

Summer 2018 No.193



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover photograph: American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) by Gavin Durrant.

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Editorial

Welcome to this edition of The Harrier. There are a number of field trip reports within. These are an important aspect of the group's activities, a way of meeting up and socialising with other members, a way to get feedback and suggestions for the group all while enjoying the birds of the county and elsewhere. As promised in the last editorial there is an article on the two indoor meetings covering recognition of both, birders who have played an important role in Suffolk ornithology and the next generation coming through. One of the outdoor field trip reports covers a SOG trip to Carlton Marshes; this reserve has become a focus of attention not only for the wonderful area it is and its ongoing expansion and development but also due to a visitor from across the Atlantic. Carlton Marsh warden, Matt Gooch, gives an update on all the activities that have gone on recently there.

It also emerged that this visitor, an American Bittern, had been photographed a week earlier at the end of March, meaning it was present on the SOG trip – a pity we didn't come across it at the time! At another SOG indoor talk, Edward Jackson discussed bird families and environmental costs of travelling, so has put together an article on further details after receiving a request for information.

A big topic of conversation, mostly of concern, has been the cold weather earlier in the year and the impact of some bird populations noted since. Species like Cetti's Warbler have been hit hard, with Minsmere noting a dramatic drop from over 90 pairs to just five. Inside is a report of some garden observations during the 'beast from the east' event. Another report on garden observations, this one over a period of time, makes for depressing reading. Whether through weather or development, the birds of the county are suffering and many species have been noted in decline. Birds are also affected in other ways, as shown in a third observation article, this one of the disturbance of Brent Geese. This article's aim is to make people aware particularly when out in the field.

Finally there has been a lot of news with the new privacy law, GDPR. Within is what SOG has put in place to comply with the new law.

Gi Grieco



Green Woodpecker

Photo: David Borderick

Observation on Brent Goose disturbance

On Saturday 5th May 2018, I was out in Holbrook Bay on the Stour Estuary counting Dark-bellied Brent Geese as part of a co-ordinated venture across the Stour and the Orwell. It has long been known that Brents can be found on the Stour in significant numbers at this time of year. The combined total on the day was 1,733 birds (1,595 on the Stour). Standing on a seawall in May, listening to Reed Warblers in the borrow dykes fresh in from sub-Saharan Africa whilst scouting Brents that are still 6000km from home, leaves me in awe of the natural world.

It is well known that Brent Geese are particularly sensitive to disturbance. Their intolerance of low-flying aircraft, with helicopters in particular, being well researched. An excellent summary of the issues they face was produced by Allan Drewitt in his Birds Network Information Note - Disturbance Effects of aircrafts on Birds (1999). Within this he references Owens (1977) which stated that *"Brent geese on the Essex coast were put to flight by any aircraft up to 1.5km away when at altitudes below 500m"*.

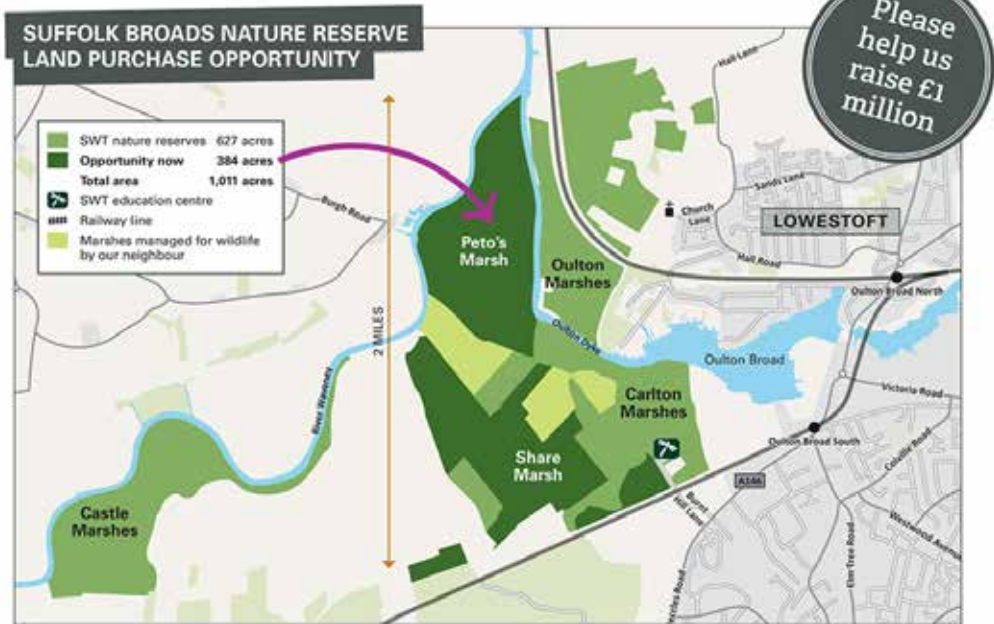
Whilst counting a small group (c.50) Brents close in to Holbrook Creek, my attention was drawn to a fast-moving speed-boat on the south shore of the estuary in the main channel, just off the Wrabness beach huts.

