

Spring 2019 No.196



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover photograph: Tundra Bean Goose (*Anser serrirostris*) by Ian Porter.

Contact email for articles, photographs, notes and observations is:

harrier@sogonline.org.uk

All material for the Summer Harrier should be received by June 2nd please.

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Website: www.sogonline.org.uk Email: info@sogonline.org.uk

Twitter: [@suffokbirds1](https://twitter.com/suffokbirds1) Text/Tel: 07951 482547

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The Harrier

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Editorial

Welcome to this edition of The Harrier. As we go to print some big news from the AGM as the name change, to Suffolk Bird Group, was unanimously voted in by members. More details about this and the AGM in the next edition of The Harrier.

My thanks to all those who have submitted both articles and photos for this edition. Having received them in good time has enabled us to publish with time to spare as we wanted to get this edition out to members as soon as possible. This is because SOG President John Grant has written a piece regarding the consultation period for Sizewell C with its proximity to Minsmere and the need for further details about its expansion and potential impact on one of our most valuable reserves. The consultation runs until March 29th and we ask members to support the RSPB's campaign. There are also details on another much loved RSPB reserve, Havergate Island, and the works going on there to mitigate against issues from climate change.

We have more details on the Rook survey with a guide to using the online recording system. If anyone requires assistance then please contact us. To complement this and to look at another aspect there is a fascinating article on Rook migration noted at Landguard. There is also a request for volunteers to protect and monitor nesting Little Terns on our Suffolk coast. This declining species needs as much help as possible to continue to survive in the county.

Also included is an interesting and thought-provoking article regarding the need to have scrub areas in the countryside and the benefits they provide to bird life - to not only protect



Photo: David Borderick

patches already there but to proactively encourage them. This is sure to provide food for discussion so we welcome your thoughts and can print them in response.

There are details of a new degree course at University of Suffolk in Ipswich. We welcomed Jamie, a student on the course, on to the SOG council at the AGM and he will write a follow up article in a later edition. In addition we are teaming up on some projects as detailed in the article and Projects Officer, Chris, will write up on this, again in a later edition. There is the regular bird review section, this edition back to covering a three month period. This was to allow an offset of an extra month to complete the review as previously there were only a couple days from the end of the month to the submission deadline date. Finally we have our usual selection of trip reports, always an enjoyable aspect of the group and nice to have a record of the birds and other wildlife encountered on these trips.

Thank you to everyone who submitted answers to the Winter Wordsearch in the last edition of The Harrier. The extra two Harrier covers to find, from the remaining letters, were Great Spotted Woodpecker and Slender-billed Curlew cartoon. Congratulations to Chrissie Freeman, whose name was pulled from the hat at the AGM, who will receive the £25 book token. *Gi Grieco*

SOG Rook Survey

Following SOG President John Grant's article in the last edition of The Harrier, here are details for the survey.

The survey has been enabled by generous funding from Suffolk resident Jenifer Bridges-Adams and is being established with invaluable support from the highly respected naturalist and conservationist Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, Fifth Earl of Cranbrook.

Photo: Gi Grieco



Rookery

The format for our new survey will be similar to that used by Save Our Suffolk Swifts, a partnership involving SOG and Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Beginning in January 2019 there will be an easy-to-use rookery survey webpage hosted by the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service, allowing the number of nests in each rookery to be recorded, with location mapping down to an accuracy level of 10 metres. The results of the work are due to be encapsulated in a SOG publication after the fieldwork has taken place.

It is to be hoped that many SOG members will take part in the survey. We stand to learn much about the current status of the Rook in Suffolk.

Details for the survey:

The survey page to enter details can be found here - <http://www.suffolkbis.org.uk/rookerysurvey>



To log records of Rook nest sites click on the link – Record a Rookery - and on this page enter your details.

Suffolk Rookery Survey

Use this page to record locations of rookeries in Suffolk



Home / **Observation Details** / Where Was It?

Your Details

First name: Please provide your first name.

Last name: Please provide your last name.

Tweak: Please provide your phone. This will help the team to contact you if they need any further information or help with access.

Click next step when done and this page requires you to enter the date of the sighting, the number of nests in the rookery and any additional information. This additional information is optional but can include tree species, notes on whether the site is historical or a new site etc.



Home / **Observation Details** / Where Was It?

Rookery Name: Enter the rookery name.

Date: Click here to select the date of the record.

Private: **Add private**

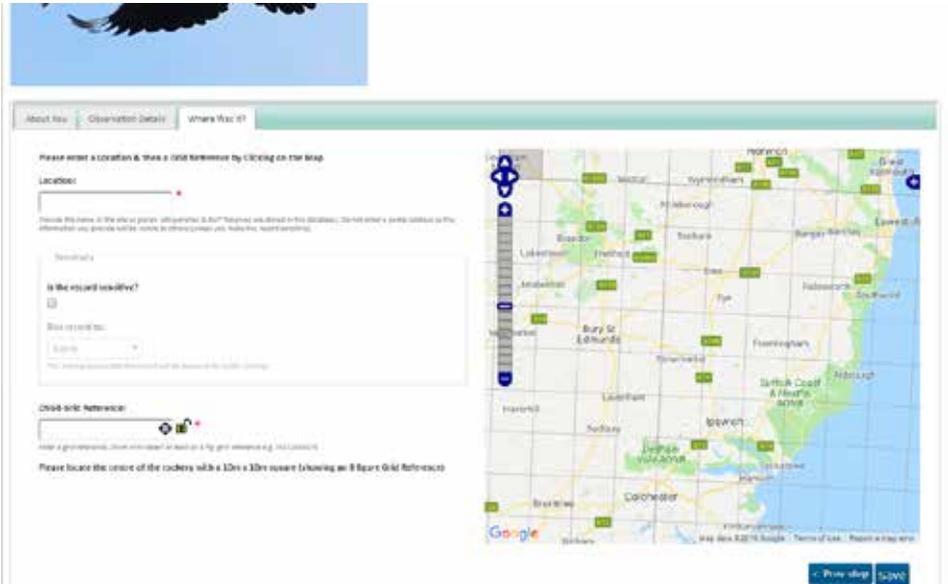
Comments: Please provide any other information about the rookery which you think will be useful.

How many nests are there? Please enter a number.

If the situation changes during the breeding season, please return to this website to record an update.

[< Prev step](#) [Next step >](#)

Click next step and this page is to record the location name and grid reference. Using the map to scroll in to the location and clicking on the map inputs the grid reference in to the OSGB Grid Reference box. Click Save when complete.

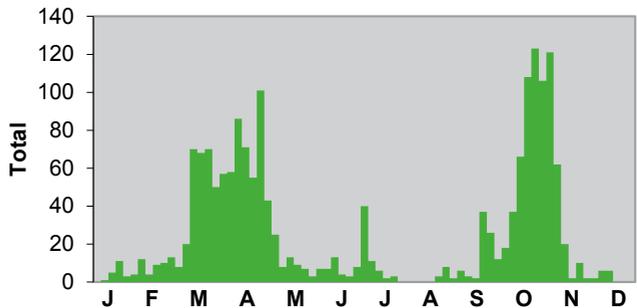


Nigel Odin, Landguard Bird Observatory

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) movements at Landguard, Suffolk

Landguard Bird Observatory Rook records clearly show a spring passage, largely from the end of February into June peaking in March & April. Occasional sightings in late winter and into July are largely due to sightings in 1987, the year prior to when three pairs attempted to nest on a lighting tower in the Port of Felixstowe (Piotrowski 1988). At this time all corvid nests were regularly removed from lighting towers preventing successful breeding.

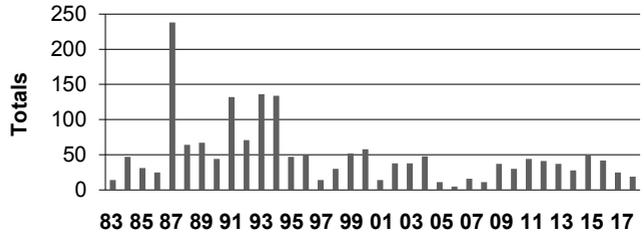
Rook Bird-day 5 Day Totals 1983-2018



Despite more bird-days in spring than autumn there are fewer double figure counts in spring with a peak day count of 24 heading south on 22nd April 1993. There is a spring bias in movements in a southerly direction. Autumn passage is

mostly from mid-September to mid-November peaking at the end of October and early November. Double figure day counts in autumn are more numerous despite fewer overall sightings with a peak count of 50 in off the sea on 24th October 1993. Autumn movements show a bias in a southerly direction or to birds seen to come in directly off the sea. Overall numbers noted have declined since 1994 with autumn records, particularly of sizeable flocks, becoming relatively uncommon since this time.

