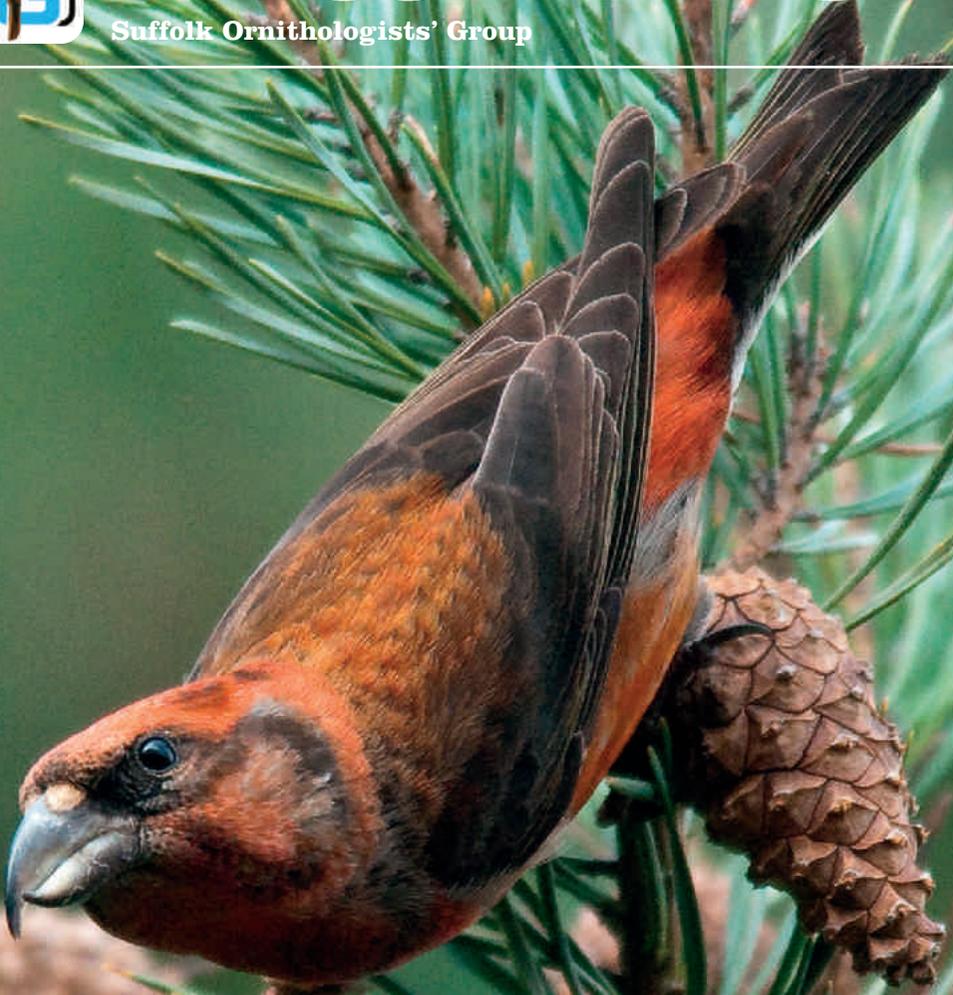


December 2012 Magazine No.171



# The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



**Inside:**

- **BTO Atlas, Suffolk birds**  
– winners and losers
- **BirdTrack Tutorial #2**  
– exploiting patch data
- **Box Owl**  
– what's in a name

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## Cover photograph – Crossbill

Photographer: Steve Plume. The shot taken at Upper Hollesley Common was on a very dull day in January 2012, using a Nikon D300 with a Nikon 400/2.8 lens plus a 1.4 Teleconverter attached at 800iso 1/640th sec at f4 full metering and -1/3ev dialled in

## Contact details for articles and observations, etc are:

Phil Brown, Editor, c/o The Coach House, Denham Road, Dalham, Suffolk CB8 8UB [p.brown@doc-doc.com](mailto:p.brown@doc-doc.com)

All material for the March 2013 Harrier should be with the Editor no later than w/e 9th March.

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# The Harrier

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## Welcome to the Winter Harrier

**W**ith all of our successful fund-raising this autumn, that completely wiped out our potential financial shortfall, Council have agreed to our having a full colour version of the Harrier this issue – I think this is a first.

The full colour Harrier provides an opportunity to showcase the excellent photography and illustration work we regularly receive from contributors. This is also the biggest edition we've prepared to date, featuring a full BINS review of the year, so we hope you like our 2012 Christmas present!

### Bursaries are back

Another result of our fund-raising has been that we are again in a position to offer a small bursary to support a Suffolk-based bird conservation project. A small Council committee is to be set up and we'll publicise this and how to apply at the AGM in February.

### Website development news

By the time we go to press it is hoped the SOG laptop will have been purchased so that work on the new site can get underway – but this cannot start until a small committee has met to agree precisely what the function of the site is to be and then determine what needs to be done. This meeting is scheduled for the New Year and we'll keep you posted on developments.

### Concerns about intrusive photography

The issue of intrusive bird photographers, unsettling both birds and birders, has raised its head again in the course of this summer and autumn. While SOG's Council fully understands

the drive for better photographs, and must admit that this magazine is a beneficiary of photographers' efforts, the Council must reiterate that photographic practices that unduly disturb birds must be avoided at all times. Often rarities can arrive in Suffolk in a distressed state and this kind of added pressure can prove to be fatal. Obviously any harrying behaviour (by birders and photographers) needs to be avoided. Thus, for those photographers who are deemed to repeatedly transgress in this way, we must warn that we will be obliged to reject any photos that they submit in future.

### In this issue

On a happier note, what we have for you in this issue are the first results from everyone's Bird Atlas efforts. Mick Wright, who has been doing sterling work on the BTO's Atlas for years, has prepared this issue's lead article with data extracted from the survey. He provides some advance insights into the state of some of Suffolk's birds – specifically the winners and losers.

Next, we continue with Nick Moran's 'Log it or lose it' series of tutorials showing this time how you can exploit BirdTrack's facilities to present your own patch data more effectively. Then there are a couple of articles on Garden Birdwatch that were triggered by Nick's last article. These are followed by a spin-off from

the Barn Owl project report that inspired Jeff Martin to submit an interesting article on the history of this bird's name.

In the second half of the publication we have details of the outstanding descriptions needed to complete the 2012 bird list – can the birders concerned please provide this material as soon as you can. This plea is followed by an interview with the redoubtable Steve Abbott, the highly qualified Chairman of SORC. Then there is the BINS autumn and a full 2012 review followed by, perhaps, the last word on the White-tailed Eagle in Suffolk yarn.

Next there's a rare trip report (i.e. I'd like to see more submitted as they are such a good advertisement for SOG), yet another of Philip Murphy's timely reminders of how things were, plus an authoritative article by Rob Fuller (BTO's Director of Science) that presents Ash dieback's implications for Suffolk's birds.

There's also a full report on the sponsored bird race, along with some of the team's reports. There's plenty of other news too, plus an auction you might want to participate in, and Brenda Rafe has kindly submitted another

fiendish Wordsearch with which you can while away some wintry hours.

### More material needed

Every quarter I enter a plea for more articles to be submitted which, thankfully, a few of you generously respond to (as you did for this edition). However, recently, there were several complaints about an article dealing with a Norfolk project. In my defence can I say that the reason for its inclusion was first, that it was a continuation of the Titchwell article that arose out of last year's coastal erosion feature (which couldn't have been included earlier as the project was not finished until spring 2012), while second, and more important, it was there because, frankly, too few members submitted articles for that issue. Hence my on-going plea to put pen to paper – otherwise you'll just have to continue to put up with this Editor's occasionally wayward preferences for 'outside-Suffolk' subjects. So I look forward to hearing from more of you in the New Year.

It just remains for me, on behalf of the SOG Council, to offer you all the compliments of the Season and to hope you all have great birding experiences in 2013!

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

Mick Wright

## The declines and increases of a few Suffolk Birds

The 2007-11 Atlas of wintering and breeding birds and its four years of fieldwork have been completed successfully. This epic piece of work could only have been done in Britain where we have an army of enthusiastic birders working in a voluntary capacity.

The Atlas fieldwork was in fact a 20-year stocktake of all our bird species. The results of which will enable us to:

- Measure changes in range
- Measure changes and map broad patterns in relative abundance patterns
- Map distributions, in Suffolk, to tetrad level
- Map changes in distribution
- Produce population estimates
- Help set conservation priorities

Suffolk fieldworkers are to be congratulated, all 1070 of them, for achieving full coverage in all 1100 tetrads. Their commitment, hard work and expertise resulted in the largest ever data

set of Suffolk's avifauna.

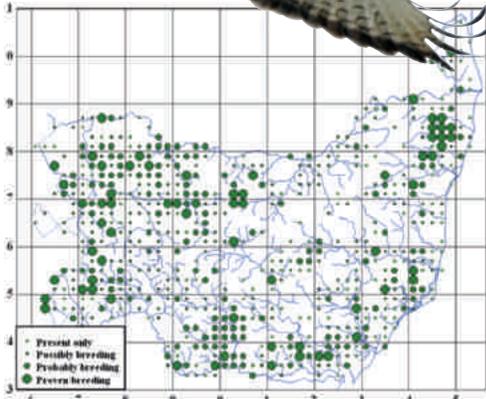
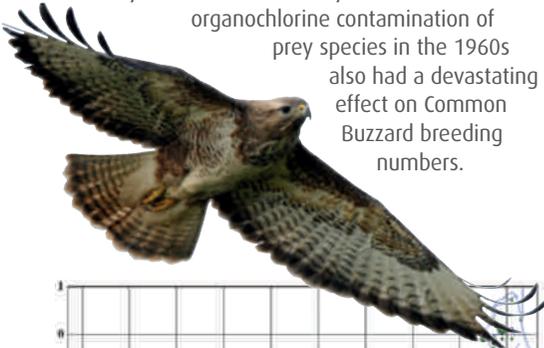
- Summer = 309,823 records
- Winter = 213,490 records

This short article looks at the changes in distribution of species that are in decline and a few that are on the increase.

### Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

The Common Buzzard was persecuted in Britain in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries resulting in a relict distribution in the west of England.

The crash in the rabbit population through myxomatosis in the early 1950s and the organochlorine contamination of prey species in the 1960s also had a devastating effect on Common Buzzard breeding numbers.



Buzzard 2007 – 2011 Breeding data

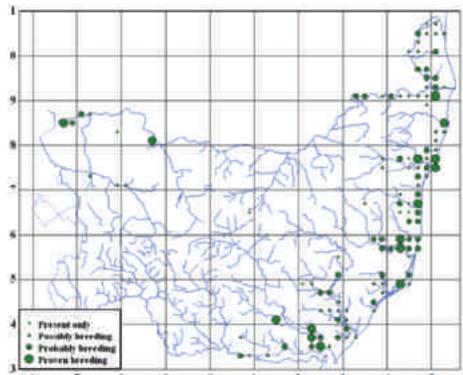
It appears that the Common Buzzard was breeding only infrequently in Suffolk during the mid-1800s according to Payn (1978). There were very few records up until 1971 when a single bird over-summered at Elveden/Santon Downham, apart from a record of two birds displaying in 1956. There were only three sites where Common Buzzards were recorded during

the 1988/91 Breeding Bird Atlas, but breeding was not suspected (SBRs). During 1995 'Suffolk Birds' reported a notable upsurge in records involving 150 sightings from 50 parishes and, by 1999, successful breeding occurred in the west of the county. During the following years there has been a spectacular increase in Common Buzzards, which has transformed the Suffolk countryside. See the distribution map for the breeding season. The winter distribution of Common Buzzards mirrors that of the breeding season.

### Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

The Cetti's Warbler has only colonised Britain since the 1970s; as well as being a breeding bird it also winters, but is susceptible to severe winter weather conditions.

A single bird at Minsmere in 1971 was the first county record for this species. In the years to follow territorial birds were noted from four sites and breeding was confirmed at two. From 1980 numbers spectacularly increased to a peak



Cetti's Warbler 2007 – 2011 Breeding data

of 31 territories in 1984. However, following the severe winters of 1984/5 and 1985/6, the population dramatically collapsed to just two pairs (Piotrowski 2003).

At the time of the last Atlas there was only one site where Cetti's Warbler was recorded. Since then breeding and wintering numbers have increased significantly to a point where they have colonised the whole of the Suffolk coast, the flood plains of tidal estuaries and are now making some progress along inland freshwater rivers.

**Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata***

According to Ticehurst (1932) the Dartford Warbler bred "in numbers" up to the end of the 19th century. The species disappeared from Suffolk altogether in the 1930s (Piotrowski 2003). The next observation of this species occurred at Felixstowe Ferry on November 29/30th 1987. More single birds were noted in the following years and, by 1995, Dartford Warblers were holding territories at three sites and breeding was confirmed the following year (Piotrowski 2003).

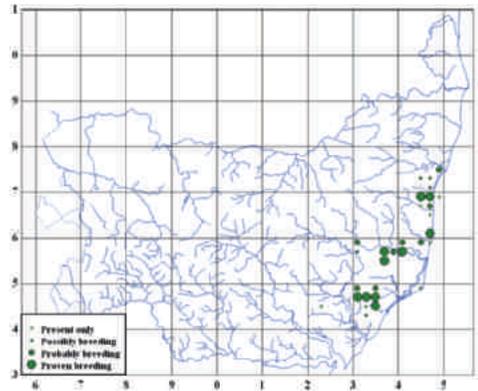
The Dartford Warbler continued increasing in numbers and has rapidly colonised its former sites in the Sandling Heaths. In 2006 they were breeding at 21 sites involving just over 100 pairs.

Thereafter numbers continued to increase on Sutton Common, Upper and Lower Hollesley, with numbers increasing from 23 pairs in 2006 to 41 pairs in 2009. However the cold wintery spells of 2010/2011 and 2011/12 have curtailed the expansion of this species.

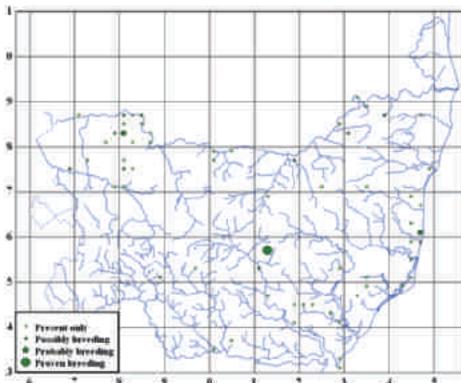
**Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret***

Lesser Redpolls were abundant and widespread in lowland Britain in the 1970s, since then their numbers have tumbled and declined significantly. The species is now a red listed Bird of Conservation Concern.

The Lesser Redpoll is a sociable bird, which usually forages in flocks. It mainly feeds in trees and favours birch, but will also readily feed on the small seeds of Alder, Larch and grass seeds.



Dartford Warbler 2007 – 2011 Breeding data



Lesser Redpoll 2007 – 2011 Breeding data



The changes in agricultural practices arising from intensification, such as the removal of hedgerows, scrub and increased use of pesticides, have all had detrimental effects on habitat and food supply. The Lesser Redpoll requires pioneer woodland habitat, open scrub woodland, which is usually dominated by birch, but especially favours heathland. Alder woods and young conifer plantations are also used, although large and dense forest stands are avoided.