Given the significant wake it caused, the 8 knot speed limit was clearly being breached and the engine noise was enough to cause a proportion of the flock I was watching to become alert (heads up/calling). It is a common misconception that disturbance in ornithological terms is the Flight Initiation Distance (FID). That is the last resort. What I witnessed was the Alert Distance (AD) - the distance at which a bird(s) changes behaviour in response to a disturbance source. Checking the OS map and GIS later on, I estimated the boat was over 2km from the flock!

Whilst I recognise that this is just an anecdotal observation, it does serve to re-emphasise this species sensitivity and I felt it warranted wider attention.

Owens,N.W. (1977). Responses of wintering Brent Geese to human disturbance. *Wildfowl* 28:5-14





Matt Gooch

The expanding profile of Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve

Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve for many years was referred to as the Broads in miniature and had seen very few breeding and passage waders; prior to 2013 not even producing a single pair of Lapwing. The reserve started to expand in 2009 with large land purchases at Oulton Marshes and soon after smaller extensions at Carlton Marshes where habitat creation projects started to show results. The reserve is great for a number of warblers and has sustained its Cetti's population while others have been lost around the coast as well as being a great place to hear Grasshopper Warblers with 10 territories being held this year and it now sustains high productivity of Lapwing pairs and Redshank with the first ever breeding Avocets this year too.

The vision for the reserve has always been to expand, but for many years this never seemed possible, only a pipe dream spoken about by the late Derek Moore when he was with Suffolk Wildlife Trust, many people recalling standing looking at Peto's Marsh saying "What if?"

In 2016 this pipe dream became a reality when the owners agreed to sell and not only sell Peto's Marsh but the entire land holding to include Share Marsh and the upland fields. It was time for action and with the support of the Esmee Fairburn Foundation who stepped in with their biggest land loan ever ensured the opportunity was not to be missed and the reserve profile rose with press coverage including BBC Countryfile and the start of a £1 million Appeal supported by Sir David Attenborough.

The appeal was rolling and with the plans and paper work being pulled together it was always about momentum and then.....

A massive boost to the reserves publicity came on the 7th April when a first for the reserve happened, the reserve played host to well-known birder Robert Wilton wedding photos where a bride, groom and some 30 birders wearing wedding suits and wellies stood looking over the scrapes joking about finding a rarity but the best to be spotted was a Little Ringed Plover.

It was later that evening at the wedding reception that panic struck when on Twitter, Gavin Durrant, one of our volunteer wardens posted a picture of what he thought was his first shot of a Bittern on the reserve. It was in fact an American Bittern and this is from when the story unfolded.

The next day visitors were arriving from 4am in the morning from all over the UK to attempt to see this rare visitor to East Anglia let alone the UK. As the weeks unfolded the American Bittern made itself at home with interactions with 2 Eurasian Bitterns and for a Bittern was quite willing to feed and display out in the open areas of Share Marsh. It attracted people from Germany, Luxembourg, France, Holland, Spain, Portugal and Poland as well as visitors from all over the UK to Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve in Suffolk, some for their first visit here. This was a fantastic opportunity to discuss our plans and with the support of our volunteers it was possible to sustain a well organised and friendly twitch for the next 5 weeks. The American Bittern presence raised over £4000 in donations to the Suffolk Broads Appeal, but its legacy goes much further than that in the fact that it has put Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve on the map and people left with a real excitement about what the future holds.