Annual Bird-day Totals 1983-2018



So what's going on? Rooks are early nesters so why are birds moving throughout the spring breeding season? Simple speculation is that spring birds are largely immatures going "walk-a-bout" away from their natal colonies in search of potential new colonies to join or new feeding areas to explore.

Last century spring migrants probably included continental migrants that had come into Britain for the winter and then returning from whence they came. Again these would presumably be largely continental immatures and non-breeders as the species nests in the Low Countries at similar times to British birds, so wintering adult birds would be returning too late to breed. A hundred years ago vast numbers of corvids migrated into Suffolk in autumn with Ticehurst (1932) eulogising about the annual event. Ringing recoveries evidenced birds originating from areas around the southern Baltic and the Low Countries. The BTO has 64 foreign Rooks recovered in Britain on their database with the most recent one in 1994. These recoveries have dried up in recent years presumably due to climatic amelioration and global warmer no longer necessitating the need for Rooks to migrate across the North Sea.

References:

- Piotrowski, S.H. 1988.
 Suffolk Rookeries – 1988.
Suffolk Ornithologists Group Bulletin 79:14-16.
 Ticehurst, C.B. 1932.
A history of the birds of Suffolk. Gurney & Jackson, London.



Photo: Gi Grieco

Rooks



Marsh Harrier

Photo: David Borderick

John Grant, SOG President

Time to show our love for Minsmere

Noisy neighbours can turn life into a nightmare. But just imagine the horrors of having a neighbour that's not just noisy but nuclear – and downright damaging too. That's what our beloved RSPB Minsmere is having to contemplate as the French giant EDF Energy and the Chinese nuclear power group CGN advance their plans for a colossal, £18billion (perhaps more?) double-reactor Sizewell C development on the very doorstep of the world-famous, much-loved and internationally important nature reserve.

It's a prospect all of us who cherish the grand old RSPB flagship site - a spiritual home for many - will find unthinkable. Surely, any adverse impact on Minsmere would have been categorically ruled out as an immovable red line at the very outset

of this long and tortuous process, wouldn't it? Surely, there would have been early cast-iron guarantees that the beautiful biodiversity hotspot of Minsmere, with its 5,000-plus species, its invaluable ability to connect so many people with nature and its unique place in countless thousands of hearts, would remain sacrosanct? Well, surely we all have the right to think so, to demand so. But no. No such assurances have been offered, even at this juncture when the third - and final - public consultation is under way. Certainly, there have been hours and hours of discussions involving EDF, which is leading on Sizewell C, and RSPB representatives. But no assurances. The RSPB, and indeed all of us who love and treasure Minsmere, could be forgiven for fearing the worst.

As the 12-week final Stage 3 consultation exercise was launched in January, the society responded with a campaign which surely all SOG members would wholeheartedly support. First it outlined its “chief concerns” as:

- The impact of noise and artificial light from such a massive construction on rare wildlife that is very sensitive to such disturbance, particularly marsh harriers - one of the UK’s rarest birds.
- The impact on RSPB’s ability to manage water levels on the reserve, that is vital for managing the reedbeds and other freshwater habitats that are home to rare wildlife like otters, bitterns and avocets.
- The potential erosion of Minsmere’s coastline, which could accelerate when you build new coastal structures. This could pose a significant threat to Minsmere’s special freshwater and coastal wildlife.

Then it called on EDF to:

- Make a public statement that Minsmere will be protected from any potential harm from the development of Sizewell C.
- Fully assess the impact that Sizewell C could have on Minsmere’s habitats and wildlife.
- Publish a clear plan outlining how EDF will address any potential impacts of Sizewell C on Minsmere.

And then it invited all and sundry to show their love for Minsmere and urge EDF to promise to give this wildlife-rich site of infinite wonder the total protection it deserves. In its multi-platform #Love Minsmere campaign it calls on supporters to tell EDF how much they love the reserve “and how catastrophic this proposal could be for wildlife if they don’t take action to protect it.”

The initial response to the #Love Minsmere campaign illustrated the depth of feeling there exists for this incomparable reserve. In its first week more than 1,400 people joined the clamour and pressed EDF to give its protection pledge. That figure is higher than the total number of responses attracted by both the Stage 1 and 2 public consultations - and they each ran for 10 weeks.

To date, the only public utterances on the matter from EDF have been vague - along the lines that they will take into consideration feedback from the 12-week consultation, which ends on March 29, before the final Sizewell C plan is submitted. Clearly, that has not satisfied the RSPB. And it shouldn’t satisfy those of us who have a deep and undying affection for a place we hold so dear.

You can add your voice in support of RSPB Minsmere via loveminsmere.org You can find out more about the RSPB’s position on Sizewell C and how the society is engaging with the proposals at rspb.org.uk/sizewellc





Photo: RSPB

Sarah Gelpke

Volunteers wanted to help protect rare seabirds on Suffolk beaches

The little tern is one of Britain's rarest breeding seabirds and has been in decline in the UK over the past 25 years. From 2013- 2019, the RSPB and 11 conservation partners have worked together to help little tern populations recover to a sustainable level, funded through an EU LIFE+ project. The beaches of East Anglia hold around 30% of the national population of little terns, and while their numbers are growing, they still struggle to breed and raise young successfully on our shores due to habitat loss, rising sea levels, predation and disturbance from beach visitors.

From late April to the end of July, the beaches at Kessingland and Benacre are the temporary home to breeding colonies of one of Britain's rarest and most attractive seabirds. Little terns travel 3,000 miles from West Africa to nest on our Suffolk beaches. They nest on the ground and so are highly vulnerable to human disturbance. This is why the nesting sites are protected by fencing and wardened by RSPB staff and volunteers.

The main job of the volunteer wardens is talking to other beach users about the Little Terns and why they need protection. Those who are interested can also get involved in some of our monitoring work, counting nests and fledglings, under the guidance of staff

or experienced volunteers. You spend your shift on the beach close to the colony and watching as they dive for fish and listening to their calls as they return to the nest lifts the spirits. Sharing this joy with other beach-users is a very enjoyable part of the role: whether that's sharing the amazing story of their migration with those who might not know much about birds, updating interested locals on how "their" terns are doing this year, or helping a child see a nesting bird close-up through a telescope.

We are looking for new people to join our volunteer team this coming season. You do not need expert bird knowledge; you do need to enjoy communicating with people and be able to negotiate steps down to the beach and walk some distance around the colony.

If you are keen to join us, please fill in a volunteer registration form and return to Sarah Gelpke (email below). All RSPB volunteers are insured once the form is completed, and it allows us to include you in our licence. Little terns are protected species, so we need to licence you to carry out protection and monitoring activities.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a Little Tern warden, contact Sarah Gelpke on Sarah.Gelpke@RSPB.org.uk or 01603 660066.

Havergate Island climate change adaptation project

Havergate Island has been around for about 500 years so as you can imagine, it has changed and re-formed itself over this time. However, now more than ever we are witnessing the impact of climate change, bigger and fiercer storms and rising sea levels, especially along our coastlines.

We are now starting to witness the impact of more regular storms on the island combined with higher tides. We are finding that the banks around the island are eroding more noticeably, paths are being washed away and the external walls are showing signs of erosion. These are all creating weak points in the island's defences and the walls need to be continuously monitored and maintained. The aim of this project is to take some of the pressure off the outer defences during extreme conditions.

After the tidal surge in 2013, a 150m section of seawall breached on Dovey's lagoon. It was rapidly decided, that instead of building the wall back to the previous standard we would instead intentionally lower, widen and reinforce it, creating a spillway (also known as a sill). Over the past few years this concept has worked really well on Dovey's lagoon, and so we decided to roll it out across the rest of the island.

Havergate is always going to flood and so the decision to build another, bigger spillway was taken to lessen the impact of further major storm surges in the future. The idea of these spillways is to control the overtopping by allowing the reinforced section to overtop first. This then fills the lagoons and helps prevent any major scouring or breaching occurring at higher, thinner parts of the seawall.

It was no mean feat creating a 650m spillway across the back wall of our Main lagoons (North end). It involved having 2 diggers out there to do the work and 300 rolls of rockfall netting which is used to cover and reinforce the lowered section of wall.