In the 1988-91 Breeding Bird Atlas this species was still widespread and was recorded in 201 tetrads but now it has all but gone as a breeding species in Suffolk; only one proven pair was recorded during the 2007-2011 Atlas period.

The habitat requirements for this species will need to be targeted before we see any change in its status as a Suffolk breeding bird.

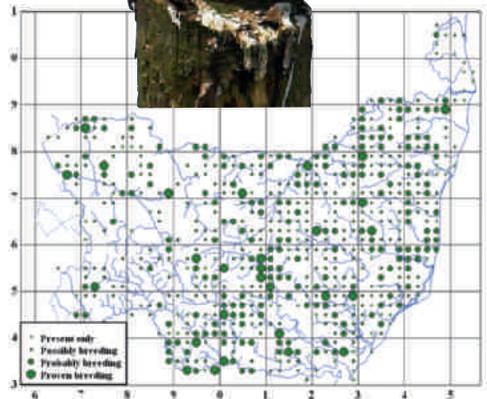
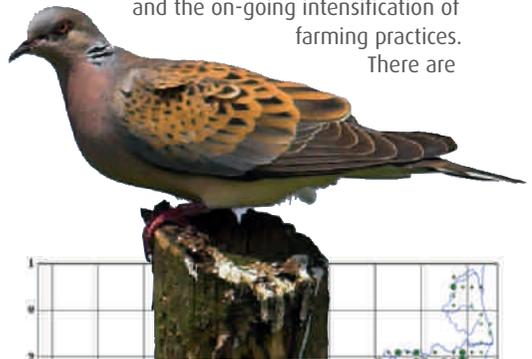
### Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

The Birds of Suffolk by Steve Piotrowski gives a good historical account of this species. In the 1988–1991 Atlas period the Turtle Dove was widespread in Suffolk and was recorded in 816 tetrads.

However, the decline in the Turtle Dove has been catastrophic. The UK population declined by 91% between 1970 and 2009 and is still continuing to fall. According to the RSPB

it is one of the species most threatened by extirpation in the UK within 10 years, if we do not act now.

The reasons for the declines are multiple, including direct loss of habitat, i.e. removal of tall hedges and thickets, to the way modern day hedges are managed. Also, there is a decline in weed seeds as a result of herbicide use and the on-going intensification of farming practices. There are



Turtle Dove 2007 – 2011 Breeding data

serious problems outside of the breeding season too. This is the only migratory dove species in Europe, and each year they make the long journey to and from their wintering grounds in Africa. During these migratory journeys substantial numbers are shot (satellite tracking of Turtle Dove has been undertaken by the RSPB this year, but none of the five tagged birds completed the journey to the wintering grounds).

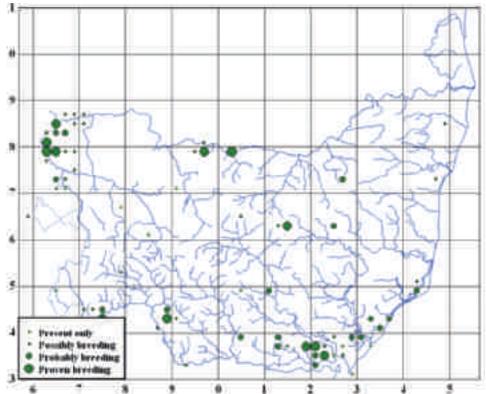
The distribution map for Turtle Dove still shows that this species is widespread in Suffolk although very few birds were proven to have bred successfully, however overall numbers are down on the 1988-1991 Atlas period.

The habitat requirements and this species' food supply needs to be targeted before we see any change in its status as a Suffolk breeding bird. In addition, there needs to be better enforcement of EU laws to curtail the shooting of Turtle Doves whilst on their migratory journeys.

### Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

The UK population declined by 89% between 1970 and 2004 and, again, this decline is probably due to intensive agricultural practices, especially the reduction in mixed farming. Extensive use of pesticides has reduced the numbers of arable weed species, an important food source for the adults, and insects, vital for rearing chicks. The switch from spring to autumn-sown cereals and consequent loss of weeds and stubbles is probably a vital cause of the population drop, as it has led to the loss of both nesting and feeding habitats. The Corn Bunting has become extinct in Ireland, where it was previously common.

Suffolk, too, has seen a decline in this species, although between the two Atlas periods the decline has slowed, with birds, albeit in lower numbers, hanging on in favoured areas such as the Shotley peninsular, Shingle Street, northwest Suffolk, Great Waldingfield and Stradishall. We need to target these areas with



Corn Bunting 2007 - 2011 Breeding data

habitat prescriptions that will assist in the recovery of this species.

#### Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Atlas Working Group, sincere thanks to all the fieldworkers who sent in records to make this Atlas of breeding and wintering birds a great success.

#### References

- Piotrowski S. 2003 The Birds of Suffolk, Helm Suffolk Birds reports. Published by The Suffolk Naturalists' Society
- Wright M. 2001 Survey of Breeding Raptors & Owls in Suffolk 1995-1998, Published by The Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

# BirdTrack

Recording birds across Britain and Ireland



Nick Moran

## Tutorial #2 Exploring your records

Once your records are in BirdTrack, they're available for the 'greater goods' of monitoring, research, local report writing and much more. Whilst this may be ample motivation for some people to submit records, BirdTrack offers a range of exciting outputs that add an enormous amount of *personal* value to your records. The more records you have in the system, the more powerful it becomes for you.

This tutorial looks at the **Explore My Records** tool, and highlights a selection of the outputs available. To really appreciate the benefits of this tool though, there is no substitute for entering some records, then having a go!

Clicking the 'Explore My Records' link on the Data Home page (the page you see once logged in)

takes you through to a blank set of 'tabs' in the middle of the page: Table, Map and Graph.



Table

Graph

Map

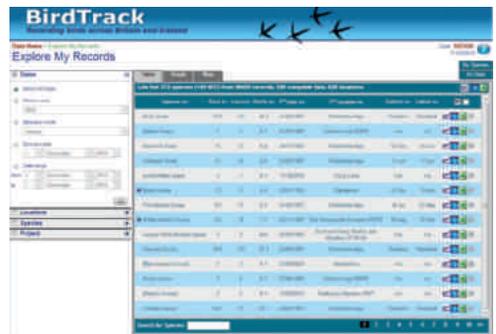
You can toggle between the Table, Graph and Map outputs by clicking the relevant tab at the top left of the screen.

To the left of these tabs are a series of filters: Dates, Locations, Species and Project. The idea is that you set the filter – or filters – you want, click the 'GO' button, and the relevant selection of data is presented in the tabs.

Here, in order to show my life list records, I've applied the most straightforward filter – viewing all of them as an example:

1. Click 'Explore My Records' on the Data Home page;
2. Click 'GO' in the 'Dates' filter on the left side of the page (the 'Dates' filter opens by default, and the 'Select All Species' radio button is automatically selected).

...and that's all there is to it!



Table

Graph

Map

Summary stats are presented along the top of the 'Table' tab, showing your life list, number of records, number of Complete Lists and number of locations.

Life list: 372 species (+25 N/C) from 50426 records, 930 complete lists, 828 locations

The summary table accommodates 14 rows; if you have records for more species than this, you can scroll through the additional pages by clicking the numbers at the bottom right of the screen.

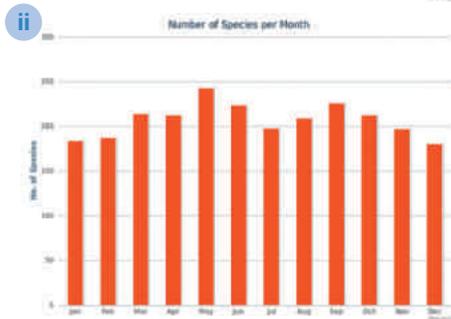
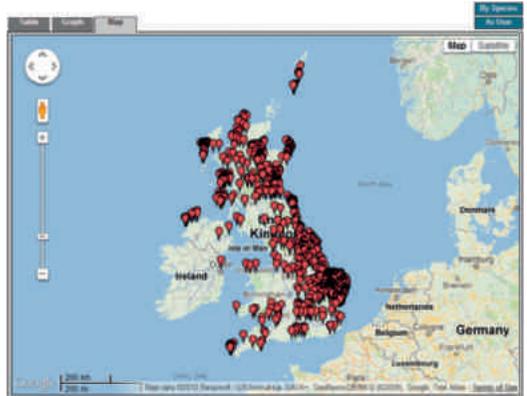
These alternative graphs are accessed by clicking the '1', '2' or '3' at the top right of the Graph tab, and you can either print or download any of the graphs by clicking the print or download icons to the right of the number buttons.



Up to 3 different graph outputs are available, depending on the filters that have been set. In the selection above (all your records), the graphs available are Number of Species per Year, Number of Species per Month, and Species Accumulation:



To view a map of the data selected, simply click the 'Map' tab.



If you want to download all the data that you have selected using the filter, simply return to the 'Table' tab and click the Microsoft Excel icon at the top right of the screen. The resulting spreadsheet contains two sheets, one marked 'Summary' and containing the same information as displayed in the Table view, the other marked 'Details' and containing every record for every species, and any details such as count, breeding status, age/sex/plumage and comments.

Let's look at a more complex example: records of a single species for a particular site, over a specified time period:

1. Click 'Explore My Records' on the Data Home page;
2. In the 'Dates' filter on the left side of the screen, click the 'Date range' radio button and select a 'From' date, 'to' today's date;

3. Minimise the Dates filter by clicking the '-' button at the top right of the filter;
4. Click the tick-box by 'Locations' to open the Locations filter;
5. Click the 'Specific Locations' radio button and select a location from the box, or type its name into the 'Search for' box then click its name in the main box to highlight it;
6. Minimise the Locations filter by clicking the '-' button at the top right of the filter;
7. Click the tick-box by 'Species' to open the Species filter;
8. Click the 'Specific Species' radio button and select a species from the box, or type its name into the 'Search for' box then click its name in the main box to highlight it;
9. Click 'GO'.

In producing the graph below, I followed the above steps for my 2009–2012 Thetford Nunnery Lakes site Buzzard records. I then clicked the Graph tab and chose graph option 3, to show my peak counts per week for Buzzard at this site.

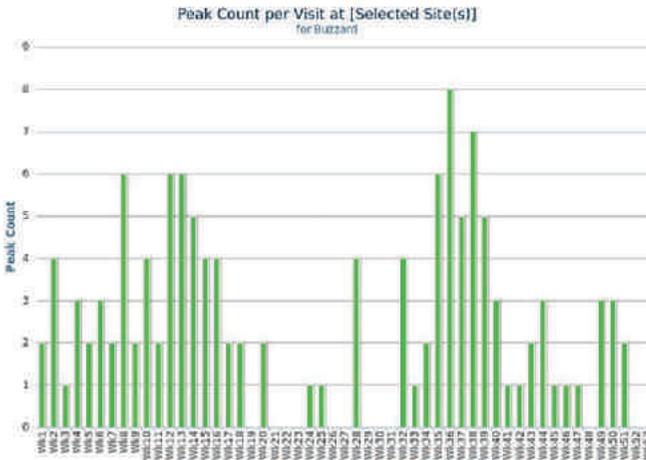
I've been BirdTracking avidly since I returned from a seven-year stint overseas in 2009. During that period I've entered more than 31,000 records, bolstered by another 14,000 from backdated notebooks from my formative years.

Adding my day-to-day records hasn't been an onerous task – it was simply a case of getting into the habit of logging my field notebook lists online, rather than writing up 'in neat' as I used to do. The beauty of the BirdTrack approach is that I can now access and interrogate my own records in a matter of seconds, instead of having to thumb through countless logbooks to find the information I want. No longer do I have to rely on memory or anecdotes – I can tell you for certain that my highest Buzzard counts at my local site are in early spring and mid autumn... and lots more besides!

*Editor:* So, if you have not already done so, join BirdTrack today and start working on your own patch data.

To help you do so Nick will be taking us through an example of SOG patch data and showing how it can be exploited at a special workshop we've arranged for **21 March**. As we'll have wi-fi at the Holiday Inn, you can bring your laptop to participate in a 'live' BirdTrack session and adjust your own data.

If you don't have a laptop you can still join in by sitting with any of the workshop's breakout groups.



## Garden BirdWatch and BirdTrack

We're regularly asked how BirdTrack ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)) and Garden BirdWatch ([www.bto.org/gbw](http://www.bto.org/gbw)) fit together, and in particular, whether or not bird records should be submitted to both. Actually both these two schemes complement one another perfectly.

They allow users of either BTO scheme to manage their birdwatching records and permit the BTO to maximise their potential for research and conservation. In other words, it's a real win-win situation.

As some of you will know, Garden BirdWatch is the BTO's way of studying the changing fortunes of garden birds. Whereas BirdTrack is a free, web-based tool that enables birders to keep records of the bird species they see when out and about birdwatching.

BirdTrack includes the 'Explore My Records' tool that allows birders to interact with their own records. Observations can be viewed by any combination of date, location and species so, if birders like to keep a life list or a year list, adding their sightings to BirdTrack provides a

quick and easy way to compile such a list for themselves. But, at the same time, these records are also available for research and conservation uses. Additionally we can confirm the system delivers records direct to the County Bird Recorder for inclusion in local bird reports (wherever birders have agreed to do so).

In fact any records collected via these two schemes actually sit alongside one another in the same database. This means that the BTO can easily draw on them for other projects, for example Bird Atlas 2007–11. It also means that there is no need for Garden Watch observers to enter their GBW observations twice, once in each project.

Looking forward, the BTO plan to deliver combined results back to both sets of observers, so that, for example, an individual's year list contains all of the birds they have seen, regardless of which project the record was originally submitted through.

*Editor:* To end, I think a quote from Mike says it all: "I submit my Garden BirdWatch count each week and use BirdTrack to store my birdwatching notes from further afield. I also use BirdTrack to keep a note of birds seen in the garden but outside of my Garden BirdWatch recording period, for example the Hobby seen flying over one summer." So now you know.

---

Carl Powell

## 'Log it or lose it' & Garden Birdwatch

The latest initiative of SOG to 'Log it or lose it' is a great reminder to us all to do just that. As the BTO Garden Birdwatch Ambassador for Suffolk I

cannot let this opportunity pass to remind everyone that there can be no better way to log sightings of "everyday" birds than by joining BTO Garden Birdwatch.

The scheme has been running since 1995 and records weekly maxima of birds seen within your garden. There are 15,000 members nationally and together we have submitted

some 85 million individual records. Within Suffolk we have about 440 members and we have contributed over 233,600 records to the national total. These records have been instrumental in identifying trends such as the increase in Woodpigeon and Goldfinch using gardens, the decline of House Sparrows and the impact of trichomonosis on the Greenfinch population.

The scheme has also been of great benefit in helping the BTO monitor population dynamics and migration patterns as members record summer and winter arrivals and departures in gardens – urban, suburban and rural. Members also receive a quarterly magazine up to the same high standard as BTO News, as well as a monthly e-mail if the team has been supplied with the address. In fact anyone, member or not, can receive this e-mail with no obligation. Simply give the Garden Birdwatch Team at Thetford your e-mail address and they will add you to the growing list.