The profile of the reserve continued to expand with the announcement on the 23rd

April that the project at Carlton Marshes was supported by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund of £4.06 million which was the pinnacle of two and half years work in applications and planning permissions. This grant is one of the biggest Heritage Lottery Grants ever given to the Wildlife Trusts only second to the Great Fen Project.

This made the news once more with articles in the local press, radio, Anglia News, BBC Look East and even into the National press with articles in the Times and the Daily Telegraph.

This is only part of the project funds, which total around £8 million and will see the Suffolk Wildlife Trusts biggest land purchase ever, creating our biggest nature reserve of over 1000 acres of land.

The plans will now see around 15 times the amount of wet grassland scrapes that already exist and attract a number of breeding waders, passage waders, wildfowl and an ever increasing number of rarities. The reserve will be further enhanced with areas of Fen Meadow rich in plants and invertebrates, as well as warblers, it will also see the creation of the Broads biggest reedbed which will aim to be home to Bitterns, Bearded tits, Marsh Harriers and Common Cranes with much of the design work following work done at RSPB Lakenheath Fen.

For the visitor to Carlton Marshes, a new visitor centre will welcome new and old visitors with an improved network of paths and new viewing structures will give everybody the opportunity to have a wildlife experience on the reserve.

The aim to create East Anglia's most accessible reserve is starting to unravel in front of us and with the support of Heritage Lottery Fund, public donations and a number of other funders the project will begin on the ground early in 2019 and will be completed

by 2022. This will be a reserve whose profile will expand more and more as people visit again and again and we will aim to inspire the next wave of keen bird watchers and wildlife enthusiasts who will visit Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve as one of the top reserves to visit in East Anglia, please watch this space.

The funds are still needed and our aim to raise £1 million from public donation is still in full flow and very close to our target, at the time of writing this we have just gone over the £934,000 mark so every penny still counts and if you have already donated, thank you or if you can **please donate at www.suffolkbroads.org.uk or phone 01473 890089** or even **text SUFF10 £10 to 70070**.

Steve Fryett

Observations in Melton during the “Beast from the East”

During late February and early March 2018, the ***Coriolis effect*** [movement of air] was responsible for a cascade of cold weather events across the UK, ultimately resulting in the “Beast from the East”. Fortunately, we do not see sustained easterly weather during the winter very often so the “Beast from the East” was an opportunity to observe avian movements at home and nearby with temperatures at a sustained low level not seen since 1991.

Monday 26th February

The “Beast from the East” established itself over East Anglia and temperatures had dropped to below freezing both day and night. A Robin in the garden singing during most nights [a sign of milder winters?] had stopped and the Starlings nest-prospecting in a neighbour’s roof had disappeared. Local Blue Tits, Great Tits, Robins and Dunnocks continued to use our feeders but the Blackbirds had left the garden.

Tuesday 27th February

Put out some bread and scraps only for the Gulls to “home in” and clear it away in 30 seconds, all Black-headed with one Herring Gull. Plenty of Blue and Great Tits with the usual Coal Tit, Dunnock and Robins still feeding in the garden. A Great Tit was

trying to get water from a frozen bird bath so replenished with some warm fresh water only for the water to freeze over within half an hour.

Wednesday 28th February

I had a snowy walk into Woodbridge via the River Deben footpath observing that most estuarine species had left; just a few hardy waders and duck remained. No changes to the species noted in the garden today.