Photo: Lyndsey Record

Mobilising to Havergate Island



Photo: Lyndsey Record



Lowering the Seawall

Photo: Lyndsey Record

The work started in mid-September 2018. The actual wall lowering only took a couple of weeks; however we made the most of having the diggers out there and put them to work enhancing the lagoons. They reshaped the eroded old nesting islands, and created new, larger features that should greatly improve and enhance Main lagoon.

Whilst they were busy on the lagoons, we took advantage of the dry weather to start laying the rockfall netting. We had already placed the rolls of wire roughly along the wall with the tractor to avoid too much manual handling. With a lot of help from volunteers, the wire went down and was pinned and stapled into place. The rockfall

netting will help to stabilise and maintain the lowered wall, especially until the vegetation grows back.

Lowering the seawall is a natural flood management technique and we hope to protect the island and keep its habitats safe and at the same time help contribute towards alleviating the impact of future storm surges elsewhere on the estuary. This whole project has been part funded by the Environment Agency with a £50,000 grant awarded as part of Defra's £15m Natural Flood Management Programme, by the Landfill Tax Fund through a £46,990 grant awarded by Viridor Credits and by the Pamela Matthews Charitable Trust.



Laying the rock fall netting

Photo: Lyndsey Record



*New breeding bird islands
and finished spillway*





University of Suffolk

Dr. Mark Bowler

University of Suffolk – BSc Wildlife, Ecology and Conservation Science

In July I relocated to Suffolk, having never been to the county before. I'd been living in the Peruvian Amazon for the last six years, teaching and expanding a research program that now takes in bird diversity, primate behaviour, camera trapping and wildlife conservation. But I'd been offered a new challenge. Dr. Chris Turner at the University of Suffolk had developed a new course, and it needed its first dedicated lecturer. The course was in Wildlife, Ecology and Conservation Science – a title that spoke to me immediately. And what Chris had planned was brilliant. We would take students to wildlife sites across Suffolk and have the local experts train them in the skills required to work with wildlife in the UK. We would back this up with broad practical experience in the lab and the theoretical knowledge to interpret and analyse data collected in the field. It was an opportunity for me to help shape an exciting new course, and share my experience in designing wildlife surveys, mapping and GIS. I bring my ongoing Amazonian research program to the University, but the move also brings me home to the UK and allows me to develop a new line of research on British wildlife.

I did expect enthusiastic students – attracted by the rich course description. But they have exceeded my expectations. In their spare time they do mammal transects, monitor

our campus Peregrines, photograph wildlife and create habitats. They are inquisitive and motivated and are rapidly teaching me about Suffolk's wildlife. As I write, our first trip to Minsmere is looming. We will survey birds with the RSPB and deploy remote audio recorders across the reserve. This is a method we have successfully employed in Peru, looking for the Critically Endangered Iquitos Gnatcatcher, and our students are part of our first pilot in the UK. The recorders will listen in on Minsmere's spring and we will apply computer algorithms to pick out groups of similar calls. At that point our students will team up with Suffolk Bird Group members to identify calls in the lab. We don't expect to out-bird the masses that descend on Minsmere at this time of year, but we do hope to refine a method that will allow us to quickly detect key species or measure diversity simultaneously at multiple sites in the future.

It is an exciting course, and it is sure to be popular. I'm lucky to be in from the start to learn alongside our first intrepid students and forge new partnerships with Suffolk's extraordinary wildlife groups. I can't wait to see how it evolves.

For more information about the course please visit: <https://www.uos.ac.uk/courses/ug/bsc-hons-wildlife-ecology-and-conservation-science>

ScrubUpBritain

Turtle Dove has declined by 94% in the UK since 1995 and Nightingale by 53%. We feel that a national focus on the required breeding habitat of dense scrub thickets is now necessary in order to help reverse these shocking declines. We would love to see conservation bodies and individual landowners lead the way by creating and managing specific scrub reserves and areas of land.

We are a small group of amateur and professional ornithologists and conservationists who are extremely concerned about the decline in many of our iconic summer migrants which are rapidly disappearing from our shores. It is well known that careful management of scrubland habitat can have hugely beneficial

results on the species that we wish to protect, but we are mystified as to why this approach isn't being applied on a large scale in Britain. In comparison with some other habitat management regimes, the retention and enhancement of scrub habitats is relatively inexpensive. This is particularly true when the control of browsing herbivores such as deer is carried out, which can enable regrowth of the shrub layer while also providing a source of revenue and food.

ScrubUpBritain manage a section of wildlife-rich valley within Newbourne, Suffolk, running adjacent to Mill River, and a private site in Hollesley, with our main aim of providing breeding habitats required for Turtle Dove and Nightingale, as well as many other species of long-distance migrant birds.

The key principles of our work are to lay immature trees and remove semi-mature trees to allow light to reach the ground and regrowth of the laid areas, as well as to create new areas of scrub. It would be as simple as that in the presence of our native (but sadly extinct) top predators such as wolf and lynx. Therefore, the erection of deer fencing around the perimeter is used to control browsing and it is working to astonishing effect (rewilding). We are already noticing, at these early stages, increases in common scrub lovers such as Garden Warbler, Blackcap and Whitethroat. Populations of butterflies, moths and other wildlife will also benefit and we have plans for extending our monitoring to these groups too. However, if a real difference is to be made, the key is linking this initiative to other similar initiatives rather than one isolated project.



Creating scrubland

Photo: Chris Bridge



Creating scrubland

The necessary habitat that is needed for successful breeding just isn't present in sufficient quantity - certainly not where we live in East Suffolk anyway. Joined up thinking needs to extend to small landowners and NGOs alike. Scrub has a bad reputation, with many considering it unsightly and in need of 'tidying up'. This has to change, and if we can show the public just how important this habitat is, then maybe that will be the beginning of scrubbing up Britain.

Rewilding in large areas has been proven to have a monumental impact on flora and fauna. Turtle Dove and Nightingale have hugely benefited at sites such as Knepp Wilding Project; the Nightingale population increased from 9 to 31 pairs in a 10 year period. These figures tell us that there are still a sufficient number of individuals present in Europe to populate these new areas that have been created, but only with the correct habitat present and management implemented. This project should be the template for new nature reserves, linked together across our landscape by a strong network of scrubbed up private areas.

Operation Turtle Dove has already made great progress with private landowners, which if focused equally on nesting habitat creation could join the dots perfectly. This isn't rocket science, there are lots of factors at work, but we MUST do what we can, now. This includes promoting what we believe to be the most influential factor of all - nesting habitat.

There is no shortage of evidence to support the negative impact uncontrolled grazing is having on our impoverished woodland and scrubland habitats. Local woods around us are so heavily grazed now, that there is virtually no understorey left. The birds that once nested there have long gone! What we have now is a monoculture of mature trees with mile upon mile of bracken and cropped grassland. Our local heaths, which once held plenty of good quality Blackthorn thickets, are now a sea of pretty, pink heather with the odd Scots pine or small clump of Gorse. This is fine for the odd pair of Dartford Warbler and Woodlark (both of which are very important short distance migrants or resident species) but does it have to be at the expense of so many of our rapidly declining summer migrants?

We are probably going to upset quite a few people by coming out and saying this, but we feel that it really needs to be said as there appears to be such low priority put on this vital habitat - not only in our own county but much of the south and east of the country as well. What became of the Nightingale initiative that was so heavily publicised several years back? We found out where some of our breeding birds spent the winter, but we believe a massive opportunity was lost. How many Nightingale conservation areas were developed or created? All we see is more and more of their fragile habitat disappearing. Meanwhile, another conservation project is starting up. We desperately hope that

this time the opportunity is seized and we are not looking back at another missed opportunity, with another disastrous extinction to document!

Thank you for reading about our work aims and projects. Please follow our team and our work on Twitter, @ScrubUpBritain.