In addition to recording birds weekly, we are asked from time to time to take part in one-off surveys and, at the moment, we are monitoring the use of berries by garden birds. Past surveys have included owls and House Sparrows, plumage aberrations and bill deformities! Like all BTO voluntary work it is not necessary to be a BTO member. I suspect many SOG members record garden birds and some may already be Garden Birdwatch participants. Make your records count by joining. Records can be submitted quarterly on pre-printed forms or, increasingly, members are submitting records electronically. This not only saves a lot of work but has the added benefit of putting records directly onto the computer data base. To cover the administrative costs of the scheme membership costs £15 per year but is due to rise to £17 in the New Year. However, this is money well spent considering the splendid magazine issued quarterly and the knowledge that your records are making a real difference to the knowledge base at the BTO. In addition, the first year's subscription is offset with the

choice of a free book. You can choose between "Gardening for Birdwatchers" by Mike Toms, Ian and Barley Wilson or the excellent "Garden Birds and Wildlife" by Mike Toms and Paul Sterry, which contains all you could wish to know about wildlife in your garden. To join simply contact the BTO at Thetford.

It did not take long for other conservation organizations to realise that a whole army of willing volunteers was recording in their gardens and members were first asked to record butterflies. Now we have columns to record not only butterflies, but mammals, dragonflies, various insects (including bees), reptiles and amphibians. The amount of information gathered weekly is staggering!

I have been giving talks and presentations around Suffolk about BTO Garden Birdwatch for several years to a variety of audiences. If anyone is interested in me giving a talk, whether it be to a birding audience or not, I can usually manage to arrange a suitable date.



**Editor:** The last issue's Barn Owl project report provoked many positive comments about the volunteers' efforts, plus this article:

Jeff Martin

## What's in a name?



Compare and contrast – two generations of the Hosking family's photography

It was while reading the interesting article on the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project in the October issue of *The Harrier* that I noticed Phil Brown's comment at the end in which he pointed out, somewhat 'tongue-in-cheek', that the Barn Owl in Suffolk should be called the Box Owl.

Why not, was my immediate thought, for if we look at the history of how the Barn Owl got its name, then 'Box Owl' would not seem inappropriate.

### Is Barn Owl an appropriate name?

Before we start though, I'll ask a question. When was the last time you knew of Barn Owls actually nesting in a barn in Suffolk? A few of Suffolk's older residents will perhaps remember the odd pair nesting in a building, but there won't be that many who will. Even before the fashion for barn conversions came about, nesting in barns was uncommon in Suffolk and, indeed, in many other parts of southeast England. Parts of Sussex and Norfolk are a little different though. So bearing this in mind, how is it that we have the name Barn Owl at all? Well, despite history being unfashionable these days, it's always worth travelling back through the records if you want the answer.

### In the beginning...

To try and get to the bottom of this, we have to go south, across the border into Essex, to a small village to the south of Braintree called Black Notley, where the naturalist John Ray was born in 1627. Ray was one of the most influential naturalists of his day who, although coming from a very modest background, was fortunate in being able to study at Cambridge University, where he came into contact with Francis Willughby. Even though they came from different backgrounds, they formed a good partnership and together they toured Britain studying its fauna and flora. They spent a lot of time not only in northern Britain, including Scotland, but also in the West Country.

Sadly Willughby died in 1672, at the young age of 37, but not before he and Ray had set out to write *The Ornithology*. This eventually proved to be the first serious attempt at the classification of British birds. *The Ornithology* (it was written in 3 volumes) was eventually finished by Ray and was subsequently published in 1676. In it the Barn Owl is listed as the 'Barn Owl, White Owl or Church Owl' and, while this hesitancy in providing just one name might seem perplexing, nothing with the Barn Owl is straightforward.

### Evidence for tree nesting

The story of why Barn Owls nested in barns in the west and north of Britain, and why they

nested in trees in the south and east is too long to tell here, but suffice to say that Ray is unlikely to have picked up the name 'Barn Owl' from Essex. There, as in many other counties of southern England at that time, they usually nested in trees. In these counties it was usually known as 'The White Owl' and one has only to see one in flight to understand why.

When I carried out my survey of Suffolk's Barn Owls in 1983, after one year's work I found that 58% of all Barn Owls nested in trees with only 20% nesting in closed barns (usually as a result of nest boxes), 12% in open barns, 2% in unoccupied houses and 8% in various other places. Later, after I had collected more information, I found that the abundance of tree nests had increased to 81.91%, only 7.45% nested in enclosed barns and 10.64% nested in open barns i.e. straw stacks and other places. If we accept the fact that those which breed in barns are more likely to be noticed than those which nest in trees, then the true number of tree nests was likely to have been higher. In support of my claim, Colin Shawyer stated in his report that Suffolk had the highest number of tree nesting Barn Owls in Britain.

### Church or tower owl?

Returning to Willughby's *The Ornithology*, as it became known, it does seem possible that before church towers were blocked up to

prevent birds entering them, Barn Owls would sometimes nest in them, hence the name 'Church Owl'. Nesting in church towers is a widespread habit throughout many parts of the world. For example in Holland it is known as *kerkhuile*, or 'church owl', as it also used to be known in Somerset, a county with Dutch connections. In Sweden it is known as *tornuggla* or 'tower owl', as it is in Finland – *tornipöllö* or 'tower owl'. In many parts of Europe Barn Owls are very reliant upon man-made structures for nesting, sometimes setting up home in the middle of villages and towns, as they used to at the Smithsonian Institution building in Washington, USA.

The Director of this Institution, Alexander Wetmore, described in 1935 how he used to catch a glimpse in the street lights of the white breasts of Barn Owls, as they set out at night to raid the sparrow sp. and starling sp. roosts. The owls used to nest in the Institution's towers until they were closed off after the last war. This is happening now, in such places as Poland, where Barn Owls are declining as they lose their nest sites as a result of developments in towns and villages. In some instances nest-boxes are coming to the rescue, but that is unlikely to be the complete answer.

No one has yet, to my knowledge, come up with a scheme in the UK to accommodate Barn Owls in church towers without causing problems for the church cleaners, but it could be done. Here and there are a few churches dotted around Britain in which Barn Owls are portrayed in a stained glass window; and most of those windows are comprised of old glass. By that I mean they have not been installed in recent years as a result of the Barn Owl interest that is sweeping the country. So we have the likely origins of two names, what about '*The Barn Owl*'?

### So why Barn Owl?

On their travels in the north and west of Britain, Willughby and Ray would have come into contact with many 'White Owls' nesting in



stone barns. Stone was the most abundant and cheap building material in those parts and barns were the most available sites to use, as mature trees with suitable holes are scarce in many places, unlike Eastern England. These barn nesting owls would have been much more noticeable than any tree nesting owls, as I mentioned earlier, so it was Willughby and Ray who were likely to have discovered that this was another important nesting habitat – and there lay the dilemma. Eventually the name ‘Barn Owl’ was officially adopted by the British Ornithologists’ Union (BOU) in 1883 and no doubt Willughby’s *Ornithology* was an influence in that decision.



### The Suffolk difference

However, in deepest Suffolk, the adoption of ‘Barn Owl’ possibly caused some consternation, for why should a common bird of the Suffolk countryside be called ‘Barn Owl’ when it didn’t nest in barns? In a kindly way, Suffolk natives are stubborn and ‘Suffolk stubborn’ is a term I came to know many years ago. It was in not accepting the adoption of the name ‘Barn Owl’ early on that ‘Suffolk stubborn’ could be said to be justifiably well represented.

It was the year after the formal adoption of the name ‘Barn Owl’ by the BOU that the new

name was used by Churchill Babington when he published his *Catalogue of the Birds of Suffolk* in 1884. However, he refrained from casting the name White Owl completely to one side, preferring instead to use *White or Barn Owl*. However, when Tuck wrote the ornithological section to the *Suffolk Victorian County History* in 1911, instead of discarding ‘White Owl’ as one might expect, he discarded ‘Barn Owl’ preferring to head the section ‘The White Owl’.

Little was to be heard of Suffolk’s Barn Owls until the early 1930s, when Claude Ticehurst published his *Birds of Suffolk* in 1932. By then, natural history had moved on since the Victorian

era and bird recording had adopted a greater conventional uniformity, where gentlemen naturalists were expected to conform in a certain manner. Ticehurst, seemingly mindful of not offending those who wielded the natural history power in the county, thus settled for ‘White-Breasted Barn Owl’. Not so Claude Morley, the somewhat autocratic founder and Honorary Secretary of the Suffolk Naturalists’ Society, who was searching the ‘only real old *Oak* in the

vicinity’ for moths at Oaktree Farm, Kenton, on 15th February 1935. It was during his search that he noticed some recent bird-casts which ‘caused me to look up’ and there he saw ‘a face of a White Owl that has suddenly become so rare’. Then, interestingly, he continued ‘Thirty years ago Barn Owls used to be seen frequently at Monks Soham’. Times certainly were changing, and since that time Barn Owl has been the accepted name in Suffolk – or has it?

### ‘Suffolk stubborn’ strikes

I first came across this ‘problem’ in the early 1980s, when I was talking to an old Suffolk

resident of Reydon, near Southwold. Like many of his ilk he was a good countryman and a one-time gamekeeper, though long before the war. We got talking about birds and I gently asked him if he knew of any Barn Owls in the area. With a somewhat puzzled look on his face he said 'No, – but we've got a few White Owls about the place'. I was not to encounter this again until 2005, when I was again talking to one of the county's older residents at Cotton, near Stowmarket. Again we got round to talking about birds and I asked him whether there were any Barn Owls around? That puzzled look came across his face, and he replied 'No – years ago we used to have a number of them old white owls nesting in them oweld elm pollards, but they gart the disease. I haven't seen one rowend here fur years now'. One

wonders if there still are some of the old Suffolk people out there who still refer to the 'White Owls'?

Contrast that to the comments of another old resident of Suffolk who I met down near the Cambridgeshire border in 2010. He noticed my binoculars and we started talking about wildlife and birds. As usual I got round to talking about owls and inevitably the Barn Owl came up in conversation. He did not mince his words when he told me, 'I don't know all these new fangled names (Barn Owl) the youngsters are using these days. It's the Scritch (Screech) Owl. Always has been, always will be'.

Today the countryside of Suffolk is a little different to that when I carried out *The Suffolk Barn Owl Survey*. Cattle were more common then, although by no means as common as they once had been and that, I am sure, has had a profound influence upon the abundance, mix and distribution of small mammals.

On the negative side hedgerow trees were still being cut down and hedgerows themselves were still being grubbed up. Here and there a few elms remained, although most were stark, dead skeletons. Soon they were to be gone – for the time being.

Nowadays it seems that, not only in Suffolk, lots of Barn Owls use boxes for nesting in, but throughout the UK and recently I heard an authority quote that stated that around 50,000 have been put up specifically for Barn Owls!

### **Barn Owl or not?**

In Suffolk, as elsewhere, we have little or no idea of just how many Barn Owls still use trees and other places compared to nesting boxes, but I would hazard a guess that at present most use boxes. So, to return to the question should the Barn Owl be re-named the 'Box Owl', well I'll leave you to answer that. If though, the name was changed, and a whole generation or two of future birdwatchers came to know it as the Box Owl, would someone else write an



article such as this in say 150 years time, when Barn Owls find somewhere else that they prefer to nest in? Don't forget, the elms have not gone forever; they may only be sleeping. Left alone by the hedge cutters, the elms might well rise again one day as their resistance to Dutch Elm grows to grace the Suffolk countryside. In the meantime, helped by nest boxes, the White Owl flies Suffolk's farmlands, waiting for the elms to re-awaken.

#### Acknowledgement

I thank David Hosking for his interest in this article and for allowing reproduction of the photographs.

#### An apology:

The Suffolk accent is a wonderful thing that sadly seems to be going. I've tried to put into words what some of Suffolk's older natives have told me over the years. In doing so, I apologise if I have offended anyone.

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**Editor:** Thanks Jeff for this interesting piece. It was also valuable for revealing that Claude Morley in 1935 should describe a White Owl as recently becoming "rare". Clearly this species was encountering problems in Suffolk well before the 1960s. Also, we have heard it alleged that the name Barn Owl may refer to a practice of nailing Barn Owl corpses to barn doors – discuss.

Craig Fulcher

## SORC greeting and records needed

Season's greetings from the SORC! It's that time of year again when we look back on the past twelve months and think about some great birds we saw and some we missed! Please see opposite the updated lists for both submitted records and outstanding descriptions for 2012. Once again I would urge you to pay particular attention to the outstanding description

list and see if you can fill some of the gaps? It's always a shame to see good records go by the wayside due to descriptions not being forthcoming.

#### SORC Committee changes

Also, I have to inform you of some changes taking place in 2013. At the turn of the year we shall be losing two members, namely John Walshe and Derek Beamish. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank both of them for their time and efforts whilst on the committee. Two stalwarts of the Suffolk birding scene, Lee Gregory and Brian Small, are replacing this pair of members. Both I am sure will be familiar to you, and I am very happy to be welcoming both of them back onto SORC.

## STATUS OF 2012 RECORDS

Date(s)	Species	Location(s)	Observer(s)	Status	Notes
<b>JANUARY</b>					
01/01/2012	'Blue' Fulmar	Minsmere	J H Grant	A	
01/01/12-30/01/12	Green-winged Teal	Alton Water	L G Woods	A	
04/01/2012	Hooded Crow	Beccles Marsh	C Buttle	A	
13/01/12-25/01/12	Black Brant	Hollesley/Gedgrave	D Fairhurst	A	
<b>FEBRUARY</b>					
01/02/12-04/02/12	American Wigeon	North Warren	T Hodge	A	1st winter Male
04/02/12-20/02/12	Hooded Crow	Minsmere/Eastbridge	S Rutt	A	
07/02/12-31/3/12	Greenland White-fronted Goose	Gedgrave/Boyton	D Fairhurst	A	Male
20/02/12-29/02/12	Greenland White-fronted Goose	North Warren	D Fairhurst	A	Female
21/02/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Butley/Boyton	S Pitrowski + S Abbott	A	
<b>March</b>					
11/03/12-20/03/12	Hooded Crow	Boyton	N Sillett	A	
12/03/2012	Raven	Covehithe	C Buttle	A	North at 11.20am
25/03/12-31/03/12	Green-winged Teal	Minsmere	D Fairhurst	A	Male
<b>April</b>					
08/04/2012	Hooded Crow	Lowestoft	A Easton	A	Different to Boyton bird
10/04/2012	Serin	LBO	J Zantboer + N Odin <i>et al.</i>	A	
11/04/12-12/04/12	Serin	Lowestoft	S Jones	A	
24/04/2012	Little Bunting	LBO	N Croft	A	
28/04/12-29/04/12	Alpine Swift	Lowestoft	P Ransome	A	
30/04/12-13/07/12	Serin	LBO	P J Holmes, G Bennet + N Odin <i>et al.</i>	A	Assumed to be same female throughout the spring
<b>May</b>					
04/05/2012	Serin	LBO	W J Brame	A	Male singing at customs
06/05/2012	Tawny Pipit	LBO	E W Patrick + M Piotrowski	A	
07/05/2012	Honey Buzzard	Ipswich	L G Woods + J Woods	A	
10/05/2012	White Stork	Sudbury	P Rowe	A	
13/05/2012	Red-rumped Swallow	East Lane	L G Woods	A	
25/05/2012	Rose-coloured Starling	LBO	P J Holmes + G Bennet	A	1st summer
26/05/2012	Marsh Warbler	LBO	R Duncan + G Bennet	A	Trapped and ringed
26/05/2012	Greenish Warbler	LBO	J Zantboer <i>et al.</i>	A	Trapped and ringed
26/05/2012	Icterine Warbler	Corton		A	
27/05/12-29/05/12	Marsh Warbler	Gt Livermere	M Wright	A	
28/05/2012	Marsh Warbler	LBO	G Bennet <i>et al.</i>	A	Dutch control
29/05/2012	Marsh Warbler	LBO	G Bennet <i>et al.</i>	A	Trapped and ringed
30/05/12-31/05/12	Red-footed Falcon	Minsmere	A Lees	A	Female
<b>June</b>					
01/06/2012	Raven	Wangford	B J Small	S	
08/06/2012	Rose-coloured Starling	Hollesley Heath	E W Patrick + G Button	S	
10/06/2012	Woodchat Shrike	Walberswick	C Buttle	A	
10/06/2012	Bee-eater	Dingle	C Buttle	S	
11/06/2012	American Golden Plover	LBO	P Oldfield + W J Brame	S	
19/06/12-20/06/12	Woodchat Shrike	Gunton		A	
28/06/2012	Raven	Melton	S Abbott <i>et al.</i>	S	
<b>JULY</b>					
02/07/2012	Red-necked Phalarope	Minsmere	G Driver	A	Male (Photo)
05/07/2012	Honey Buzzard	Minsmere	T Harris	A	(Photo)
22/07/2012	White-rumped Sandpiper	Havergate	D Fairhurst	A	(Photo)
28/07/2012	White-winged Black Tern	Minsmere		A	(Photo)
29/07/12-30/07/12	White-winged Black Tern	Alton Water		A	Same as Minsmere (Photo)
29/07/2012	White-winged Black Tern	Orfordness	M Marsh + D Crawshaw	A	(Photo)