Thursday 1st March

Today I went for a walk north of Melton that takes me to the fishing lakes at Wilford Bridge then along the river Deben to Dock Lane. Behind St Andrews place, in the village, a footpath runs through a wooded area that remained fairly free of snow and provided a chance of food for at least five Song Thrush and a few Blackbirds. The fishing lakes were still partially free of ice but just one Little Grebe was present. On the River Deben from Wilford Bridge to Dock Lane the mudflats had frozen and resembled arctic sea ice although the main river continued to flow without ice. There were just a handful of Lapwing and Redshank, three Dunlin and a Curlew in an area normally supporting thousands of estuarine birds at this time of year. Also noted was

a single Fieldfare that landed on the iced mudflats and appeared to be drinking unfrozen pockets of saltwater before quickly flying off. Back at home a Blackbird was observed trying to get food from a seed feeder so I provided some apples and laid them out for him but he never found them. Once again Great and Blue tit, Dunnock and Robin were all present in the garden. No Coal Tit seen today.

Friday 2nd March

First thing this morning was to observe two thrush species partially hidden in the shrubbery sitting quietly. These soon revealed themselves to be Fieldfare, not recorded in the garden during the four years we have been here, and were soon tucking into the apples. Clearing away a few crusts left over from breakfast to the garden quickly had the Black-headed Gulls dropping in together with a Common Gull. The Gulls are now getting very brazen, normally they are somewhat tentative about landing in the garden. Brought some more apples as it did not take long for the Fieldfares to devour the first lot - they are a domineering species and are probably keeping other thrush species

away. Nevertheless, also noted in the garden today was a Song Thrush and to my amazement a female Blackcap which I have never recorded in the winter before. Getting worried about the Coal Tits as they have not been seen for three days now. Another observation is that no Wrens have been seen in the garden during this cold spell.

Saturday 3rd March

Despite more overnight snow, this morning there are signs of a thaw. In the garden two Fieldfare are still present with another surprise sighting of four Goldfinch albeit briefly, the first finches all week. I have noted the lack of corvid movements over Melton this week, as they breed locally and there is a roost opposite Dock Lane on the River Deben, and we are located on their flyway. Also surprising was a second Blackcap, a male appeared feeding in the winter Honeysuckle. The Blackcaps are an interesting conundrum and I suspect they moved in with the weather. Finally, as dusk fell a Blackbird was in full song, a sure sign that the "Beast from the East" had passed away.



Fieldfares

Photo: Andrew Moon



Spotted Flycatcher

Peter Rutt

Garden changes

It is a cold dull January afternoon and I'm doing my RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch in my Elmswell garden. I moved here 19 years ago and 'doing the birdwatch' has been a family event as my two sons eagerly assisted me over the years, and now they have 'flown the nest' it is a solo event as I like the continuity of doing annual surveys. Over the years I recorded a good few species, usually making it into the teens – and this is on a strict interpretation of the rules, no dodgy flyover birds here, they all 'use' my garden. This year I got to six species, not even recording Robin or Collared Dove. I felt underwhelmed and slightly depressed. I've noticed a big drop in garden bird numbers as Elmswell develops.

When I moved here to my village centre house in 1999 I could not see any other dwelling out of my bedroom windows. I happily filled my Big Garden Birdwatch form in as having a 'rural' garden, no way could I contemplate calling it urban. Today I can see 25 houses built in the last 15 years. Green spaces have been infilled, houses built behind houses and over the last year a large bungalow has been built on the site of an old orchard. The rotten apples which used to attract Fieldfare and Redwing are gone and the old rotting tree where the Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers would sit and drum also gone.

When we moved here we had Fox and Rabbits wander through the garden, Mallards would nest regularly and give us anthropomorphic anxiety as a brood of 22 ducklings would reduce to about 2. A Spotted Flycatcher built a nest in early 2000s, it didn't breed but provided a moment of ornithological excitement. One winter a Moorhen decided my feeding station was better than the local pond. Summer evenings would be enlivened by the newly flying Tawny Owl chicks diving from the tall trees in the Grange into the orchard to hunt. Since 2013 they have bred only once, in 2016. There was a rookery in the tall trees opposite. There were plenty of nests to see, loud cawing on March mornings, the odd excitement of a fledgling Rook in the garden after its maiden flight thinking 'what now' as its parents walked around encouraging it. The rookery still exists, a shadow of its former self. The village Rooks have moved out to the edges as the gardens and green spaces disappear. Carrion Crows have replaced them. Rooks are country birds full of interest and a bright sheen of colour in sunlight, I grew up in south London in the 1970s and I had Crows there, they are urban black. I now have several cats who think I provide a theme park for them in my garden, cats like to use my cover plants to hide and ambush.