Photograph: Chris Bridge



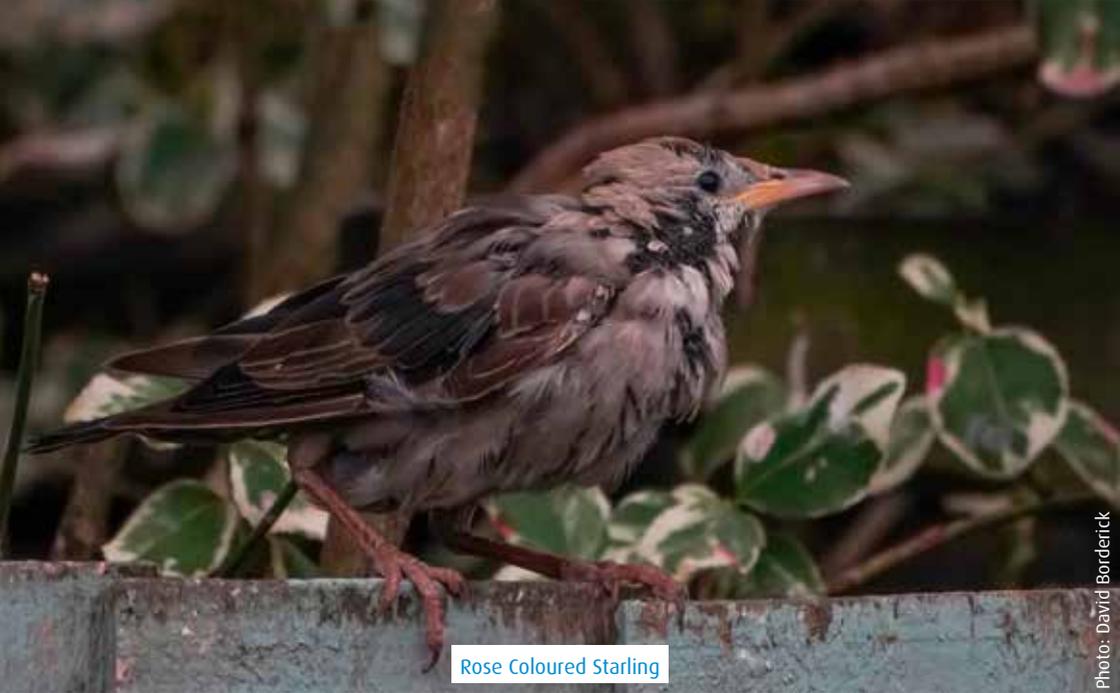
Suffolk Scrub Lovers

Readers' Photographs



Ring-necked Parakeet

Photo: Andrew Moon



Rose Coloured Starling

Photo: David Borderick



Cattle Egret



Waxwing

Winter Bird Review

2018/2019

The quarterly records section gives a snapshot of birds seen within the county during the period and is compiled by Eddie Bathgate and Eddie Marsh, predominately from data received by Suffolk BINS.

All scarce and rare birds are subject to submission and acceptance by either SORC or BBRC. Updated lists on Accepted and Outstanding Records for 2017 and 2018 can be found on the SOG website - <http://www.sogonline.org.uk/suffolk-birds/>.

November 2018

Weather:- The weather this month was fairly mild. There were 16 days where we had rainfall with only 4 days in double figures, 34mm on the 1st, 24mm on the 10th and 11th and 14mm on the 28th. We had 15 days of 11C or above with the highest temperature being 16C on the 6th. Average low night-time temperatures were between 3C to 5C. The lowest nighttime temperatures were 0C on the 2nd and 21st and -1C on the 22nd. So overall, November was a good month.

Birds November 2018

A **Whooper Swan** was at Westwood Marshes on the 2nd with eight over Pippas Ford too. Good numbers at RSPB Lakenheath with 35 early in the month and up to 114 there by the 24th. Three **Whooper Swan** were at Butley from 23rd-27th and seven at Minsmere 26-27th. Two **Bewick's Swan** were at Covehithe from the 22nd-24th. Around Boyton/Gedgrave/Havergate 24 **Pink-footed Geese** were present from the 1st-10th with 25 south off Minsmere on the 17th and 25 at Dingle Marshes on the 18th. A **European White-fronted Goose** was at Hollesley on the 2nd. Numbers built up to

seven by the 4th with 20 at Blythburgh on the 17th and 16 at Dingle Marsh on the 18th. A **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** was off Sizewell on the 17th and four **Tundra Bean Geese** were visible from Ferry Road, Felixstowe from the 24th. Two **Greater Scaup** were on Benacre Broad from 19th-24th with a single at Minsmere from the 24th onwards. A drake **Scaup** was at SWT Lackford on the 30th too. Six **Goosanders** returned to Thorpeness on the 21st. A red-headed **Smew** was seen off Stutton on the 16th then off Manningtree on the 27th. A **Hooded Merganser** was found in Blythburgh on the 13th having been present since Oct 27th. The right place at the correct time of year for a genuine one maybe but it disgraced itself by revealing a yellow ring.

A **Black-throated Diver** was off Minsmere on the 9th. **Great Northern Divers** were sighted off LBO on the 11th, 23rd & 28th with one off Minsmere on the 23rd. A **Black-necked Grebe** was on the Stour on the 9th and 30th with a sighting at Alton Water on the 29th. A **Slavonian Grebe** was at Southwold on the 16th with two on the Stour on the 29-30th. A **Red-necked Grebe** was on the Stour on the 17th as well. **Great Egrets** were prevalent throughout the month with two at Dunwich 2nd, 14th, 18th, 21st and 30th and singles at Covehithe 2nd & 5th, SWT Trimley on the 2-3rd & 14th, and Lackford 7th. Up to 4 were recorded at RSPB Lakenheath and birds were seen in flight over Pippas Ford 21st and Ipswich 22nd. Four **Cranes** returned to RSPB Lakenheath from the 26th. **Purple Sandpipers** were seen at LBO, Southwold, East Lane, Bawdsey and Ness Point with a maximum count of eight there on the 25th.

A ring-tailed **Hen Harrier** was observed at Boyton on the 2nd with sightings also at Minsmere, Newbourne, Gedgrave, Shingle Street, Levington, Boyton and SWT Carlton Marshes. A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was seen around Havergate, Boyton and Gedgrave from the 6th to the 8th with further sightings at Lackford 8th, Felixstowe Ferry 9th and Cattawade 30th. A **Short-eared Owl** was at Gedgrave on the 1st with further sightings at Kessingland, Shingle Street, Levington Creek and RSPB Boyton on the same day. Five **Caspian Gulls** were on Havergate on the 6th with two at North Warren on the 9th with other sightings at Covehithe, Minsmere and Lakenheath. Seen off Sizewell on the 18th were five **Great Skuas**. A **Pomarine Skua** was off Southwold on the 10th.

A **Shorelark** was at Covehithe on the 10th. A **Great Grey Shrike** was seen at Mayday Farm in the Brecks on the 2nd, one was also seen at Brandon Country Park on the 12th and 15th. A late **Whinchat** was at Minsmere 11-12th and a late **Yellow Wagtail** at Thelnetham Fen on the 18th. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was found in the Minsmere sluice bushes 17th-23rd with another at Mariners Score in Lowestoft on the 18th. A **Pallas's Warbler** was at LBO 5th-6th. Four **Firecrests** were around Corton on the 17th. A **Waxwing** was seen in Corton on the 23rd then five at The Drive,



Purple Sandpiper

Photo: Andrew Moon



Pallid Swift

Photo: David Borderick

Reydon from the 28th. A **Snow Bunting** was reported at Knettishall Airfield from the 4th to 15th, a great inland record. Further sightings were singles at both Benacre and LBO on the 12th and a maximum of three at LBO on 19th-20th. A **Lapland Bunting** was seen on the 5th at Corton and another observed over Corton Old Sewage works on the 11th. A **Rose-ringed Parakeet** was sighted in Nicholas Everitt Park, Oulton Broad on the 10th and remained there all month.

Scarcer November Sightings

A **White-throated Diver** was found dead at Thorpeness on the 18th, possibly the same bird sighted off Kent previously. At SWT Carlton Marshes, **Cattle Egret** were present on and off throughout the month with three there on the 24th.

A **Puffin** was seen north off LBO on the 11th. Two **Pallid Swift** were discovered at Thorpeness late morning on the 11th; only the 6th and 7th records for Suffolk. Unfortunately one was taken by a Sparrowhawk late afternoon. A Swift species was seen over Minsmere the same day with another sighting over Ipswich on the 13th.

A juvenile **Rose-coloured Starling** was identified along Bugsby Way, Kesgrave on the 9th. It had already been present for six days and was seen in the area until the 24th. A probable **Richard's Pipit** was at

Aldeburgh Town Marshes on the 4th with another at Old Felixstowe on the 9th. A **Penduline Tit** was seen on the 2nd behind Southwold Boating Lake but unfortunately could not be relocated. A **Siberian Chiffchaff** was seen on the 21st at Beach Farm, Kessingland with one also at North Denes on the 30th.

December 2018

Weather:- December was a mild month overall with 12 days of double-figure temperatures, a high of 14C on the 2nd and even late in the month we had 12C and 11C on the 29th and 30th respectively. It was also a fairly wet month with 18 days where rain fell, though the only double figure days were 15mm on the 7th and 10mm on the 15th and 16th with a total of 85mm for the month. Cold temperatures were a rarity, the month only recorded two frosts these being -1C on the 4th and -3C on the 25th. The actual high for the whole month was 9C and the low being 4C; these are above normal for December.