### STATUS OF 2012 RECORDS (continued)

Date(s)	Species	Location(s)	Observer(s)	Status	Notes
31/07/12-22/08/12	Ferruginous Duck	Minsmere	Gi Grieco + D Pearsons	A	(Photo)
<b>AUGUST</b>					
12/08/2012	Montagu's Harrier	Sizewell	R Chittenden	A	(Photo) Wing tagged from Holland
20/08/2012	Honey Buzzard	Hen Reedbeds	C Fulcher	S	
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>					
01/09/2012	Common Rosefinch	Orfordness	M Marsh + D Crawshaw	A	Juv ( Photo)
02/09/2012	Montagu's Harrier	Havergate	D Fairhurst + K Alexander	A	Juv ( Photo)
10/09/12-15/09/12	Montagu's Harrier	Minsmere	M Riley <i>et al.</i>	A	Juv (Multi Observed)
12/09/12-23/09/12	Montagu's Harrier	Boyton/Gedgrave	P Whittaker + S Abbott	A	Juv (Photo)
21/09/12-22/09/12	Dotterel	Havergate	P Gallagher	A	Juv (Photo)
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Sizewell	D Pearsons	S	1 North 13.20
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Thorpeness	S Mayson	S	2 North 7.53
23/09/2012	Sabine's Gull	Thorpeness	S Mayson	S	North 9.50
23/09/2012	Sabine's Gull	Thorpeness	L G Woods	S	North 8.05
<b>OCTOBER</b>					
07/10/2012	Hooded Crow	LBO	W J Brame, P Oldfield <i>et al.</i>	A	South ( Multi Observed)
11/10/2012	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Southwold	C Fulcher, S Mayson + L G Woods	A	( Photo)
20/10/2012	Hooded Crow	Benacre	E Lucking	A	(Photo)
20/10/2012	Common Rosefinch	Orfordness	M Marsh + D Crawshaw	A	Trapped (Photo)
24/10/2012	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Hopton	A Easton	A	(Photo)
25/10/12-29/10/12	Barred Warbler	Minsmere	E W Patrick <i>et al.</i>	A	Sluice Bushes (Photo)
28/10/2012	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Alton Water	J Glazebrook	S	
30/10/2012	Radde's Warbler	Hollesley	R Duncan, O Slessor <i>et al.</i>	A	(Photo)
<b>NOVEMBER</b>					
02/11/2012	Barred Warbler	Minsmere		A	North Bushes (Photo)
08/11/12-11/11/12	Richard's Pipit	Covehithe	C Fulcher	A	(Photo)

### OUTSTANDING DESCRIPTIONS FOR 2012

Date(s)	Species	Location(s)	Notes
<b>JANUARY</b>			
07/01/2012-11/02/2012	Siberian Chiffchaff	Long Melford SW	
10/01/2012-11/01/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Breydon South Wall	
10/01/2012	Ring-billed Gull	Levington Creek	Per RBA
27/01/2012	Siberian Chiffchaff	Greyfriars Wood	
<b>FEBRUARY</b>			
04/02/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Blythburgh	
08/02/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Rushbrooke	Per RBA
11/02/2012	Siberian Chiffchaff	Alton Water	Per RBA
24/02/2012	Rose-coloured Starling	Braiseworth	1st winter
26/02/2012	'Blue' Fulmar	Lowestoft	
<b>MARCH</b>			
06/03/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Stutton Mill	
11/03/2012	Raven	Aldeburgh	
11/03/2012-20/03/12	Hooded Crow	Gedgrave	
12/03/2012	Goshawk	Covehithe	
21/03/2012-03/04/2012	Hooded Crow	Southwold Harbour	Same as Gedgrave bird ?
27/03/2012	Raven	Pakefield	Per RBA

## OUTSTANDING DESCRIPTIONS FOR 2012 *(continued)*

Date(s)	Species	Location(s)	Notes
<b>APRIL</b>			
03/04/2012	Black Kite	Cattawade	
15/04/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Sibton	Per RBA
16/04/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Benacre	
22/04/2012	Rough-legged Buzzard	Shingle St	Per RBA
<b>MAY</b>			
02/05/2012	Hoopoe	Shingle St	
04/05/2012	Grey Headed Wagtail	Trimley	Male
07/05/2012	Raven	Bredfield	
07/05/2012	Montagu's Harrier	Orfordness	Female
10/05/2012	Montagu's Harrier	LBO	Female
11/05/2012	Montagu's Harrier	Minsmere	Female
11/05/2012	Honey Buzzard	Minsmere	Per RBA
11/05/2012	Red-rumped Swallow	LBO	
12/05/2012	Red-rumped Swallow x 2	Minsmere	
12/05/2012	Honey Buzzard	Blythburgh	
23/05/2012	Montagu's Harrier	Minsmere/Dunwich	Per RBA
27/05/2012	Honey Buzzard	Sizewell	
28/05/2012	Bee-Eater x 5+	Minsmere	Per RBA
28/05/12-29/05/12	Red-footed Falcon	Elmswell	Per RBA
28/05/2012	Purple Heron	Lakenheath	Per RBA
28/05/2012	White Stork x 4	Lakenheath	Per RBA
<b>JUNE</b>			
01/06/2012	White Stork	Sudbury	Per RBA
01/06/2012	Raven	Lakenheath	Per RBA
09/06/2012	Greenish Warbler	Orfordness	
18/06/2012	Bee-Eater	Minsmere	
<b>JULY</b>			
24/07/2012	Honey Buzzard	Westleton	
<b>AUGUST</b>			
12/08/2012	Barred Warbler	LBO	
19/08/2012	Red-spotted Bluethroat	Hollesley	Trapped and Ringed
30/08/2012	Montagu's Harrier	Bawdsey	Juv (south)
31/08/2012	Honey Buzzard	Thorpeness	Dark morph Juv
31/08/2012	Honey Buzzard	Bawdsey	Dark morph Juv
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>			
02/09/2012	Common Rosefinch	Hollesley	
04/09/2012	Icterine Warbler	Lowestoft	
09/09/2012	Goshawk	Bucklesham	
17/09/2012	Hooded Crow	Combs Ford	Per RBA
23/09/2012	Sabines Gull	Lowestoft	Juv (North 10.50)
23/09/2012	'Blue' Fulmar	Lowestoft	North 9.50
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Covehithe	North 8.14
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Covehithe	North 8.22
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Southwold	2 North 8.05
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Sizewell	2 North 7.58
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Sizewell	North 8.40
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Sizewell	North 13.20
23/09/2012	Sabines Gull	Slaughden	
23/09/2012	'Blue' Fulmar	Orfordness	
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Bawdsey	North 8.55
23/09/2012	Cory's Shearwater	Felixstowe	
<b>OCTOBER</b>			
16/10/2012	Raven	Ipswich	Per RBA
16/10/2012	Honey Buzzard	Needham Market	Per RBA
31/10/2012	Richard's Pipit	Dingle	
<b>NOVEMBER</b>			
09/11/2012	Hooded Crow	Southwold	Per RBA

## Meet Steve Abbott

### Biographical notes:

Steve is now retired from teaching, married with an extremely understanding wife and one son, also a naturalist, now at university. Suffolk born and bred, Steve worked mainly in Surrey, Norfolk and London, visiting his home county regularly to maintain his list before returning ten years ago to live permanently in Melton, near Woodbridge.

Steve describes himself as an all round naturalist and comes in many guises – twitcher, wildlife inspector, birder, bird racer, ringer, field biologist, naturalist, illustrator and lecturer!

### When did you start bird watching?

According to my mother, when I was 6 months old! Apparently she regularly found me in my pram staring at the birds in the sky above me!

### Key influences?

There have been many. First off there was the countryside I was brought up in and around Mendlesham in mid Suffolk. Unlike children today, I spent much of my time roaming the countryside exploring and watching wildlife and there's no question that the bird nesting I did then<sup>1</sup> and my collecting of feathers and memorising of bird songs provided me with the bedrock for my present birding knowledge and skills.

Perhaps my chief formative influence was my local primary school (it's still there today) and in particular the headmaster who nurtured my interest in nature. My earliest patch records date back to that time.

Next came the development of a Long-eared Owl roost close to Mendlesham. I was able to



view the roost closely and duly submitted my records to the Suffolk Recorder of the day – the famed Bill Paine. I was starting to get onto the radar of Suffolk birding and this improved still further when I was invited to attend a weekend ringing with David Pearson and Grenville Clark, followed by an introduction to seawatching. Now I was on the slippery slope to becoming a serious bird watcher!

As a teenager I puttered all over Suffolk on my Vespa 150 Sprint! That was how I came to venture out of mid Suffolk to discover the coast and Shingle Street, where its Little Terns became particularly special for me. That Vespa then led me to the Sandlings and finally the Suffolk marshlands – all areas I'm still captivated by today.

The result of this wide range of influences was to create the all-round naturalist you see today – while I'm principally known for my birding, basically I'm passionate about every aspect of the natural world.

**Then in the nineteen seventies you went up to London University and subsequently became a teacher?**

Yes, I took a degree in Zoology and Botany. It

<sup>1</sup> **Editor:** It was interesting as I wrote this interview up (6 November) to hear Chris Packham on Radio 4's Today programme say much the same thing about himself while he was bemoaning the lack of young people becoming engaged with Nature nowadays.

was on my course's field trips where I encountered the dry, acid Surrey heaths and became fascinated by their ecosystems. Further field trips to Dorset and the New Forest provided knowledge of excellent birding spots and added to my interest in the heathland habitat that persists today in my passion for the Sandlings.

Then after graduation I went into teaching and for over thirty years I taught biological sciences in schools in London, Surrey, Norfolk and for the past ten years in Suffolk.

### **You're a qualified ringer and trainer and sponsor I believe?**

Yes, while teaching in Surrey, I became a qualified 'A' Ringer and was a founder member of the Runnymede Ringing Group working Wraysbury gravel pits and the Surrey heaths. The sensation of holding a bird in your hand is a wonderful privilege and immensely valuable in facilitating bird ID skills like ageing and sexing. These days I ring at the Haven near Thorpeness and on the Sandlings.

### **Most exciting birding moment?**

That's still fairly recent – last year to be precise. It was October 2nd and at 11:30a.m. I had just packed up a ringing session at the Haven, North Warren. There'd been an earlier alert up the coast about a crane species moving south, so I thought I'd take some time out to have a look about. I'm glad I did as that's when I saw a Crane drifting towards me from Thorpeness – and within moments I knew it was a Sandhill – Suffolk's famed 2011 Sandhill Crane about to land close by on South Marsh.

I named it and nailed it there and then and so was the first person in Suffolk to broadcast its presence. But, being fully aware this was a Suffolk first I have to report I was reacting like a "headless chicken" and was so excited I couldn't text! My first thought was to tell Roy at BINS and I quickly broke the news to him over my mobile – unfortunately, as we all know (and to Roy's continued chagrin) he was stuck on Shetland. Next the news was transmitted to

the SOG group that was on Orfordness at the time (and they did manage to get on it whilst it was on the ground at Sudbourne) before the Crane upped sticks and set off for Boyton. The rest is Suffolk birding history.

### **You've found quite a number of rarities over the years – what's your secret?**

It's deceptively simple and a bit old fashioned – I call it "habitat interpretation" and anyone can learn how to do it!

*Editor:* What's that?

It's the skills we honed when young before Bird Alert pagers and mobiles ruled. You start with the habitat and the season when you're watching and you look at the day's weather – what's the wind direction, speed and conditions etc., is a low sweeping in, or is a high anchored over the North Sea? Experience tells you each weather situation offers different birding opportunities. Then the third factor, what habitat should you be birding in?

*Editor:* That seems to rely heavily on experience.

Yes it does, but that's the only way to find those rarities before others. I suppose I often don't go out bird watching, but 'bird hunting'. From regularly communing with Nature you come to develop a sixth sense, to know there's something up, or there's another bird lurking in a bush. Its not uncanny, I suspect it's just that your senses are heightened and you're more attuned to bird activity that less experienced birders just aren't aware of. As a result, if you put the time in, you do bag more rarities!

### **Talking of rarities, you're also Chairman of SORC, what would you like to say about that?**

First that, while I'm relatively new to the SORC team, I've been very active in this field for some time and in fact I was Chairman of the Surrey Bird Club, then served for ten years on the Surrey records committee in the 1990s. Also, I was a founder member of the Berkshire Bird Atlas Group in 1987. As to other points,

well, in the last issue of the Harrier you've already covered most of what I would want to say about SORC. Though I would like to repeat that records are the foundation for future conservation activities – the more we have the better the future should be. If you don't log it we could indeed lose it.

### Any birding hates?

Not really, although I do hate myself when I can't identify something – not that it happens very often I have to say!

### Favourite bird?

To be honest it varies enormously. I like *Phylloscopus* warblers and all the raptors – especially the Peregrine – and my raptor ID skills were honed as a wildlife inspector. But I suppose I am especially fond of my first BBRC rarity, the Little Bunting I found at Walberswick in the seventies. And of course the Sandhill Crane is my all time favourite!!



### And what about your favourite birding spot?

That's easy – the Suffolk Sandlings and the marshes – the sounds, the smells, the total experience, I never tire of it. Having said that, I also have a soft spot for the Caledonian Forest.



### Do you have any birding tips?

Well I'd like to go back to basics here and concentrate on those who are just starting out and trying to get to grips with birds:

- First up, when you're a novice, you can't beat going out with an expert – there's no way you can get all the knowledge you need from books and the internet. That said, you do still need a good bird book for ID. There are quite a few around, but personally I prefer the Collins.
- Second, try to learn as many of the common bird songs and calls as you can. It saves a great deal of time trying to identify common birds and also helps you focus quickly on the more unusual species that may be around.
- Third is jizz<sup>2</sup>. It's an added dimension that can help you firmly identify types of birds at a distance, or when seen fleetingly. And there's only one way to become proficient in it – in the field, preferably again with an expert.
- Fourth, never leave the house without your binoculars, if I go out without mine I feel naked!