What do my 19 summers' of wildlife-friendly gardening have to show as a success? I have Frogs, a lot of Frogs. I still have a Hedgehog on summers evenings, he can come into my garden, but has to leave via the main road as my new neighbour has put in an 1.8m high close-boarded fence with concrete gravel board that the Hedgehog finds impenetrable. I still have him but for how long? I have the usual butterflies, but not the Skippers and Ringlets I used to. I can look up and see from time to time a Little Egret or a Red Kite gracefully glide over. I can hear the Muntjac barking at

night in the village. They cannot enter my garden anymore after the new fences were erected. This is a mixed blessing as it has to be said that it is hard to love a creature that can devastate your garden overnight (and I remember the thickets at Lackford Lakes full of Nightingales only 15 years ago) – I think the Muntjac has a lot to answer for there.

Elmswell itself is being much developed; now the green spaces are infilled, the developers are taking fields at the edges. Where I can now find Little Owl and a winter flock of Yellowhammers will become housing in due course. The archaeologists have been and gone, the diggers will be here before too long.

To avoid the charge of hypocrisy I confess that I work in construction, I am a quantity surveyor, my living comes from people building houses. In my defence I work almost exclusively on brownfield sites and many of the buildings I work on have 'Black Redstart friendly roofs' (although I doubt if Black Redstarts find them ideal). I am very aware of the pressure of housing and the cost of homes. I have children, they need a home, I don't advocate 'NIMBY' approaches, but I fear that unless planning laws are implemented with a respect for nature we will lose the biodiversity that is right under our nose and not be aware of it until it is too late. We speak of the problem we have connecting children with nature. I had no such problem with my children, but anyone moving into my house in the future will find that a much harder thing to do.

I don't especially look forward to next year's garden birdwatch. I will change the classification of my garden from 'rural' to 'urban' with a heavy heart, for that is what I fear it has become.

'Aussie birds': a few further thoughts

I received several enquiries for more information following my Indoor Meeting talk on Australian Birds in Stowmarket on 26 April, so I thought it might be helpful to share a few details on a couple of the topics I covered.

I gave an overview of the Australian bird fauna and referred to some fairly recent work on the evolution and diversification of bird families. I showed a circular graphic, based on DNA analysis, listing bird families in relation to each other. This suggests that Swifts are much more closely related to Hummingbirds than they are to Swallows and Martins. Another nice example of this 'convergent evolution' is Australian Robins and European Robins: they look very similar, but their families are quite far apart genetically. Here's a link to a summary of a paper that was originally published in the journal *Nature*:

<https://phys.org/news/2012-10-family-tree-birds-reveals-evolution.html>

At the end of the talk I said that although visits to faraway places for birding or family reasons were always very satisfying, they do come with associated environmental costs – particularly if air travel is involved.

For some time it's been possible to 'offset' the CO₂ associated with air miles (and other forms of emissions as well). For individuals, this involves making small personal contributions to projects around the world that help local communities invest in renewable energy technologies, tree planting and other positive actions.

For more details of the principles behind this and the different types of certified projects on offer, take a look at the Carbon Footprint website:

<https://www.carbonfootprint.com/>



Photo: Lee Woods

Keeping in touch with you

As no doubt you're aware, the General Data Protection Regulation came into force on 25 May 2018. We will continue to contact you by post in relation to membership matters and to send you *The Harrier*. However, we require your consent to contact you on other matters related to SOG activities: for example advising you about unforeseen changes to Indoor or Outdoor Meetings, promoting special events, requests to contribute to bird surveys or other information relating to birds and birding in Suffolk and elsewhere. We hope you will be happy for us to keep in touch for these reasons!