Birds December 2018:

Whooper Swan sightings included up to seven at Minsmere RSPB throughout the month and a single bird at Butley Ferry area all month. **Bewick's Swan** sightings came from Thorington Street with two from the 10th to 19th, four on Havergate RSPB and Boyton RSPB on the 11th, nine (seven adults and two juveniles) at Leiston off Red House Lane behind Hopkins Homes Development from the 21st to 31st, nine at Minsmere RSPB on the 30th (likely the Leiston birds) and a single at North Warren RSPB on the 26th. The highest count of **Greater White-fronted Geese** this month came from North Warren with 122 on the 22nd with a handful of birds at Hollesley RSPB, Boyton RSPB, Trimley SWT and Gulpher Road, Felixstowe. There were four **Tundra Bean Geese** commuting between Hollesley and Boyton RSPB reserves and Felixstowe Ferry area

between the 2nd and 31st. Two different individuals were with the **Bewick's Swan** at Leiston on the 23rd and 24th and two birds at Hollesley RSPB on the 29th. It's good to see **Pink-footed Geese** reaching Suffolk on a more regular basis in recent years, at Hollesley RSPB 49 on the 2nd, five over on the 11th, 45 at Boyton RSPB on the 3rd and 40 over Bawdsey Hall on the 6th. A drake **Greater Scaup** was at Minsmere RSPB on the 2nd and 3rd and another drake at Alton Water on the 28th and 30th. A **Velvet Scoter** offshore at Minsmere RSPB on the 3rd. **Goosanders** continued to be reported from Oulton Broad/Carlton Marshes area at the start of the month with six on the 2nd and seven on the 3rd. At Dunwich nine flew south on the 27th. On the Stour Estuary, the drake **Smew** remained on the Stour viewed from behind the Co-op at Manningtree. A red-head was on East Scrape, Minsmere on the 14th and 15th.

There was one **Great Northern Diver** off Kessingland on the 1st and another bird was seen on the River Orwell from Levington Creek and the Marina between the 15th and 18th. A single **Black-throated Diver** was off Minsmere RSPB on the 18th and again off Minsmere with 500 Red-throated Divers on the 28th plus one off Bawdsey on the 31st. A **Black-necked Grebe** was seen on Alton Water, at the dam end, on both the 26th and 28th. A rare raptor in Suffolk these days is **Rough-legged Buzzard**, one was seen Orfordness/Sudbourne Marshes on the 11th, then on odd dates in the month at the former site plus one was seen over Boyton RSPB on the 26th. A good number of **Hen Harrier** sightings with a single at Orford/Sudbourne Marshes on the 11th and 16th and further ring-tails at Blaxhall Common and Bawdsey Marshes on the 13th, single Havergate RSPB on the 17th, one Orfordness on the 27th and at Hollesley RSPB area on the 27th and 30th. A nice male **Hen Harrier** flew over Upper Hollesley Common on the

17th. The only **Merlin** reported during the month came from Sudbourne Marshes on the 16th. The only reported **Spoonbills** this month were from North Warren with a single on the 21st and two from the 27th to the 31st. A **Common Crane** was noted at Tinkers Marsh in an agricultural crop on the 12th, on the 31st a single flying north at Minsmere at 14.25hrs with the same bird seen going north at Reydon at 14.36hrs.

Caspian Gull sightings came from Felixstowe Ferry, Trimley SWT Reserve, Hollesley RSPB, Minsmere and Lackford Lakes. A **Pomarine Skua** noted past LBO on the 1st and 18th. A few **Great Skua** were seen during December; two from LBO on the 1st, three Southwold, two Minsmere and five LBO all seen on the 7th. **Short-eared Owl** sightings for the month were from Kessingland, Bawdsey and Gedgrave, whilst Sudbourne Marshes had the highest count with five on the 16th. Two sightings of **Long-eared Owl**, one at Island Mere, Minsmere at dusk on the 11th and another seen at East Lane, Bawdsey at dusk, on the 26th, this has now become a hard bird to see in Suffolk in recent years as they were a common winter visitor a few year back.

On the 3rd, three **Shorelark** appeared at East Lane, Bawdsey on the beach near the Martello Tower and the saline beach lagoon, then on the 24th there were joined by a fourth bird and remained to the month's end showing well. During December, **Water Pipits** were seen from Kessingland, Levington Creek, Easton Broad, Bawdsey Lagoons, East Lane with a high count of three at Carlton Marshes SWT on the 16th. Another poor winter for one of our favourite winter visitors, but **Waxwing** put in an appearance with two on the 2nd flying south over gardens at Sizewell Hall. Further sightings included four at Reydon, one at Gunton, two at Corton Sewage Works, three on the Drive at Reydon, four at Minsmere north bushes briefly, a single at Orchard Close, Woodbridge

and two seen at Might's Bridge, Southwold. A wintering **Firecrest** reported by the Old Rectory Footpath at Tattingstone on the 25th. The only **Great Grey Shrike** of the winter so far was from Brandon Heath Park on the 8th. At Sotterley Park two **Hawfinch** on the 22nd. **Snow Buntings** were in short supply in December with only 30 seen at Hollesley RSPB before flying over to Orfordness on the 24th and 30 at Kessingland and four at Southwold also on the 30th. A flyover **Lapland Bunting** heard calling at Hollesley RSPB on the 2nd. **Corn Bunting** along Brick Kiln Lane, Chelmondiston and another single at Elmsett, both on the 28th. The **Ring-necked Parakeet** was still seen at Nicholas Everett Park on the 2nd and was reported again on the 24th. Another bird was seen over Levington Marina on the 16th.

Scarcer December Sightings:

Cattle Egrets continued to be reported from Carlton Marshes SWT Reserve during the whole of December with a high count of four birds on the 2nd and 8th. A **Puffin** was seen heading south offshore at Minsmere RSPB on the 1st and another on the 3rd. A nice **Grey Phalarope** was a surprise find on West Scrape, Minsmere RSPB on the 13th and 14th. Out of nowhere a **Red-rumped Swallow** was seen briefly on the 9th at Gorleston and re-found at Kessingland on the 10th and showed very well during the afternoon, it was not located or seen on the 11th.

Photo: Andrew Moon



Red-rumped Swallow

The only **Raven** reported all month came from Pippis Ford, Needham Market on the 28th. The **Rose-coloured Starling** at Kesgrave remained faithful to Bugsby Road all month, although often very elusive. A nice rare warbler was found at Kessingland Sewage Works on the 2nd, being a **Dusky Warbler** and it remained until the 10th; the bird was very elusive and often only picked up on call.

January 2019

Weather:- January was a pretty dry month although there were 13 days where some rain fell, with 5mm being the highest recorded on the 27th. On the 24th snow was witnessed but only amounted to around 20+mm; therefore no chaos on our Suffolk's roads! Daytime temperatures only broke into double figures on 4 days; these being 10C on the 1st and 7th and 11C on the 13th and 25th. Daytime temperatures were generally below the normal average with 16 days of 5C or below, so a fairly chilly month. There were 13 nights of below zero temperatures, the lowest of these being -5C on the 29th and 31st. Actual High for the month was 6C and Actual Low 0C, so overall a pleasant January.

Birds January 2019

Whooper Swans continued to be present at Minsmere RSPB through the month reaching a maximum of eight birds between the 25th and 27th. A further six seen at Carlton Marshes on the 26th and two seen briefly at Hollesley RSPB on the 28th. The single bird stayed in the Butley Ferry area from the 2nd to 28th. The **Bewick's Swans** off Red House Lane, Leiston on the 3rd increased to 11 (nine adults and two juveniles) and remained all month. There were three reported over Melton sewage works on the 1st and seven flew up the Deben near Kingsfleet on the 10th. In addition, two at Trimley SWT on the reservoir on the 12th and two on Orfordness on the 18th.