<sup>2</sup> The concept of Jizz, which stands for 'General impression' of a bird, can be a way of confirming a family or genus of birds – occasionally specific species. Wikipedia tells us that 'the origin of the word is a mystery'. There is a theory that it comes from the World War II acronym GISS for 'General Impression of Size and Shape (of an aircraft)', but the birding term was first recorded earlier than that in 1920. More likely, jizz is a corruption of gestalt, the German word that roughly means form or shape'.

Thanks Steve, it was good to have this chat. You've clearly been a very active birder for a considerable period of time.

Yes, sometimes I'm surprised (as were some of my teaching colleagues) just how much teaching I also managed to fit into my career!

By the way, I still hold the record for the team seeing the most birds in a day in Oxfordshire, not to mention with the 'dream team' too, as we hold the record for the highest number of species recorded in a day in Suffolk!

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Roy Marsh

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## Suffolk BINS – 'A year in brief – 2012'

Our Editor, Phil Brown, asked me this time around to incorporate my quarter four review for BINS with a recap of 2012. Now, as many of you know, to call it a year in brief doesn't really suit my writing style, however, I will endeavour to see if I can keep it down to at least two volumes, tee hee!



Fieldfare, by Eddie Marsh

**January** – The 1st saw the out of season Hoopoe in Lowestoft, provide the New Year's day bird race surprise, but for me, mid winter is a fantastic time to enjoy visitors like Waxwings or like this cracking Fieldfare.

**February** – What a month with a Greenland White-fronted Goose briefly at Gedgrave Marsh, while the 10th produced my first nomination for Bird of the Year (BOTY), a Red-breasted Goose discovered by Will Brame with Brent's at Felixstowe Ferry.



Red-breasted Goose, by Will Brame

A second Greenland White-fronted Goose was found by Dave Fairhurst at North Warren on the 20th, and this is our second nomination for BOTY pleasing so many Suffolk birders; the images show you just how tricky it was to find!



Greenland White-fronted Goose



North Warren by Dave Fairhurst



Glossy Ibis, Eastbridge by Jon Evans

**March** – As we moved to mid/late March, temperatures were soaring and February’s Glossy Ibis was now performing well at Eastbridge, and what a stunner. This once extreme rarity to the county now barely raises a twitch, I even had three Glossies over my house this year, but to me, still a fantastic bird and one I would happily travel to see.

**April** – Barring a Penduline Tit heard at Island Mere on the 6th, then on 28th and 29th two White Storks were on marshes at Dagmate Lane, Nr Acle, plus the possible Little Bunting at Landguard Bird Observatory (LBO) (later confirmed by photograph). April was a very quiet month, but one where you could relax and enjoy our own county birds, like the Bittern, as per this stunning photograph right.



Bittern, Minsmere April 2012 by Jon Evans



**Above:** Long-billed Dowitcher, Great Livermere by Jeff Higgott

**Right:** Black-winged Stilt, Minsmere by Eddie Marsh



**May** – Now were talking you say! Bird of the spring for many, and my third contender for BOTY, was the summer plumage Long-billed Dowitcher found by John Walshe, fifth only for the county, at Great Livermere evening of 4th, and until the 5th only.

Two Black-winged Stilts were heard over Minsmere on the 7th before showing distantly on the levels for that day, again found by Dave Fairhurst, this is my fourth nomination for BOTY to conclude a cracking month.

The 26th May LBO saw a Greenish Warbler trapped and ringed, and on the 29th LBO trapped its third Marsh Warbler in four days.

**June** – With the wettest June in history, and a particularly quiet month saw the cracking Wood Warbler continue to please all-comers on Sutton Heath.



Wood Warbler, Sutton Heath by Jon Evans



White-winged Black Tern, Alton Water by Bill Baston

**July** – ‘A Tern up for the books’. The 28th saw a short-staying White-winged Black Tern drop in at Minsmere, just ahead of the individual at Alton Water on the 29th, with a further bird being present all day on Orfordness also on the 29th. The individual at Alton gave stunning views for all, and what a treat to see at such close quarters. This had to capture the title of ‘Star Bird’ this month.



Spanish Sparrow, Landguard Common by John Richardson

**August** – Produced my fifth nomination for BOTY, with a first for the county on the 24th briefly photographed, the male Spanish Sparrow on the Common at Landguard then decided to do a bunk, and was not relocated for a further week, when it pleased many from the 1st September onwards for locals, and being a national MEGA, this beauty attracted an audience from far and wide!

**September** – This recovered Manxie from Felixstowe Dock Complex on 17th proved the precursor to a good passage of sea birds occurring on 23rd including several Cory's, Sabine's Gulls and good counts of Leach's Petrels being noted offshore.



Manx Shearwater, Landguard by Alan King, AKA 'Rab'



Olive-backed Pipit, Corton by Ian Clarke, AKA 'Sparky'

**October** –The highlight of the month has to be my sixth nomination for the BOTY, the confiding Olive-backed Pipit found by James Brown along Corton church hedgerow on 23rd, with a probable of the same species reported from East Lane on 17th in what was a comparatively quiet month, despite a Red-breasted Flycatcher, an excellent inland discovery at Alton Water briefly on 28th, one at Southwold Constitution Hill on the 11th and Penduline Tit at Minsmere heard only by west hide on 27th with a Richard's Pipit noted briefly at Dingle on 31st bringing the quiet month to a close.



Waxwings, by John Richardson

**December** – The Star of the month at the time of writing this had to be the cracking Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll found initially on 8th, but only seen by the finder, but luckily was still present till 9th at least when showed well on the Beach at Slaughden, just South of Aldeburgh town, and has to be my seventh contender for BOTY.

Also inland was a Grey Phalarope at Great Livermere discovered on the 3rd and remained till the 4th was a cracker, otherwise, the Waxwings stole the show, with a good influx noted early December with flocks close to 200 being noted around Ipswich and, despite the regularity we get the chance to see these little stunners, they never fail to impress.

This brings my year at a glance to its conclusion, and alongside being able to showcase some of the amazing photography demonstrated throughout the year, I just want to pass on my continued thanks to all our BINS members, and fellow Suffolk birders who continue to support us, and enable us to deliver a fantastic service, and maintain an excellent website for everyone to enjoy at: [www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding](http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding)

Finally I would like to leave you with this year’s Suffolk BINS BOTY nominations for 2012, with the results to be announced in January on our website and will be included in our now annual review slideshow at the SOG AGM on the 28th February 2013, where we will present the winner with the coveted trophy, so hope to see you there.

**STOP PRESS**

**BINS announces its *fourth* county first this year – on 13 December an immature drake Surf Scoter offshore at Minsmere.**

**November** –A Richard’s Pipit found at Covehithe on the 8th-11th proved to be the rare bird of the month, again demonstrating what a quiet autumn Suffolk has had this year. Outside of this, other than a few oddities, couple Great Northern Divers, Lapland Buntings, the odd Shorelark, Barred Warbler at Minsmere on the 2nd and a Red-crested Pochard at Alton Water, it was down to the Waxwings to again steal the show throughout the month.



Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll – Aldeburgh, by Collin Barley

- 2012 BOTY Nominations:**
1. Red-breasted Goose – Kirton – Will Brame
  2. Greenland White-fronted Goose – North Warren – Dave Fairhurst
  3. Long-billed Dowitcher – Excellent inland find, only the third record in 30 years – John Walshe
  4. Black-winged Stilt – A cracking county rare picked up on call – Dave Fairhurst
  5. Spanish Sparrow – County 1st and National ‘Mega’ – John Richardson
  6. Olive-backed Pipit – National Rare and showed well – James Brown
  7. Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll – Aldeburgh, first for Suffolk, and a real cracker – Colin Barley

## Last word on a long-running Yarn

Not far from Yarn Hill is the settlement of Iken. In the Seventh Century a church was built there by St. Botolph. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records for AD 654: "Botulf ongan thoet mynster timbrian oet Yceanho" – Botulph began to build the minster at Iken-ho. ("ho" in Old English was a promontory – in this case into the Alde.) There is a brief life of St. Botolph in the Schleswig Breviary, composed in Germany in the 16th. Century (Botolph came to England as part of the Anglo-Saxon settlement), which reads as follows: "Manens autem in eodem

loco, gallinas nutrire coepit: quas aquila de vicina silva veniens rapere solebat" – roughly: "Staying moreover in that place, he began to raise chickens: which an eagle coming from the nearby woods used to snatch away". This would definitely have been White-tailed Sea Eagle, rather than Golden.

So perhaps the good St. Botolph would have joined the campaign against its re-introduction to the Suffolk coast?



## Field Trip Report

Val Lockwood

### Orfordness (National Trust) 30th September 2012

Leader: Steve Piotrowski and John Grant

**T**wo Black-tailed Godwits and a Grey Heron were the first birds of the day seen from the vicinity of the landing stage on Orfordness. The leaders gave a brief chat to members on their first visit to Orfordness and provided an outline of plans for the day.

As usual we made our way to the pools picking up two Pied Wagtails, two Kestrels and a distant Buzzard en-route. We were doing quite well for raptors as a Marsh Harrier was also

observed. A Goldcrest and a flock of Goldfinches flew over and the first of many Meadow Pipits was flushed. At the first pool we saw twenty Wigeon, several Brent Geese, a single Cormorant and Canada Goose plus a Redshank. In addition a Stonechat was viewed sitting on a post and Swallows, Sand Martins and a Redpoll flew overhead. The joyful call of the Skylark was heard and, after some deliberation, it was concluded that a fairly distant large raptor sitting on the far bank was a female Marsh Harrier.

Moving towards the second pool a Chinese water deer was seen and admired. We added Pintail, four Snipe, a Mallard, Shelducks, a Sandwich Tern and Lesser Black-backed Gull to our list at the pool and Jackdaw and Wheatears on our way to the ringing hut. Birds ringed that morning were Chiffchaff, Robin, Goldfinch and Reed Bunting. It was then on to the moth traps. Moths that had been caught were two Angle Shades, two Hebrew Character, one Black

Rustic, five Deep Brown Dart, 27 Lunar Underwings, one Large and one Lesser Yellow Underwings, two Flounced Rustics, two Beaded Chestnuts, two Square-spot Rustic and a L-album Wainscot (a species which has recently colonised Suffolk).

We made our way from the ringing area towards the lighthouse spotting a Red Admiral on bramble, the only butterfly seen that day, and added a hare to the list of mammals recorded. We were reunited with our rucksacks and lunched at the lighthouse. Benches were re-positioned to gain the best vantage points for seawatching and we were hardly into the first bite of our lunches when "Hobby" was called. The Hobby flew in from the sea close to where we were sitting. We all rushed to gain a better view and were wondering if the Hobby had managed to fly away unobserved, when it was spotted sheltering on the beach close to a

concrete block. Nobody ventured too close, so that the bird was not disturbed, as it appeared to be exhausted. Seawatching revealed a Manx Shearwater, two Turnstones, four Knot, twenty-five Brent Geese, two Grey Plovers, fifteen Gannets, three Sandwich Terns, two Guillemots and three Common Scoter, also three harbour porpoises which were seen well by all of the group, along with a seal.

After lunch and seawatching we made our way to the BBC building, adding Curlew, 50 Golden Plovers, two Little Egrets and an Avocet to our day list. Before returning to the boat we were rewarded with great views of a Whinchat. Total species of birds for the day was 52.

Many thanks to Steve and John for a great time, we were never going to match the eventful 2011 meeting but, as always, we had a most enjoyable day!

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Philip Murphy

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## Looking back

### – October to December 1962 and 1987

**S**electd highlights from the 1962 and 1987 Suffolk Birds reports for the period October to December.

#### 50 years ago

An outstanding candidate for the accolade of "Suffolk's bird of the 20th century" occurred during this period in the form of a Houbara (now Macqueen's) Bustard at Hinton between Blythburgh and Westleton from 21st November to 29th December.

#### Houbara Bustard

It was discovered by a local farmer, identified by

members of the Dingle Bird Club and observed during its 38-day stay by "*large numbers of ornithologists from all over the country*". It appeared to be generally unconcerned by all of this attention, spending much of its time feeding or resting in a mustard field. Occasionally it would visit adjoining stubble and barley fields – if it decided to walk between fields it would frequently make use of the road, in the process passing within a few metres of cars full of amazed birdwatchers<sup>3</sup>. When mobbed by a crow it erected its head and neck feathers in the manner of a Bittern and repeatedly snapped upwards with its bill. It was last seen, just before the onset of blizzard conditions, on 29th December. This is the fifth British record and the first since one in Aberdeenshire in October 1898; perhaps not surprisingly, there have been no further British records since this bird.

Another addition to the Suffolk list involved a female Rustic Bunting trapped and ringed at

<sup>3</sup> Given the earlier Barn Owl article's use of Eric Hosking's photography, it is interesting to note that there was also an arresting image of this particular Bustard on the roadside taken by the late Eric Hosking to be found on his photographic website.

Minsmere on 24th October. Scarce birds included a Leach's Petrel found exhausted at Thorpeness on Christmas Day, a Corncrake killed by a car on Westleton Heath, 14th October and Suffolk's latest-ever Bluethroat on Orfordness, 8th November. Additional late migrants were a Black Tern on Havergate Island, 6th November and what was assumed to be the same Whimbrel on 4th November and 1st December, also on Havergate. Wildfowl totals on Havergate Island included 10,000 Wigeon and 200 Pintail in December. Velvet Scoters featured well with 33 south off Felixstowe, 5th November and four on the Shingle Street shore pools, 23rd December.

Assorted sightings of interest during this period included the year's final Avocet on Havergate Island, 10th November, the year's largest group of Collared Doves (28) at Pakefield in late October and early November, up to seven Hooded Crows at both Havergate and Benacre in December, twelve Waxwings in from over the sea at Aldeburgh, 2nd November, ten Ring Ouzels at both Walberswick and Minsmere in the second week of October, at least five Great Grey Shrikes (three on the coast, two inland) and nine Lapland Buntings at North Warren, 2nd December.

In the 21st century we have become accustomed to widespread sightings of Firecrests on the Suffolk coast in autumn but back in 1962 coastal autumn sightings involved only two in October and one in November.

### 25 years ago

This period will be long-remembered for the rare and scarce birds which occurred in Suffolk, including two additions to the county list. However, what was undoubtedly the most remarkable sighting was of a species first recorded in Suffolk in the late 18th century. Whilst participating in a BoEE (now WeBS) count on the Alde Estuary at Sudbourne on 20th December, former Suffolk birder Reg Clarke had the amazing good fortune to witness three Little Bustards as they flew in

across the river from the direction of Orfordness and alight in a stubble field no more than 100 metres in front of him.

### Little Bustards

Having watched the bustards for five minutes, Reg went off to alert other observers (remember, no mobile phones in those days) but the birds were not seen again. It is somewhat ironic that Reg had not managed to see any of the Great Bustards present in Suffolk during January to March 1987! The previous Suffolk record of Little Bustard had been in June 1960 over on Orfordness. Additionally, for a county to record two species of bustard in a single year must be a modern-day British record?