Council agreed that the most effective ways to reach all members - while minimising outlay - were:

1. an initial email request with a digital consent form
2. a paper consent form sent out with this Summer edition of *The Harrier*

Many thanks if you have already replied via email. If you don't use email or haven't already responded, please complete and return the enclosed form as soon as possible, using the reply-paid envelope. If we already hold data for a means of communication you no longer wish us to use, this will be deleted from the SOG Membership List spreadsheet.

Our **Personal Data Protection Policy** and **Privacy Statement** can be found on the SOG website: <http://www.sogonline.org.uk/data-protection/>



Tree Pipit

Photo: John Richardson

First Indoor Meetings of 2018

Our first two indoor events of the year were at a new venue, the University of Suffolk, Ipswich. In its infancy, 45 years ago, SOG used to hold indoor talks at Suffolk College, so it was a return to old haunts. The talk in January was on the birds of Kazakhstan, by well-known Suffolk ornithologist, Steve Piotrowski. Steve gave a humorous talk on the trip to Kazakhstan with Waveney Bird Club; relating not only some of the great birds to be seen in the area but also some of the scrapes they got into – a tour leader/driver who sometimes didn't quite know where to go to find species, Eric's brush with the law and a keenness to make sure supplies of beer were on hand!

Part of the evening was also a celebration of some of Suffolk's and the group's birders. Two such birders were made honorary vice-presidents of Suffolk Ornithologists' Group in recognition of their contribution to Suffolk birds and birding. The first was Steve who is author of Suffolk Birds and co-founder of SCBOP. He has been greatly involved with SOG over the years, taking on many roles including honorary president for 14 years and editor of the Suffolk Bird Report. Another important figure in Suffolk birding is Reg Snook, a founder member of SOG who is particularly linked with Ipswich and its parks. Reg has published books including one on Mabel the owl at Christchurch Park as well as being illustrator on the first SOG publication, The Rook in Suffolk. Both were roundly applauded.

There was also time for a surprise for another special member of SOG, Jean Garrod. Jean had her 90th birthday just before the meeting so she was presented with a birthday cake and a chorus of 'Happy Birthday'. All present got a slice of the cake as they left the venue!

The following meeting in February was the group's AGM. There were the formalities initially with SOG president, John Grant, opening proceedings and council members were voted in. We also welcomed three new members to SOG Council – Justin Zantboer, Peter Merchant and Chris Courtney. Outgoing SOG Secretary, Edward Jackson, was thanked for his work and fortunately he is remaining on council as the link with SNS as well as SoSS Project Swift Advisor. Eddie Bathgate has kindly stepped in to the role of secretary. Next were reports from Secretary, Chair and Treasurer then a presentation on 2017 birds by Suffolk BINS duo Lee Woods and Roy Marsh. They also made the presentation awards, for Bird of the Year 2017 and New Years Bird Race 2018.

Then it was time for two SOG awards to be presented. The first was to Laura Raven, who received the Garrod Award. The Garrod Award is given to younger people who are involved in Suffolk birds or wildlife. Laura is a bird ringer, regularly participating in activities at Minsmere and elsewhere. The other award is for the Denis Ockelton trophy. This trophy is given for outstanding contribution to Suffolk birding and was presented to Dave Pearsons. Dave is currently the Chair of Landguard Bird Observatory; this site is the only ringing station in Suffolk. He is also a monitor and area co-ordinator for the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. He regularly participates in surveys and projects such as the Suffolk Rookery Survey organised by SOG and the British Trust for Ornithology Breeding and Wintering Bird Atlas between 2007 and 2011.

SOG Awards



Steve Piotrowski
Lifetime Achievement Award



Reg Snook
Lifetime Achievement Award



Laura Raven
winner of the Garrod Award



Dave Pearson
winner of the Denis Ockelton trophy



Photo: David Borderick



American Bittern

Photo: Andrew Moon



Coues's Arctic Redpoll



Photo: Andrew Easton

American Bittern

Spring Bird Review

March 2018

The quarterly records section gives a snapshot of birds seen within the county during the period and is compiled by 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/>.