Photo: Andrew Moon

White-fronted Goose

Greater White-fronted Geese sightings increased this month; from Hollesley RSPB, Alton Water, Aldeburgh Town Marshes with the highest count again from North Warren with 171 on the 23rd. The four **Tundra Bean Geese** that had been commuting between Hollesley and Boyton RSPB reserves and Felixstowe Ferry area in December seemed to have settled in the Felixstowe Ferry area at the beginning of January, viewed from Gulpher Road between the 1st and the 8th. There were two birds present at Leiston from the 2nd to the 8th. On the Deben Estuary, near Kingsfleet 11 birds on Corporation Marshes on the 10th. On the 12th, two individuals on Aldeburgh Town Marshes then up to four on several dates. Finally, two seen at Trimley SWT on the 23rd and 26th; could these also be the Leiston birds? A lone **Pink-footed Goose** at Hollesley RSPB on the 6th and 9th with a single bird Aldeburgh Town Marshes on the 12th and 17th, rising to two on the 18th then six on the 19th and 20th. At Carlton Marshes a flock of 1,000 over in the afternoon of the 14th was an impressive count. Trimley SWT two on 22nd. A **Pale-bellied Brent** was found with Dark-bellied Brent at Trimley SWT on the 24th and 25th with probably the same bird on the Deben Estuary on the 28th. The drake

Greater Scaup was at Alton Water again on the 1st only. The only other sighting was four seen on the sea from Dunwich on the 22nd. Off Hopton, five **Velvet Scoter** offshore on the 1st and the same birds off Gorleston Cliffs on the 4th with two south off LBO on the 7th. Still plenty of **Goosander** being reported; 10 at Minsmere RSPB and a maximum of 11 on Thorpeness Meare with birds present all month and three seen south off LBO on the 30th. On the Stour Estuary the drake **Smew** was reported again from the 13th to the 20th. Sightings of **Great White Egret** came from Dunwich, Minsmere RSPB, Bawdsey and Belstead Brook, Ipswich. There were two adult **Spoonbill** at North Warren between the 1st and 16th plus two reported from Havergate RSPB on the 30th.

A **Great Northern Diver** was on the River Orwell from Levington Creek and the Marina on the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 14th with maybe the same bird on the Stour from Stutton Mill on the 7th and 9th. A **Slavonian Grebe** on Alton Water on the 6th with further records from the Stour. Some **Shag** records from the River Orwell including one at Levington Marina, up to three at Levington Creek and three on the jetty by Orwell Bridge. There were up to two at Lake Lothing and Hamilton Docks, Lowestoft. The individual **Rough-legged Buzzard** was regularly seen around the Orfordness/Sudbourne Marshes area. Other sightings were one over Minsmere RSPB on the 7th, one over Kingsfleet on the 10th, a single juvenile reported from Reydon on the 17th and a single from Blyford on the 30th. Ring-tail **Hen Harrier** sightings this month came from Waveney Forest Mound, Minsmere RSPB, Sudbourne Marshes, Gedgrave, Hollesley RSPB, East Lane, Shingle Street, and Kirton Creek. Males were seen at Carlton Marshes on the 7th and Levington Marina on the 9th. Lots more **Caspian Gulls** reported this month and too many for full details, so just locations: Minsmere RSPB, Recycling Centre

Beccles, Slaughden, Sizewell, Hollesley RSPB and Livermere where seven came into roost on the 19th. These details give an idea of where to look for them. On the 12th, a nice first-winter **Iceland Gull** was found off the Sizewell Power Station rig and it was still being reported up to the 27th though it could be very elusive. A 3rd calendar year on roof tops of Burrell Way, Thetford on the 18th.

During January **Short-eared Owl** sightings came from Sudbourne Marshes, Carlton Marshes SWT, Waveney Forest Mound and Aldeburgh Town Marshes. Good to hear the **Lesser-spotted Woodpecker** was heard at Santon Downham on the 9th, although no further reports. The four **Shorelark** continued to be present the whole month at East Lane, Bawdsey where they gave exceptional views for birders and photographers.



Photo: Craig Holden

Water Pipit sightings continued from Carlton Marshes SWT, Levington Creek, Covehithe and Dunwich. At the start of the month more **Waxwings** arrived in Suffolk; initially four at Colneis Road/Rosemary Avenue, Felixstowe on the 1st then further sightings around the county at Lark Road, Stutton, 14 at Minsmere, up to 27 at Orchard Close, Woodbridge, 15 at Leiston Leisure Centre,

two at Carlton Colville and a single at Charsfield Garage. Further sightings came from Westhall Road, Lowestoft, The Drive, Reydon, singles at Buxhall Village Hall and Sylvester Road, Leiston and two near Tesco Martlesham. In Bury St. Edmunds there were two by the bus station and nearby four on Tavern Lane. In Ipswich four on Marlborough Road and two at Lattice Avenue, up to 22 at Hines Road and likely the same birds with 22 along Defoe Road, rising to 26 on the last day of the month.

A couple more **Firecrest** reported this month; always great to see these little stunners with sightings from Minsmere on the 2nd and 5th and Trimley SWT on the 23rd and 25th. In the Brecks a **Great Grey Shrike** was seen at Santon Downham near the railway line from the 23rd to 31st. Another reported from Mayday Farm and Brandon Heath Park on the 30th. Two **Tree Sparrow** were present on feeders at Reydon Smere on the 24th. The **Twite** were regularly seen along the beach between Dunwich/Walberswick this month with the highest count being 20 on the 28th. At Tattingstone Place two **Mealy Redpoll** on the 7th. Two **Hawfinch** seen on a few dates in the dell area of Sotterley Park. The single **Corn Bunting** was still at Elmsett on the 1st only while at Erwarton opposite the Queens Head pub 20 recorded on the 26th and seven on 22nd. At Kessingland Beach there were 32 **Snow Bunting** on the 1st with further sightings in the month. Reports also came from Orfordness with 16 on the 12th, 16 at Covehithe on the 14th and three at Dunwich.

The **Ring-necked Parakeet** was seen again in the Lowestoft area on the 1st and 2nd plus four birds seen at Tuddenham Avenue, Ipswich on the 4th, two over Woodbridge/Belvedere Road, Ipswich on the 24th and a single in Ipswich Old Cemetery on the 26th.

Scarcer January Sightings:

A nice **Black Brant** was found with 900 Brent Geese in the Kingsfleet/Falkenham/Felixstowe Ferry area on the 20th and was still present on the 31st. A drake **Green-winged Teal** was found on the Dunwich shore pools on the 4th and remained until the 7th, though it could be very elusive at times, disappearing for long periods in vegetation. **Cattle Egret** continued to be reported from Suffolk again this month, these being from Carlton Marshes SWT Reserve with a high count of three birds on the 19th. They were often seen early morning heading off in a southerly direction. These were tracked down when two were found at Walnut Tree Farm, Benacre between the 4th and 15th and a report of one on the 29th. The tatty looking **Rose-coloured Starling** remained faithful to Bugsby Road, Kesgrave until the 11th, then strangely no further sightings which seemed strange considering we are still only in January. **Raven** sightings reported from four locations this month.



Photo: Ian Porter

Siberian Chiffchaff

A smart **Siberian Chiffchaff** was found along Belstead Brook, east of Bobbit's Lane, Ipswich on the 19th and showed well on and off until the 30th. A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was a surprise catch at Burgh Castle on the 6th.

JNCC Urban Nesting Gull Surveys

Seabirds Count: Britain and Ireland's 4th Breeding Seabird Census

Survey Timings – 23rd April – 7th May

Since 1969 there have been periodic censuses of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland. The last census was completed in 2002; due to the time that has passed, it is important another survey takes place. Seabirds Count was developed by the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) partnership and is being coordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Its goal is to gather vital data on the breeding numbers of seabirds, with the aim of understanding how distributions and populations have changed. Survey work started in 2015 and aims to be completed by the end of the 2020 breeding season.

As part of the Seabirds Count census, volunteers across the whole of the UK will be participating in surveys of breeding seabirds during the spring/summer months of 2019 and 2020. During these seasons (late March – mid June) there will be surveys of urban nesting gulls, taking place in many of our towns and cities. These urban surveys will play a vital role in understanding how the UK population of both Herring and Lesser Black-backed gulls are faring. Herring gull numbers in natural breeding sites such as cliffs, rocky coasts and moorland declined by a third between 1986 and 2015. By conducting surveys of urban nesting gulls, we can understand whether these declines at natural sites are a product of these birds moving into urban areas, or if the declines are more widespread.

Volunteers will mainly be using two types of survey method, one will be surveying roof tops from a vantage point, the other will be from the ground. These surveys will only happen once at each site, unless the surveyor perceives there to be an issue with the initial count.

Urban Gulls: Survey methods

Given the expansion in the distribution of urban nesting gulls over the last 15-20 years, an alternative method of estimating the UK

breeding population is necessary. This is what the second part of the surveys aims to do. This new method will consist of surveying a sample of 1km squares in urban areas, within each SMP administrative area. The sample will be a stratified random sample, based on the number urban squares, and the ratio of strata, found within each administrative area.