The two additions to the Suffolk list both occurred at Landguard – Dusky Warbler, 27th October to 1st November and an immature male Desert Wheatear, 20th to 24th October which was trapped and ringed on 23rd. Remarkably, a Desert Wheatear at Prawle Point, Devon, 26th to 30th October was seen to be ringed; exceptionally sharp eyes managed to read the ring number which showed that it was the Landguard bird.

Suffolk's first record of Red-rumped Swallow had occurred as recently as 21st April 1987. As has happened with other species, this was followed by a surge of records, this time in late autumn with two at Landguard, 28th October and singles in November at Lowestoft, 12th, Benacre, 14th and Southwold, 21st to 25th.

### When Dartford Warblers were rare

In the second decade of the 21st century Dartford Warblers are almost taken for granted on Suffolk's coastal heathlands. That was not the case in 1987 when yet another highlight was the county's first Dartford Warbler since about 1939. The individual concerned was a young male present on the river wall and golf links at Felixstowe Ferry, 29th and 30th November – the gathering of birders on the latter date was one of the biggest of the year.

Additional rare and/or scarce species and noteworthy totals in this period included up to 35 Purple Sandpipers at Lowestoft, three Grey Phalaropes, three Sabine's Gulls (all off Landguard during 16th to 20th October i.e. in the immediate aftermath of the infamous hurricane), a peak of 35 Little Auks off Covehithe, 21st November, Dipper of unspecified subspecies, Minsmere, 5th November, four Pallas's Warblers (of which three were at Landguard), three Yellow-browed Warblers, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Benacre, 3rd October and Little Bunting, Landguard, 19th October.

The coastal region dominated the Suffolk birding scene in this period but there were some very noteworthy reports from inland sites. These included a Black-throated Diver at Lackford, 26th November to 26th December (the first record of this species in west Suffolk since 1973), single Red-necked Grebes at Cavenham GP, 18th October and 6th November and two on Redgrave Lake, 30th October, and moribund Little Auks picked up at Long Melford, Bury St. Edmunds, Ixworth and Thetford Forest during the period 21st to 26th November.

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Rob Fuller, Director of Science, BTO

## Ash dieback – what might be the consequences for birds?

**M**any people are asking this question. It is just a few weeks since *Chalara fraxinea* was confirmed in ash trees in eastern English woodland and, as yet, it is far from clear what the implications are for our woods and hedges and the wildlife living within them.

Much will depend on the speed with which the pathogen spreads, the geographical extent of the disease and whether there is substantial genetic resistance amongst our native ash trees. If the worst scenario unfolds, and we see similar levels of tree mortality to those experienced in the worst affected parts of mainland Europe (e.g. Denmark), then the consequences for woodland ecology will be massive.

Initial thoughts are that relevant processes for birds might include the following:

- An increase in fallen and standing dead wood, which could provide a temporary

glut of resources for saproxylic invertebrates that should benefit woodpeckers, possibly including the increasingly scarce Lesser Spotted.

- Canopy cover will decrease letting more light through to the woodland floor. This may result in greater regeneration of bramble and saplings that could be beneficial to a range of species that nest and feed in the field layer and low shrub layer. However, much will depend on whether this re-growth is heavily browsed by deer or not. We know, from work in Bradfield Woods, that intense deer browsing can severely reduce the quality of regenerating coppice as a habitat for some warblers, Nightingales and Dunnocks. There is a possibility that, if the dieback is really severe and we see massive regeneration, this could actually give a boost to deer numbers, thus creating even greater pressures on woodland habitats. Alternatively, if the open canopy results in a proliferation of grasses and sedges, this may inhibit regeneration of the complex vegetation structures that many birds depend on.
- Large changes in the tree species composition of woodland are likely to occur. For example, will we see an increase in sycamore in many woods? This would not necessarily benefit birds, as densities of breeding birds tend to be low in pure

sycamore stands, though the trees do provide abundant aphids and consequently are attractive to canopy feeding insectivorous birds. There would presumably be large changes in the characteristics of the leaf litter (both in chemistry and physical properties) within many woods that could conceivably affect invertebrate availability for ground feeding birds.

- Ash trees themselves probably provide

rather few specific resources for birds. The biomass of insects provided by ash are not as high as oak for instance. Old ash trees, especially pollards, may contain large cavities, used for example by Stock Doves and owls. The seeds of ash are a major food of Bullfinches. The main effects of loss of ash, however, are likely to be through accumulation of dead wood and the structural changes that occur in woodland vegetation.

Phil Brown

## Suffolk's trees – going, going...?

The Forestry Commission's 'Plant Health Conference' at Ickworth on Monday 10 December was something of an eye-opener. Not due to its initial concentration on *Chalara fraxinea* (Ash dieback), but because of the range of pests and diseases reportedly battering Britain's trees today.

### An accelerating problem

Over the course of the twentieth century Britain's trees only succumbed to five major pathogen outbreaks – with Dutch Elm featuring twice. Yet in the first decade of the new century this figure has already doubled. This frightening acceleration is attributed to a combination of lax biosecurity measures applied to the global plant trade (Britain apparently imports 70% of all of its plants) and climate change (most notably warmer winters). The list of threats is now a long one (see table):

Tree species	Threat
Ash	Ash dieback fungus – <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Beech	<i>Phytophthora kernoviae</i>
Conifers	<i>Dothistroma</i> needle blight Pinewood Nematode Pitch canker Pine Lappet Moth Asian Longhorn Beetle
Cypresses	<i>Phytophthora lateralis</i>
Elm	Dutch Elm
Horse Chestnut	Horse Chestnut Bleeding & Canker Leaf Miner Moth
Larch	<i>Phytophthora ramorum</i> – pathogen
Oak	Acute Oak Decline Oak Processionary Moth (Sudden Oak Death – potential threat) (Wilt disease – threat from US/China)
Plane trees	<i>Cerato cystis platoni</i>
Spruce	Great Spruce Bark Beetle
Sweet Chestnut	Sweet Chestnut Blight
Willow	Asian Longhorn Beetle
Yew	<i>Phytophthora lateralis</i>

The combined impact of all of these diseases on the British landscape's character are expected to be profound and could well be long-lasting. In Suffolk Ash dieback is established, as is horse chestnut, oak, beech and conifer problems. And others on the list above could well arrive. However, as Rob Fuller's article indicates, we are not yet in a position to establish what the detailed impact of all of these changes on Suffolk's birds are likely to be. It is likely to be indirect and mixed – i.e. there will be some winners and some losers. For instance, with greater levels of dead timber around, the grubs that sustain woodpeckers could increase. Whereas Jays, that rely on acorns, could encounter increased competition for their vital winter food source.

#### Woodland biosecurity measures

It also appears, because of the sheer range of pests and diseases threatening our woodlands that we may all need to become biosecurity

conscious and take precautionary measures when we're out and about in them. There's a full explanation of this matter, the pests and diseases already here, or waiting in the wings, and the measures that ought to be taken at [www.forestry.gov.uk/biosecurity](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/biosecurity).

This biosecurity is a set of precautions aimed at preventing the introduction or spread of harmful organisms. These measures are simple. Get into the habit of cleaning footwear and outdoor gear regularly to ensure they are free from soil and organic debris. Don't let mud accumulate on tyres, wheels or under wheel arches either. This way we won't be inadvertently spreading pests, pathogens or invasive species that harm trees.

So we have been warned, Suffolk's landscape will change, possibly dramatically, many of our trees will be lost but, as yet, scientists cannot tell us by how much, nor when or where.

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Steve Fryett

## Observation – Dartford Warbler

Oct 27th Eastern car park of  
Westleton Heath

The previous two days had seen a fundamental change in the weather, with a cold prevailing northerly bringing squally rain and sleet to the final days of autumn, however today some brighter periods were evident as we arrived at Westleton Heath car park to walk off lunch. Whilst putting my boots on I could hear a faint melodious warble. Investigation behind a barrier of gorse revealed a Dartford Warbler perched in a small leafless Elder bush singing while consuming the last few remaining elderberries. We were close enough to watch this delightful warbler gently pick the last three



berries with its fine bill ensuring none was dropped. Having completed his task the tail was cocked and song was delivered again before disappearing into the gorse.



Phil Brown & Yvette Marsh

## SOG introduces Knettishall to L&G

On October 19th twelve employees of Legal & General (L&G) visited Knettishall Heath to help Site Manager Samantha Gay with the clearance of scrub on the heath. SOG had also been invited to attend in order to provide the L&G staff with a bit of light relief from their backbreaking task. The role of the two SOG Council members was to escort groups of L&G employees on a three to four-mile bird walk around this new Suffolk Wildlife Trust site.

From the outset the weather was indifferent (later it deteriorated to a steady downpour) so, as a bird recce had already established that there was little bird life around (although a

possible Tree Pipit had been spotted), the SOG team decided it would be best to convert the bird walk into more of an introduction to the Breckland habitats.

Accordingly, at the outset of each walk, the L&G employees were given a short lecture (see

photo) about the site's three habitats – heathland, grassland and riverine meadows. In fact Knettishall is an unusual Brecks site as it displays all three habitats alongside each other. Then on the route march around the site each type of habitat was visited and its key features revealed.

### Brecks Fact File

A unique and distinctive habitat of over a 1000 square kilometres, stretching from just north of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk to Castle Acre in Norfolk, five-miles north of Swaffham.

Breck is a word derived from a medieval term meaning a tract of heathland broken up for periodic cultivation. Because the soil was poor, when farmed it was quickly exhausted and allowed to revert to scrub, giving the landscape a 'broken', fractured appearance.

For instance the SOG team explained that the heathland, which the L&G team were helping to clear, was not a natural habitat, but a man-made one that their work was helping to maintain. The staff members then encountered a small herd of Exmoor ponies whose grazing was also helping to maintain the heath. In the morning a number of Meadow Pipits were

spotted, plus a definite Tree Pipit and numerous Jays foraging for acorns.

Passing through a fringe of woodland (where the afternoon group were introduced to the medieval business of rabbit warrening) a

substantial area of Brecks grassland was encountered along with a small herd of grazing Dartmoor ponies.

On passing through another strip of woodland surrounding the Peddars Way (which marks the western boundary of the Heath and follows the line of a Roman road) the two groups were then guided towards the river and the third habitat.

There, on the edge of the Little Ouse, the morning team were shown a slide probably created by the Otters (though no fresh pugmarks were evident), which are increasingly frequenting the area. However, as the rain was so heavy for the afternoon group the SOG team decided it best

#### Brecks Fact File

The Brecks are “a vitally important biodiversity hot-spot”. The most recent audit of the Brecks (2010) counted 12,845 different species. Among these are a 1/4 of the UK’s rare species; 28% of all of the UK’s BAP species; it is also a stronghold for 600 species, of which 60 are found nowhere else. Not surprisingly 43% of the area is environmentally protected – as SSSI, SPA or Ramsar sites.

#### Brecks Fact File

The Brecks’ light land was easily ploughed and thus settled early on, perhaps between 4000-3000 years ago. Traditionally the area has been grazed, principally by sheep, although from medieval times until the late 1800s rabbit warrening was important too.

In the centre of the Brecks was England’s first major industry – flint mining. Grimes Grave in Thetford Forest was the undisputed centre in Neolithic times. And the nearby Icknield Way, one of England’s oldest trackways, was used to transport the flints south from around 5000 years ago to the Dorset coast and thence onto mainland Europe.

to shorten the walk, so this second group missed out on the Otter opportunity.

Finally the entire group met up at the ranger’s site office. The L&G staff agreed they’d learnt a great deal about the area and, despite the

weather, enjoyed the walks. Hopefully SOG will have an opportunity to repeat this exercise with other L&G teams and other organisations.

Yvette Marsh, Corporate Social Responsibility Coordinator for Legal & General (who have kindly supported SOG with recent donations) commented – “I would like to pass on huge thanks to SOG for their help. My team had a fascinating insight into the nature of Knettishall Heath and the surrounding Breckland, and my team can see how

their work today could help build a future for this site. We would be delighted if SOG could join us again at future events.”



Roy Marsh

## Sponsored Bird Race Update – 15th September 2012

In the last Harrier, I left you with an outline to our successes, and said I would give you a clearer update for the Christmas edition of how the Group fared in terms of funds raised, as well as key statistical data which could be extracted from our day's efforts.

Below is again the final table, but also including total sponsor monies raised. I wanted to share the success with the Group:

Team Name	Team Members	Type – Full, Green (Non Motorised)	Score	Best Birds	Worst Misses
Team RSPB Raspberry Fools	Robin Harvey, Jon Gibbs, Paul Green & Ian Salkeld, Rachel Coombes	Green – On foot – Walked 14 miles+	114	Sooty Shearwater, Stone Curlew, Manx Shearwater	Song Thrush, Skylark, Kittiwake
Pied Twitters	Roy Marsh, Craig Fulcher, Scott Mayson, Craig Holden	Full County – 157 miles mainly coastal	110	Merlin, Pied Fly, Stone Curlew, Sedge Warbler	Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Yellowhammer, Little Owl!
Deben Dragons	Phil Whittaker, Steve Abbott & Nick Mason	Full County – Restricted themselves to Deben	110	Nightjar, Tree Pipit, Long Eared Owl, Pied Flycatcher	Great Crested Grebe
Sooty & The Sweeps	Gi Grieco, Eddie Bathgate & Chris Keeling	Full County – Miles tbc	109	Bonxie, Arctic Skua, Whimbrel, Stone Curlew	Song Thrush, Skylark, Yellowhammer, Mistle Thrush
Waveney Bird Club Thursday Branch	Steve Piotrowski, Eric Patrick, Andrew Green & John Grant	Green – On foot – Walked 10 miles	108	Cuckoo, Stone Curlew, Sedge Warbler	Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Yellowhammer, Linnet
Lounge Lizards	Andrew Easton, Rob Wilton, Paul & Jane Ferguson, Josh Cyprus	Lizard Land – Lowestoft and surrounding areas	96	Grey Partridge, Razorbill, Yellowhammer, Jay	Canada Goose, Pheasant, Mistle Thrush
Hadleigh Harriers	Adam Gretton & Anna Gretton	Full County – River Orwell and Minsmere	87	Pectoral Sand, Peregrine, Sandwich Tern	Skylark, Starling, House Sparrow
Wild West Boyz	Phil Brown, John Owen, Georgina Owen & David Collins	Green on bikes – 25 miles & 5 miles on foot	76	Stone Curlew, Crossbill, Goldeneye	Skylark, Tawny Owl, Little Owl
Birder Bill	Bill Stone	Birds rung and around Bawdsey Manor only	59	Tree Pipit, Siskin, Swift	Tawny Owl, Linnet, Red-legged Partridge
				<b>Total Funds Raised</b>	<b>£3,068.46</b>
				<b>Donations</b>	<b>£142.00</b>
				<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£3,210.46</b>

Overall, this was a tremendous achievement from everyone involved, and we are also hoping to reclaim around £500 of additional Gift Aid. So the total could be of the order of £3,700 – a mind-blowing figure. However, if you were unable to get to a sponsor form, and would still like to donate, then this is still possible, so please, please help support our ongoing efforts.

Statistically, a number of classic Suffolk

farmland species, including Grey Partridge, Yellowhammer, Skylark and Linnet, with other usually difficult and declining species such as the Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch and Jay proved hard to connect with on the day. Further, alarmingly many species drew a blank altogether including, Corn Bunting, Fulmar, Sanderling, Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Warbler, Firecrest and Tree Sparrow. Many of which are already on the red/amber list, but all of which would be on the 'possible to be seen'

list, and, not that long ago, some would have been on the 'almost certain to be seen' list. Of note, there was a total of 147 species recorded on the race day, compared with the 162 species noted on the day the January 1st record was set with 130 species, just going to show it isn't any easier to connect with species in the Autumn than the Winter!