Square Survey Method

For the sample survey will be counts of herring and lesser black-backed gulls from ground-based surveys. Counts of lesser black-backed gulls and herring gulls will need to be reported on separately, for each 1km square.

If you sign up to survey a square, a link to an online map will be provided to you by your regional coordinator, this link works best on a mobile device. If you wish to print off your survey area this link: <http://www.streetmap.co.uk/> will be more useful. All you need to do is enter the grid reference of the square you are surveying.

I need all the help that I can get, I have 80 random 1 km squares to try and cover so I would appreciate your help with this survey. Please contact Mick Wright at kupe1515@sky.com

Further details at www.sogonline.org.uk/urban-nesting-gull-survey/



Photo: Gi Grieco



Kingfisher

Photo: Matt Whitcombe

Val Lockwood

Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen

Sunday, 2nd December 2018

Leader: Ivan Lockwood

The rain stopped and the sky cleared and there was a beautiful light by the time we met up in the car park. After running through health and safety Ivan said that we would make our way across to the feeders. A Mistle Thrush was the first bird to be seen, quickly followed by Greenfinches, a Song Thrush and a female Reed Bunting. A few Siskin were picked up feeding on Ash trees and after a Buzzard flew over flushing the Siskin, we counted about 20. It was one of those halcyon days when birds kept appearing and

I struggled to keep the species list up to date, and look for new birds and those already called, at the same time. Amongst other species seen, there was a flock of Redwing, Yellowhammers, Blackbirds, Lesser Redpoll, mixed tit flocks, Dunnocks, Goldfinches and Bullfinches to add to the growing list, before we decided to move on.

The next stop was made by the sailing lake where we picked up a good array of duck species including Gadwall, Shoveler,

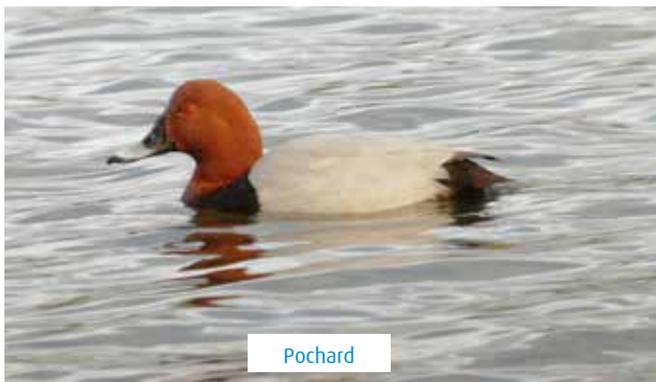
Teal, Wigeon, Tufted Duck and a few, much admired, Goldeneye. It was pleasing to see a good number of Lapwing which were gregarious and very mobile, once one bird flew they all seemed to take flight, making their presence known very vocally.

We moved on towards Bernard's Hide putting up a very startled Green Woodpecker and added two Fieldfare to our bird list. An obliging Kingfisher perched very close to the hide and a few of us were treated to fleeting views of a second Kingfisher and a Peregrine which flew low over the water in front of the hide. A comment was made a bit later that it was probably one of the quietest few moments there had been on a SOG outdoor meeting as we all silently admired the Kingfisher which seemed content on sitting on a branch beside the hide! There were also a few Egyptian Geese and one Pink-footed Goose which appeared to be injured. A Grey Heron and Little Grebe were competing for fish which seemed to be in plentiful supply still (despite it being December), as we could see a few of them leaping out of the water. In the vegetation around the margins of the pool three Snipe were visible. Our next stop was Bess's Hide. On the way we saw a Nuthatch and Marsh Tit on a fallen tree stump. Another two species were seen at Bess's Hide, Little Egret and Greater Black-backed Gull.

As there was an event on at Lackford Lakes late morning and daylight was of the essence we decided to move on to Lakenheath. After lunch we assembled in the car park before heading towards the river bank of the Little Ouse passing close to a Kestrel which was hovering nearby. As we stopped to look through our scopes and check out some gulls opposite, a Great Spotted Woodpecker flew

towards the first bank of trees. Of note there were two Yellow-legged Gulls picked out from the many gulls on the pool and fields on the opposite side of the river. Further along we saw a total of three Stonechat and a Red Kite flying over was a real bonus. We heard a Cetti's Warbler call from the reed bed and saw the first Meadow Pipit of the day. As we approached the Joist Fen viewpoint a Great White Egret flew across to the other side of the river, the first of several sightings and we eventually were able to see three at the same time and at least four in total. Also of note were approximately 80 Stock Doves flushed by a Sparrowhawk and there were numerous sightings of Marsh Harriers, with at least eight seen at any one time and a minimum rough count of 15 birds roosting. We heard Water Rails and a few members had fleeting glances of a Bittern. Another highlight was when a Peregrine was seen, and then another was called, and eventually a third was picked up; two females and a male in some territorial display. The last spectacle of the day that we were treated to was a murmuration of Starlings which ended a great day magnificently. Thanks to Ivan for leading the trip, Adam for doing a recce on Lackford Lakes and the many members who turned out to support the meeting especially those who stayed until dusk.

Photo: Gi Grieco



Pochard

Lower Holbrook

Saturday, December 8th 2018

Leader: Steve Fryett



Redshank

Photo: David Bordenick

the perimeter of the rather splendid Royal Hospital School grounds via the sewage works. Unfortunately, we recorded nothing at this site and only a few brief glimpses of a Redwing and Mistle Thrush further along. Back on the river wall we noted a few Brent Geese, Wigeon and a male and female Pintail now on the high water mark. A considerable number of Curlew were now roosting in the Eel Grass, noisily making their presence known. Now facing a fierce side wind, it was extremely difficult to view across the river with only one Great Crested Grebe noted as most species had decided to hunker down somewhere on the Essex side. The old river defence posts surrounding the west side of Holbrook Bay had become a jostling game to find a post amongst the waders that included mainly Turnstone with Grey Plover, Dunlin and a few Knot. Although windy it was a bright day that probably enticed out a rather tatty Red Admiral around an area of Ivy. With high tide almost upon us we decide to move to Alton Water.

We reconvened at the Tattingstone Wonder carpark and headed to the hides in Rabbets Wood. Here the feeders supported a number of Chaffinch, Blue, Great and Coal Tits together with a couple of Grey Squirrels. From the hides the total count of Great Crested Grebes was an impressive 145. Also noted was a pair of Goldeneye, quite a few Tufted Duck along with two male Pochard and three Gadwall. Having failed to find Godwits on the river Stour it was a surprise to see two Black-tailed fly past the hide. With ominous dark clouds approaching we decided to finish the meeting here.

A strong south westerly was prevalent for the last outdoor meeting of the year. With eight assembled members we set off from the Lower Holbrook car park heading past the reedbed to the Holbrook Creek on the river Stour. One had to say it was very quiet except for a charm of Goldfinches preening in the safety of the scrubby reedbed. The tide was more than halfway up as we looked over the concrete wall to find a few Redshank and Wigeon with a Kingfisher located on top of an outfall. We decided to head west along

Tollesbury Wick

Saturday, 2nd February 2019

Leader: Ashley Gooding

A sharp frost and a biting north-westerly wind greeted us in the car park as we prepared for our visit to this Essex Wildlife Trust reserve. I was very pleasantly surprised by the turnout, 12 members, and after a brief introduction to the day ahead and H&S briefing we set off towards the reserve.

I had spent a lot of time late last year trying to access tide time tables for the new year so that the meeting would coincide with a high tide and I could let Gi know what date I would be doing it. This site is a mine of useful info, www.tides4fishing.com/uk and publishes the whole year for free. This



Dunlin

trip coincided with high tide just after 10 am and the creeks were already filling up as we walked along the sea defences. A few Wigeon and Teal were feeding along the edges and a couple of Curlew gave their evocative call as they flew away from our approach as did two Fieldfare on the opposite side. A Buzzard was battling against the wind towards Old Hall Marshes as we stopped to see what we might find on Tollesbury fleet - there were a few Little Grebe and a nice group of ten Red-breasted Merganser. We stopped again to view some shingle bars where we could see waders roosting but the windy conditions made it very difficult although we did manage to find Avocet, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover and Dunlin and many roosting Shelduck.

Some of the group had turned their attention to the geese feeding on the marshes and were sure that there were some Greater White-fronted Geese amongst the Greylags. The lighting conditions were far from favourable so we walked a couple of hundred yards or so to get a better viewing angle. Sure enough there were six White-fronts and they could well have been a family party as there were some juveniles amongst them. Looking across Tollesbury fleet we picked up a male Marsh Harrier, a female soon joined it and they had a mid-air scrap before breaking off - two more females were also spotted in the direction of Mersea Island.