On a successful and positive note, 77% of teams were able to connect with the now iconic Barn ('Box') Owl, which is testament to the outstanding work that has already been done to bring this spectacular species back from the brink – interestingly this was the same percentage as House Sparrow, while the real winner in recent years, the Common Buzzard was seen by all teams, with a particular movement noted that day, with in excess of 20 individuals, through Minsmere alone!

With 9 teams taking part, it was interesting to see that on the day 88% of the teams connected with the now numerous Great Spotted Woodpecker whilst the Lesser Spotted was not noted at all throughout the County and just some 33% connecting with the now scarce Nuthatch. Grey Wagtail, Grey Partridge, Pochard, Common Swift and the Cuckoo only scored 11% despite being species you could well have expected to bump in to.

I would again, on behalf of SOG Council, like to take this opportunity to specifically thank all

members of the teams taking part; without them, there would have not been an event at all. Also, I want to say a big thank you to everyone who sponsored the many teams and their individuals taking part, but also, a special thank you has to go to Customer Service Direct, and the many people who sponsored me personally, allowing me to raise in excess of £300 from work alone – I was also supported strongly throughout the company in the lead up to the event. A further special thank you goes to Legal and General, who very generously put up £500 of match-funding sponsorship for me, enabling our team to raise in excess of £1500. With the theme in our team of 'if you don't ask etc', we were also able to secure a further £50 from Swarovski, £40 from Rare Bird Alert and even a pair of binoculars for us to auction at the AGM from Viking, so again, a big thank you to these as well.

I hope that everyone who took part really enjoyed the day and, although next year's event will not be sponsored, it would already seem there is sufficient interest in running this again in 2013 when, hopefully, we will be able to continue to gather further statistical information, as we aim to understand the declining and rising population patterns of some of our much loved species. However, as a Group, we would always welcome your donations to help support the valuable work we do.

Again, thank you one and all for your generous support, it really will help make a difference!

*Editor:* Over the next few pages are reports from some of the participants, opening with the day's winners:

Robin Harvey

## Raspberry Fools Report

**I'm not a big fan of bird races: The stupidly early starts and the hundreds of miles roaring round the countryside in a car don't do it for me. But a bird**

**race in September, with a bunch of like-minded folk and with the option of doing it on foot. Add to this the opportunity to raise some much needed cash for SOG. I was tempted!**

After several weeks of gathering promises of money around the office and visitor centre, the day dawned. A team of five, unoriginally named the Raspberry Fools (after our RSPB association) assembled at the Minsmere workcentre at 6.30am in surprising clement

weather. We had done very little planning and the only aim was to cover as much ground as possible in and around Minsmere. We had no great expectations other than the desire to reach a total of at least 100 species.

The first ten minutes failed to produce the hoped for Nuthatch on the volunteer's chalet feeder and this was to

become one of the "dips of the day". We did manage Marsh Tit, Bullfinch and a good number of expected common species to set the ball rolling though. Marsh Tit and

Treecreeper were the pick of the birds seen in South Belt as we headed towards the Scrape. An elusive Sedge Warbler near West Hide was a bonus and we added most of the common duck species to the list from west and south hides. The Konik field produced a good selection of waders including Greenshank and Spotted Redshank (but the Pectoral Sandpiper reported later on in the day eluded us). At least five Water Rail and twenty Yellow Wagtail here were also welcome.

As we neared the Sluice eagle-eyed Ian spotted a very distant Red Kite over Sizewell belts. As we celebrated the fact that no other team would stand a chance of picking it up it came closer and closer, eventually spending over half an hour quartering the dunes and South Levels. Inevitably, our nearest rivals, the Thursday Club also had fantastic views!

Seawatching off the Sluice and dunes produced Gannet, Guillemot, Red-throated Diver, Common Scoter, two Arctic Skua and more

surprisingly a couple of Hobbies. Two Kingfishers performed well along the Leiston Drain, a Grey Wagtail flew south and the Sluice bushes, although generally quiet, did hold a few Common Whitethroats. Two flyover Avocet proved to be the only ones of the day, but two Shelduck also flying over were only seen by two members of the team and were not counted in the day total.



Scans from Public and East Hides revealed Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Garganey and a single Northern Wheatear was in the dunes. We then headed north to Dunwich Heath where we quickly added Dartford Warbler and Stonechat and the first of at least 20 Common Buzzard seen during the day. It quickly became apparent in fact, that there were raptors on the move. More buzzards and hobbies were eclipsed by a fine Osprey heading south (one of at least three seen at Minsmere that day).

Our next big target was Stone Curlew, and Mount Pleasant did not disappoint providing great views of at least eight individuals. We also added Pied Wagtail and Lesser Whitethroat to the list here. After a short search of the northern edge of Westleton Heath we were delighted to locate a family party of six Woodlark. More Dartford Warblers and Stonechats, plus a flyover Siskin were also noteworthy.

The next stage of the trip involved a long walk from the Minsmere north arable to Ash Wood, Sizewell during which we only succeeded in adding Mistle Thrush and House Sparrow (no



Red-legged Partridge!). Ash Wood gave us the chance to rest aching legs and quench our thirst with a refreshing cup of tea. We also added Yellowhammer to the day's total. Sizewell belts were rather quiet and the industrial landscape

of the nuclear power station refused to give up any Black Redstarts. The outfalls were more rewarding though with Little Gulls and a 2nd winter Mediterranean Gull the pick of the bunch. We were also treated to views of our rivals having afternoon tea (or was it whisky?) in a cliff top garden. Had they admitted defeat?

Two more bouts of seawatching off Sizewell and then the Sluice again proved very worthwhile with single Manx and Sooty Shearwaters and two Puffin the highlights. We were not hallucinating, honest! By this point we were feeling very tired, but there was still daylight left and we were sure we could just about make it to Island Mere.

Two Starlings over the reedbed as we headed inland were amazingly the only ones of the day

and a Grey Plover on South Scrape was also new. As the light started to fade we did indeed make it to the mere. The reward was a patrolling Barn Owl, and the last species to be added to the list, a calling Tawny Owl.

Our final total was a very creditable 114 species. Not bad we thought, for a green team. We could have gone even higher had we caught up with some other expected common species such as Song Thrush and Skylark. As texts were exchanged with others though, it quickly became apparent that this was in fact a winning score. We had beaten all of the motorised teams as well as the green ones!

A few days later we finally got round to calculating how far we had walked: A grand total of nearly 14 miles. It's no wonder most of us could hardly move the following day. Of course it's not the winning that really matters. We also managed to raise almost £150 for SOG. Many thanks to all who sponsored us. We all agreed what a pleasant experience it had been and one we hope to repeat (although next time a bike might be a good idea!).

The winning team was Rachel Coombes, Jon Gibbs, Paul Green, Robin Harvey and Ian Salkeld.

Roy Marsh

## 'Pied Twitchers' Report

If you recall, I left you on a 'cliff hanger' (hardly you cry, particularly having posted the results) in the last Harrier, but want to continue now with a short extract from what was a cracking days birding.

As I said last time, it had seemed an age since deciding our Group's inaugural Autumn bird race, and having scooped some 1st division teams to take part in the form of RSPB from Minsmere, and The Waveney Bird Club, a



number of other teams made up of local birders, friends and fellow SOG members, the scene was set and so were we!

Following an early rise at 3am, our day officially kicked off at 4am, as we picked up 'Little' Craig at Bredfield. It was our intention to start in the north of the county, and work our way south, visiting a number of locations along the way. Some other teams opted for the 'Green' option, being totally on foot, as the RSPB and Waveney teams were, based around the Minsmere area, while others from the west of the county did an amazing 25 miles on their bikes and further 5 miles on foot. It was soon clear that this was going to be much tougher than our usual race on January 1st, as it had been impossible to stake any birds out. This in itself lent a further dimension and a necessity for some tactical decision-making. Our team of four were known as the 'Pied Twitchers' – Craig Holden, Scott Mayson, Roy Marsh & Craig Fulcher.

So, with a couple of hours planned in the dark, and two of our three key target species bagged (Barn Owl and Tawny Owl) we headed for our first daylight stop, where we set about an early morning seawatch off Covehithe Cliff. We were able to secure some usual suspects, as well as several nice close Gannets, Guillemot and our best bird of the day, a lovely male Merlin flying in off the sea. Having also now done the Broad, we made our way back to the car, and had made good progress having notched up over 60 species by eight am!

We strategically worked our way south, taking in Southwold, Westleton Heath, which proved very successful, with a Woodlark noted plus anticipated Dartford Warblers and Stonechats, before heading to Minsmere. Our first stop on the reserve proved well timed as we had three different Bitterns within ten minutes at Island Mere, plus an unexpected group of six soaring Buzzards, as well as a number of other new additions. With lunchtime fast approaching, a

well-earned pit stop was agreed in the teashop, where a selection of cakes and drinks were purchased for general consumption over a review of the day so far, and a leisurely plan of attack for the afternoon.

Knowing we were already behind the RSPB team, despite having visited several other sites, we set out and headed towards the beach, the dunes and the levels. We diverted up to the newly opened wader pool, before completing the circular route back to the car park having scoped the scrape as we went, and, despite picking up a brilliant tick of three Stone Curlews on the exit road off the reserve, we were still short on reaching 100 species, and finding the going tough (as also were our competitors) under the now hot sun.

We then headed further south and took in Boyton Marsh, amassed a few more 'easy' target species to straddle the 100-mark, and were buoyed by this late surge. We then headed off to Shingle Street, and were well-chuffed to find probably our only true migrant passerines of the day, a Wheatear on the beach, plus a cracking Pied Flycatcher around the allotments. With our final destination just round the corner at East Lane drawing a blank, and the light all but gone, we had to call it a day, but were at least pleased we had made a respectable 110 species, and a score we felt may put us in with a shout.

Back in the comfort of my reclined sofa, and surprisingly tired legs, having only walked around 8 miles, I set about texting round the results, although I did actually fall asleep mid text at one point, I was able to at least confirm the results, which I have included again in my other update, but was delighted to note we had secured a (joint) silver medal!

We as a team were really chuffed with our result, despite having missed some usually obvious species in Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Yellowhammer and Little Owl although we were so overwhelmed by the support we were

given, it really made up for it on the day, so thanks to everyone who supported us in raising over £1500 for the group, this was fantastic.

Finally, as reigning New Year's Day champs, our attentions are now fast homing-in on that,

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Gi Grieco

## Sooty and the Sweeps Report

**H**aving got a slightly different team from the Suffolk BINS New Year's Day race, it was a matter of deciding what area to cover and what route to take along with a new name – Sooty and the Sweeps being the one chosen.

Due to a lack of time for any pre-race reconnaissance, bar on the local patch, most research was done by referring to present bird blogs for news, looking at historical data both online and in the Suffolk Birds report to get an idea of what species might be about. Due to the time of year it was about seeing when potentially the last of the summer migrants might still be about and when the first of the autumn would be arriving. I built up a spreadsheet with likely species, chances of seeing them and most likely location for them. With a potential of nearly 200 species in that time-frame, Minsmere by far came out on top as the site with the most potential. Ironically this was borne out by a couple of teams including the Raspberry Fools, who saw the most species with 114 just birding around Minsmere! Maybe we should have followed our own research as we

with a determination to try and crack the 130 mark this year, but I am sure we will be back again next September to pit our wits in this event, so get those teams sorted and we'll see you there next year!

managed 109 species in 16 hours and did 141 miles in a car with a few miles walking too!

Leaving Woodbridge we tried in the local vicinity for owls without success, so our first birds of the day were when we pulled over by the River Blyth and heard a few waders, gulls and corvids. We continued north detouring to a couple of places before getting to Corton for our first seawatch and migration point. We got a good selection of species there including a nice flyover Hobby. Heading back down the coast we stopped at Lowestoft North Denes picking up a couple of warbler species and from Ness Point managed to get both Arctic and Great Skua. No luck with Peregrine or Shag at Lake Lothing although a Guillemot was good consolation.

We then headed to Dunwich and Minsmere where we saw our greatest percentage of birds for the day, with some good birds like Yellow Wagtail and Reed Warbler but again missed species like Song and Mistle Thrush. We also just missed some raptors like Red Kite and Osprey. Deciding to head back up to Southwold we did a lot of walking for few species, the



highlights being Curlew Sandpiper on Tinkers Marsh and on driving slowly through Southwold we heard our first House Sparrow of the day and the loud chorus of cheers from the car alarmed the nearby tourists! A stop off at the Blyth again before heading down to Melton, the one place I had reccied, but with the tide very low we managed only two of the possible species – just. Two of us saw a Kingfisher while the other was moving the car as a large tractor bore down towards it. Fortunately we relocated it along the river. Last stop was Boyton where we bumped into one of the other teams, the Deben Dragons, who were only doing the Deben peninsula. Having given them info

previously for species on the Deben, they kindly gave us some info on species we still needed in the area, managing to get Grey Plover, Avocet, and Oystercatcher at last, along with a lovely Barn Owl and a nice surprise in a Whimbrel.

A great day, that was definitely harder going than doing a race on January 1st, we were pleased with our final tally and the money we raised, so thanks to all who sponsored us. A couple of tips, pay more heed to the research and if you're going to be out all day and walk miles don't wear cut-off wellies or you'll get very sore feet – Chris!

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Andrew Easton

## Lounge Lizards – Report

**O**ur team decided we would conduct our SOG September bird race within the boundaries of 'Lizard Land'. With no one site with a good mixture of habitats close together, we would have to visit several well-separated sites to get a reasonable total.

We decided to start at dawn by heading down Kessingland Beach to the sluice before heading back via the sewage works and then work our way north to Breydon Water via a mixture of sites. Another advantage of this starting point was that we could check the sea from here and later at Ness Point.

A couple of Cetti's Warblers here saved a long walk out to other potential marshland sites later on but, disappointingly, there were none of the hoped for migrants in the scrub. This proved to be much the same elsewhere with no Redstarts, Whinchats or Willow Warblers anywhere to be found, and just a single Wheatear.

Next we headed towards Ellough airfield with generally unproductive stops enroute. As we

pulled up at the airfield a Buzzard drifted over the trees at the back of the field in front of us. Not having seen any Grey Partridges there for a while we weren't very hopeful but seven of them were soon spotted in single file climbing a large pile of brick rubble at the far side of the field, passing a couple of Red-legged Partridge as they did so. A couple of Yellowhammers were flying around calling as well and, as we got back in the car, a flock of 128 Golden Plover flew in and landed by the airfield.

Things were looking up, or so we thought, but North Cove nature reserve, our next stop, soon put paid to that. Marsh Tit gave itself up fairly easily, but atypically no Treecreepers, Coal Tits or Great Spotted Woodpecker would either show themselves or call.

Oulton Broad is always good for Egyptian Goose and Great Crested Grebe, except it seems when you are doing a bird race! Well Breydon is always a good back-up for these two species, except again, when you are doing a bird race! No grebes, and only two Egyptian Geese, but firmly on the Norfolk bank.

There was a small sprinkling of waders at Burgh Castle, but the Breydon South Flats would surely add several more. Nope, hardly a wader in sight, just Shelduck and Ring Plover added. Abysmal. 100+ was looking a very

distant dream, and so it would prove. A Peach-faced Lovebird being chased by Magpies here should surely count as a bonus of 10 though?

Mutiny was afoot with talk of calling it a day early due to lack of birds stopping play, but eventually we carried on and tried Oulton Broad again in the late afternoon where finally Egyptian Goose and Great Crested Grebe were

added, and a party of four Common Sandpipers were a bonus. Ness Point was chosen as the last port of call where a pair of southbound Oystercatchers became our last tick of the day, for a total of 96.

A very enjoyable day, though a little frustrating with the almost complete lack of migrants.

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Phil Brown

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## **Brecks breaker!** **A report from the Wild West Boyz**

**T**he Wild West Boyz (actually a three man and one woman team), based in the far west of Suffolk, had chosen an all-inland and green bird race circuit covering the Suffolk Brecks. So, from the outset, we all knew a triple figure total was highly unlikely.

Planning for the race had included recent intell from Lackford Lakes, reccies of West Stow and the western edge of the King's Forest, plus seeking permission from Elveden Estate to access their internal road system. The recce for West Stow was eventful as it turned up an Osprey – presumably migrating south, so sadly inevitably not to be seen on the big day.

### **The circular route**

For those of you interested in emulating the circuit, which tried to avoid using public roads as much as possible, it began at Lackford Lakes, moving anti-clockwise via the A1101 to Flempton, then briefly north to West Stow, before plunging further north through the King's Forest using Forestry Commission roads, until Berner's Heath was encountered. There the trail headed briefly west and then south on Elveden's Seven Trees Road to Icklingham and onto the Icknield Way to pass through Cavenham Heath NNR. The circuit then turned eastward as it proceeded from Tuddenham

through to Cavenham and thence north, to return to the A1101 and Lackford Lakes.

### **The day**

The team assembled pre-dawn at Lackford to spend the next three hours circling the Lakes, scouring their margins and invading the hides. This elicited 53 bird species. While the highlight was the early immature Goldeneye our intell had alerted us was present, we dipped on owls and most of the waders and some of the ducks known to be present.

At around 10:00 the bikes were broken out and the Boyz birded around the site to West Stow where an early lunch was taken after six further species was added, including the elusive Nuthatch.



The Forest was also disappointing, with only five species added, although a party of over a dozen Crossbill, a couple of Treecreepers and three species of raptor lifted spirits.

Next, onto the heathland at Berner's, where numerous Meadow Pipits were at last spotted, along with an unusual gathering of fourteen Stonechats. After heading south to the Cavenham Heath NNR the autumn roost of Stone Curlews was easily spotted from the weir (easier and better viewing than from the Icknield Path). Over fifty were counted – although we later learnt almost double that number were actually present. Next the gravel pit, now badly obscured by the undergrowth around its margins, revealed a single sandpiper to only two of the team, so could not be counted (this was only the second wader spotted all day). Sadly the team also dipped on the Grey Wagtails and a Wheatear that intell had said were present.

Cycling into Tuddenham the team finally managed to bag an elusive Starling along with numerous Lesser Black-backed Gulls. We then dipped on the Grey Partridge known to be present on the sandy soil just to the north of Cavenham, before returning wearily at 18:45 to Lackford to witness the Greylags (which we'd seen arriving shortly after dawn) leaving the reserve en masse for nocturnal feeding on the surrounding fields.

### The result

In total seventy-six species had been spotted by all of the team, while the pledges raised almost £600.00. No mean achievement and our thanks to our many sponsors – even the ones that only paid up because I managed to finish the course – rather than it finishing me! If there's to be a next year, it was such back breaking work that I think we'll all be looking at wider wheels and softer saddles.



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Roy Marsh

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## SOG's Sainsbury's stop-off

On Wednesday and Thursday 5 & 6 September several Council members, plus Dave Pearson, manned the SOG display stand at Sainsbury's Warren Heath branch in Ipswich. While these proved to be long and wearying days, they were profitable ones too – raising a total of £130.00 and recruiting several more members.

With more SOG members' help it is our intention to repeat this exercise at other Suffolk supermarkets during 2013. So volunteer today, by contacting the Editor and we'll put you on the list. It is relatively easy work and very profitable for the Group too – ensuring we get to initiate and back yet more conservation efforts.

## Jean Garrod 'retires'

**A**fter an amazing thirty years as the Outdoor Events organiser, Jean has reluctantly stepped down from the role. Her unstinting efforts to put together a programme, contact the usual leaders and occasionally persuade new ones to participate, has been a great service to the Group.

Fortunately she will continue to be the contact for bookings for both the Havergate Island and Orfordness trips, so she will look forward to hearing from you when you book your place.

Having taken over this year, with assistance from Council members Craig and Scott, I want to thank Jean for her help and support. Having visited Jean and Ken to get some details on past trips, it was good to reminisce, looking back through all the previous Events cards that she had to hand so I could peruse them for ideas.

For 2013 Craig and Scott looked into trips further afield, but mini-bus and coach costs were deemed too prohibitive, so this is something we will look into in the future. As you can see from this issue of the Harrier, we have another full Events card for 2013 so please come along and join in.

Once again a huge thanks Jean from SOG Council and members for all your hard work in putting together a programme for so many years.

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Adam Gretton

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## Mark Cocker Talk Report

**M**onday 19th November marked a new departure for SOG's indoor programme, partly as a result of the members' survey earlier in 2011. This had suggested that some members

wanted to see some evening talks away from the usual Ipswich venue (occasional talks used to be held in Bury St Edmunds up to 2006, but interest in these dwindled). The Waveney Bird Club (WBC) were approached, and it was agreed that we would hold a joint meeting in Bungay, at the Fisher Theatre, with Mark Cocker as the speaker.



## A sell out event

The event sold out (130 tickets), with some £400 of profits going to the Suffolk Foraging Farmland Bird Project. When our Chairman asked for a show of hands for SOG members present, numbers were a bit disappointing – but I can reassure any members who didn't make it along, that even though the venue is close to the wilds of Norfolk, the natives were friendly, the talk was excellent, and the beer cheaper than our usual Ipswich venue!

Roy and Gi manned the SOG stand, which attracted interest from several potential new members. Steve Piotrowski introduced the evening on behalf of WBC, saying he hoped that “this will be one of many future joint events with The Suffolk Ornithologists' Group.”

## 'Crow Country'

Mark Cocker talked first about 'Crow Country' (which he first delivered to SOG in January 2006), and then, after the interval, he talked about his forthcoming book 'Birds and People', due to be launched at the Birdfair next year.

Many members will be familiar with the first volume, which won widespread praise, to the extent that Mark is now regularly referred to as 'the rook man', with some (including one of his daughters) even claiming he now looks a bit like a rook! Even those present who had heard him talk on 'Crow Country' before found some new angles in his talk, including the degree to which rookery sites (even if deserted some years ago) are often still used as staging posts, for birds on the way to current roost sites.

## 'Birds and People'

Mark honoured SOG some four years ago by giving his very first talk on 'Birds and People', even though he had only recently started the long writing process. He completed the writing shortly before the Bungay talk, with some 1700 pages of typescript, so it was a very good time for him to reflect on the book, which outlines human interactions with most of the world's bird families. With this work having



such a wide scope, Mark focused on the corvids, highlighting some fascinating aspects, including Ravens being seen as sinister in some cultures, but also as part of the creation myth (and thus life-bringing) in several Pacific north-west native American tribes.

With Mark's words as usual painting vivid pictures, he only used a few slides, but these included two artistic masterpieces, with corvids at their heart: Picasso's 'Woman with Raven' and Van Gogh's 'Wheatfield and crows'. The latter painting was previously thought to be Van Gogh's last painting, reflecting his bleak depression, but it is now thought he completed another painting ('Tree-roots') after this one. Bearing in mind the local saying 'If that's crows that's rooks, and if that's a rook, that's a crow', Mark explained the painting should have been named 'Wheat field and rooks' (but then acknowledged the same change could be made to the title of 'Crow Country').

## Joint talk in 2013

As you will see on the programme card that accompanies this Harrier, we will be joining WBC again next year for a joint talk on 18th November by another favourite speaker, Derek Moore. The venue for this will be the Cut Theatre in Halesworth, and we hope it will be well-supported by SOG members, particularly those who live some way from Ipswich and don't usually attend events there. Proceeds will again go to the vitally important Foraging Farmland Bird project.

# Announcements

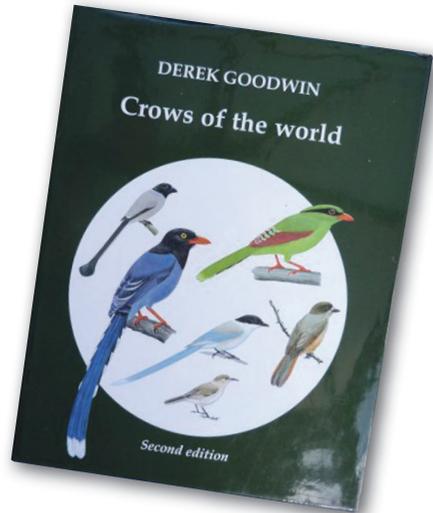
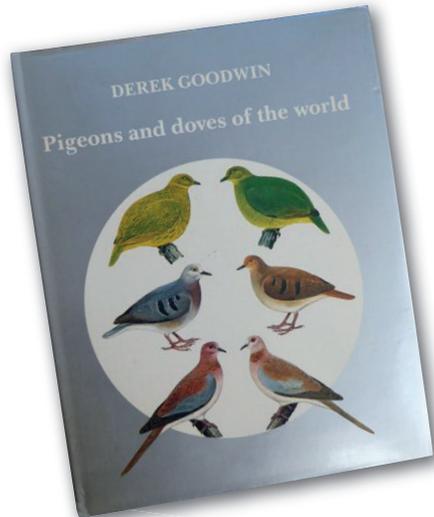
## Book Auction

The late Derek Goodwin, who was a personal friend, gave me signed copies of his definitive 'Pigeons & Doves of the World' and 'Crows of the World'. These are hardback revised editions for 1983 and 1986 respectively.

I have never used them, so they are in pristine condition, although there is a little creasing of the dust jackets. I am now offering them for sale with a view to raising some money for SOG.

A trawl through e-bay, Amazon etc. shows that they can be quite expensive, especially in good condition so I'm looking for sensible offers. To ensure that SOG benefits well I'm setting a reserve of £25.00 per copy. If these reserve prices aren't reached they will be offered as AGM raffle prizes.

If you are interested in making a bid, please contact me by 31 January 2013 on 01473 334696 or email [garyplank@talktalk.net](mailto:garyplank@talktalk.net). We'll be aiming to announce the happy purchaser at the AGM in February.



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## Kiln Meadow officially declared an LNR

Many SOG members had an input into the fight to save Kiln Meadow from development and we are delighted to report that the battle for it to be declared a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) has been won. SOG's input has been kindly acknowledged by Margaret Regnault.

The site that has been saved is reported to be a home for Dormice, reptiles and toads. The meadow also constitutes an important link between the Bobbitts Lane LNR and Spring Wood/Millennium Wood LNR on the southern edge of Ipswich alongside the A14. Hopefully the section of Spring Wood for which planning permission has already been granted can in due course be saved as well.

## Christmas Wordsearch

This year there are 32 Suffolk birds to be found in the grid below. These bird names may run horizontally or vertically (not diagonally), forwards or backwards. Letters may be used more than once.

Please list all 32 birds and say exactly which one is the odd one out and why.  
All answers to the Editor by 31st January 2013.  
**First out of the "hat" will receive a book token prize.**

R	O	U	G	H	L	E	G	G	E	D	B	U	Z	Z	A	R	D
E	R	E	P	P	I	D	G	N	I	T	N	U	B	W	O	N	S
V	E	L	V	E	T	S	C	O	T	E	R	N	I	K	S	I	S
I	P	P	I	N	K	R	E	D	J	A	C	K	S	N	I	P	E
D	I	B	E	I	R	A	S	H	A	G	A	N	S	T	O	N	K
D	P	R	R	L	A	L	L	U	G	D	N	A	L	E	C	I	I
E	D	A	E	N	L	I	E	T	I	W	T	W	E	M	S	E	R
T	N	M	D	U	E	A	A	A	R	R	S	S	B	S	C	Y	H
A	A	B	N	D	R	T	E	L	N	I	L	R	E	M	A	E	S
O	S	L	A	V	O	N	I	A	N	G	R	E	B	E	U	N	Y
R	E	I	S	C	H	I	M	O	O	R	T	P	E	E	P	E	E
H	L	N	O	G	S	P	S	W	A	L	L	O	W	O	O	D	R
T	P	G	O	O	D	L	L	U	G	S	U	O	C	U	A	L	G
D	R	U	G	R	E	R	E	I	R	R	A	H	N	E	H	O	T
E	U	G	N	I	W	D	E	R	G	N	I	W	X	A	W	G	A
R	P	P	I	N	K	F	O	O	T	E	D	G	O	O	S	E	E
R	E	D	C	R	E	S	T	E	D	P	O	C	H	A	R	D	R
E	S	O	O	G	D	E	T	N	O	R	F	E	T	I	H	W	G

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Steve Plume (front cover); Steve Abbott (pages 20 and 22); Steve Aylward (page 35); Chris Baines (page 28); Collin Barley (page 27); Bill Baston (pages 6, 11, 25, 33 and 38); Will Brame (page 23); Ian Clarke (page 26); Jon Evans (pages 3, 4, 24, 25 and 29); Dave Fairhurst (page 24); Ian Goodall (pages 3, 5, 38, 45, and 46); Jeff Higgott (page 25); David Hosking (pages 12, 13, and 16); Eric Hosking (pages 12 and 14); Alan King (page 26); 'Gadge' Nicholls (page 15); Eddie Marsh (pages 23 and 25); Roy Marsh (page 39); Gary Plank (page 47); John Richardson (pages 26 and 27); Phil Whittaker (page 34).

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## Council for 2012:

### Officers

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

### Members

**Jon Warnes** [to 2013]  
**Robin Harvey** [to 2014]  
**Jean Garrod** [to 2014]  
**Craig Fulcher** [to 2015]  
**Scott Mayson** [to 2015]

### Honorary Vice-Presidents

**Jean & Ken Garrod**  
**Mike Jeanes**  
**Mike Hall**  
**Robin Hopper**



### Bird Recorders

#### North-east Area Recorder:

**Andrew Green**, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP  
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: [andrew@waveney1.fsnet.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:smsuffolkbirder@gmail.com)

#### West Area Recorder:

**Colin Jakes**, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN  
Tel: 01284 702215 [colin@jakes.myzen.co.uk](mailto:colin@jakes.myzen.co.uk)

#### Treasurer/Membership Secretary

**Matthew Deans**, 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

- Extensive range (20+) of field trips every year – 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

- Active lobby to protect habitats and birding amenities
- Provides a county-wide field force of bird surveyors (100+)
- Organises and promotes bird surveys
- Inspires and undertakes conservation projects
- Numerous achievements:
  - Contributed to many species breeding successes (Peregrines, Barn Owls etc.)
  - Undertakes monitoring
  - Involvement on community and education projects
  - Organises and hosts dawn chorus walks
  - Assisted with fund-raising for bird hides
  - On-going participation in key bird surveys for the BTO, such as BBS, the Bird Atlas and the recent Nightingale survey
  - Provides studies for environmental waste companies etc.



*For birds & for birders*

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

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