We then moved off to Abberton reservoir and had lunch there - this would also give us the opportunity to use the facilities and

check the info boards for what was about. From the car park we saw Buzzard and Kestrel before walking out onto the Layer de la Haye causeway to see what we could find amongst the commoner species of duck. The first bird of note was a Black-necked Grebe busily diving for food and there were many Teal, Wigeon, a single Black-Tailed Godwit and a few Goldeneye with some of the males displaying to females. We crossed over to the other side of the road and began sifting through the large numbers of Tufted Duck and Pochard for the recently present Ring-necked Duck. We found a superb adult male Scaup, two first winter males and three females but after much diligent searching we could not find the Ring necked although it was seen a few days after.

We then drove to Billets Farm and walked to the new viewing screen. From here we had another three Black-necked Grebe, two male Marsh Harriers hunting in the distance, ten Pintail, a very distant Ruff in flight and I made a count of three hundred and forty Coot feeding close in plus all the usual duck species. Behind us there were thirty plus Lapwing with three Golden Plover.

With the light fading we drove to the Layer Breton causeway, from here we picked up two Great Egret in flight, a single female Goosander (there were nearly a hundred a fortnight ago), three red-head Smew and lastly a very distant male.

Many thanks to all who attended in the somewhat trying, cold conditions but as usual, good fun was had by all.



Falkenham

Saturday, 9th February 2019

Leaders: Gi Grieco
and Dave Pearsons

There were 14 members assembled for this popular meeting although they were surprised to find they had two new leaders. Unfortunately Justin and Ellie couldn't attend as Justin had been poorly with flu so Dave and I stepped in. The day was bright, but extremely windy with strong gusts, so around the village where there was more shelter a number of birds were singing, giving us a feel of the coming spring. It was pleasing to hear Robin, Wren, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Greenfinch. The latter showed well at the top of the tree and we could admire this species that has dwindled so much and is less frequently encountered in our gardens. It was also great to see the courtship display flight of a Blue Tit, a glide on outstretched wings on to a branch.

In the churchyard we saw a Coal Tit busily feeding around some Lime trees while the floor was a carpet of Snowdrops with patches of Winter Aconites. Behind us on the arable fields a covey of Red-legged Partridges ran along and we noted the first of many Hares seen in the area on our walk.

On the walk down to the river the wind made it difficult to hear any other small birds but we did catch snippets of Skylarks singing and a Meadow Pipit flew over. A Buzzard was perched on the edge of a copse. Scanning one of the fields we saw a nice flock of Golden Plover. At the river we scanned and saw a number of Dunlin, with a line of white on the far shore indicating a group of Avocets. The gusty wind made using a telescope difficult to view more

Photo: Gi Grieco



Blackbird

distant birds. Along the shore there were a few Redshank, Grey Plover and some Knot. We decided to walk down towards Felixstowe to see if we could see the Brent Goose flock as there had been a Black Brant within it recently. We soon realised they weren't close by and eventually saw the flock fly, up near the ferry, so decided it wasn't worth going that far. We did watch a male Kestrel hunting along the river wall, amazed at its flying skills in the wind and some saw a Sparrowhawk flash by. We backtracked and headed to Kirton Creek noting Stonechat along the dyke, Rock Pipit on the saltmarsh, a Marsh Harrier flew across the river and a big flock of Lapwing and Golden Plover in a field while a Grey Heron flew over. At the creek, again large numbers of Dunlin amongst the waders already noted with additions of Curlew, Turnstone and Black-tailed Godwits. Several duck also present that included Teal, Wigeon, Mallard and Gadwall.

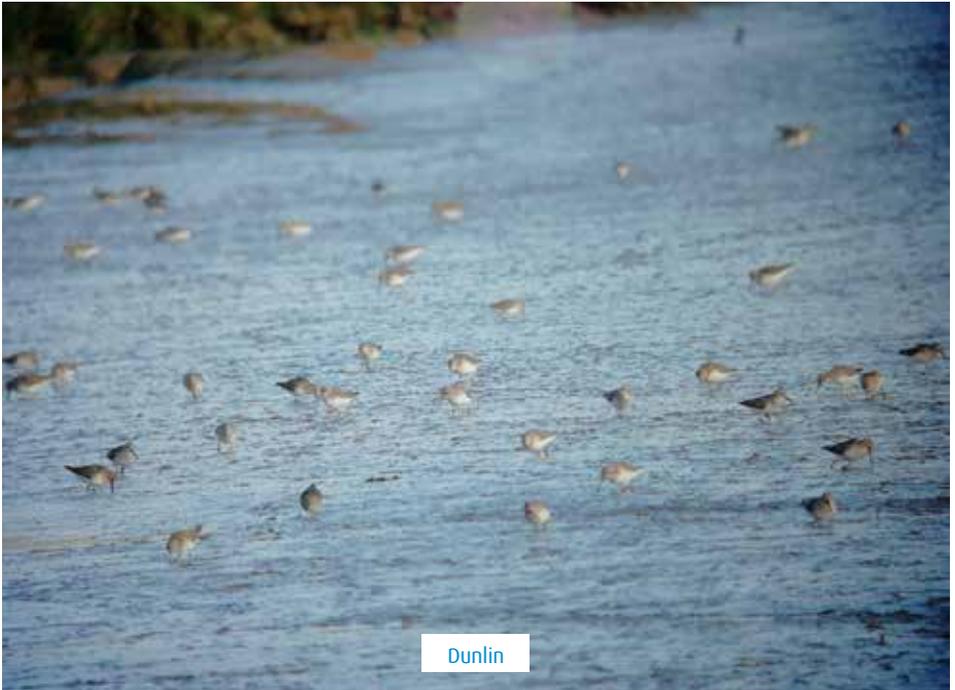
Heading back inland, small bird numbers were low but at a maize strip a group of House Sparrows were located and with patience also a number of Yellowhammers plus one Brambling. A pair of Buzzards circled over a wood and then we made it back to the cars, glad to get out of the wind. The Falkenham trip is a long walk but coupled with the strong winds made it hard work! Some called it a day while others decided to carry on, heading to the Strand on the River Orwell to have lunch. A walk under the bridge to get some shelter while scanning revealed up to three Red-breasted

Mergansers, three Little Grebes, some Goldeneye and eventually three Shags. One of the Shags had a lovely green sheen on its head and, with a Cormorant nearby, showed the contrast in size between the two species. A Peregrine flew in close so we had great views then a bit later a bit of territorial display with the male carrying a bird in its talons followed by the female.

Our next stop was to go and see the Corn Bunting flock at Erwarton. With no parking near the site, Dave and Val were dropped off to go recce whilst the others drove on to find parking. Parking up and walking ten minutes back down the road the recce party had been unsuccessful only noting a Buzzard hunting in the field. We'd hoped Dave, known as 'the Corn Bunting whisperer' after his exploits on a birding trip to Extremadura, would have tracked them down. As we watched part of a flock of around 100

Linnets, looking back, a flock of larger birds flew up on to the telegraph wires; a flock of 21 Corn Buntings allowing great views of this scarce bird in Suffolk. With the light starting to go we decided to finish the day at Alton Water where a Red-throated Diver had been present near Lemons Hill Bridge. This was picked up distantly on a bank - not often this species is encountered like that. There were good numbers of Great Crested Grebes along with Tufted Ducks, Pochard and many Coot. Looking east, a large group of Cormorants roosting on a sand spit with several Greylag Geese and the odd Goldeneye in the water. One last scan revealed a male Mandarin Duck feeding amongst the Coot and Mallard.

Overall an enjoyable, if somewhat tiring day. Thanks to Dave for helping and wishing Justin well and look forward to his and Ellie's next trip later in the year at Trimley.



Dunlin

Photo: Gi Grieco

Council for 2019

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Bird Recorders

North-east Area Recorder:

Andrew Green, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP
Tel: 07766 900063 Email: bird-ne@sns.org.uk

South-east Area Recorder:

Scott Mayson, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY
Tel: 01394 385595 Email: bird-se@sns.org.uk

West Area Recorder:

Colin Jakes, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN
Tel: 01284 702215 Email: bird-w@sns.org.uk

Memberships

c/o SNS, The Museum, High Street, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 3QH



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Who we are

- Founded in 1973 by a group of Suffolk birdwatchers
- Associated with the Suffolk Naturalists' Society
- SOG remains an independent birding group and is a registered charity

What we do

Networking

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

Media

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

Trips and talks

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



Protecting birds

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



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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