Weather:-

The 'Beast from the East' continued into early March and on the 3rd we suffered 17.8cm of snow, but from the 4th temperature started to improve. The month was very cold and rainfall was above average with 115mm of rain falling, with double figures on six days and in total there were 18 days of rainfall. There was a total of 12 dry days and 1 day of snow. The average temperature for the month was only 5C though daytime temperatures did get into double figures on 11 days with the highest being 14C on the 16th. Time will tell how this cold and wet weather has affected our bird populations in Suffolk.

Birds March 2018:-

Small numbers of **Whooper Swans** continued into March at Minsmere until the 19th. Also present at Kirton Creek, two at Boyton on the 20th, 21st and 25th and Lakenheath RSPB. The **Tundra Swan** remained at Westleton on the B1125, a count of 14 on the 4th being the only report from here for March. A single was reported from Boyton Hall Marsh on the 20th which was the last report for March. **Greater White-fronted Geese** were at their most favoured Suffolk site at North Warren with the highest count being 160 on the 4th. The six **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were present throughout the whole of March at Trimley Marshes and one lone Pinkie at the beginning of the month. **Pink-footed Geese** were also reported from Boyton Marshes with

a maximum of 10. Scaup are scarce in the county these days so a drake on Lound Lakes between the 4th and 17th was a nice find. There was also a bird on the River Orwell, along the Strand, for a few days. **Goosander** reports came from Oulton Broad, Minsmere, Thorpeness Mere, LBO, Loompit Lake and Christchurch Park. **Smew** were reported from Oulton Water and Minsmere.

Photo: Barry Woodhouse

A few records of **Shag** including a good record of a juvenile at Needham Market Lakes that showed very well between 10th and 14th.



A drake **Garganey** on Botany RSPB was present from the 6th to the 11th at least.



The only

Photo: David Borderick

Great White Egret

reports in March were from Dunwich, Southwold and Lakenheath RSPB. Red Kite continue to increase with sightings from nine locations while **Hen Harrier** are much less frequent and were noted at Havergate on the 7th, two ringtails at Gedgrave/Havergate on the 13th, one ringtail over Henstead Church on the 14th, ringtail at Boyton also on the 14th and one at Minsmere on the 19th. The only **Merlin** sightings this month came from North Warren with a female on the 16th and one at Cavenham Heath on the 17th.

Purple Sandpiper reports this month came from Slaughden and LBO. A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** was at Kessingland/Benacre on the 3rd and 9th and at Covehithe on the 10th and 12th,

then Easton Bavents on the 15th. Probably the same bird was at Minsmere on the 4th, then on the 19th two first winter birds on East Scrape in the evening also one on the 20th. There was also a late record of one north from LBO on the 31st. At Minsmere the **Mediterranean Gulls** were building up in good numbers with 123 on the 31st. **Short-eared Owls** were still being reported from Felixstowe Ferry (Tomline Wall) early part of March with four being seen, other reports from Boyton, Risby, Kingsfleet and Aldeburgh Town Marshes. A **Long-eared Owl** was seen in North Bushes, Minsmere on the 21st and later flew to south. At Santon Downham, on the 24th, two **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were seen along the river. It has not been a **Waxwing** year - very poor in Suffolk as it has been in the UK in general. The only reports were one at Crest View Drive, Lowestoft on the 1st and one at Tuddenham Road, by Greshams Social Club, on the 12th. **Black Redstart** migration and sightings went crazy in March with far too many to list but in total 80+ reported into BINS; how many were there in Suffolk in real terms? It was also a fantastic month for **Firecrest** with 54+ reported during March. Records of **Hawfinches** continued through March with sightings from Tattingstone Place with high count of 4+, Kentwell Hall, Long Melford often being seen along the Hall drive with a high count of 4 on the 3rd, Wrentham Old Churchyard with high count of 2 during the month. Other records came from East Bergholt Field Study Centre, Fagbury Cliff, a private Garden in Bramfield and four at Sotterley Dell.

Scarcer March Sightings:-

Black-throated Divers were seen at East Lane with two offshore on the 9th with one sitting on the sea. There was also one off Minsmere on the 21st and 25th and again off the Minsmere Sluice on the 29th and 30th in near full summer plumage. A good rarity for Suffolk in the shape of an adult **Night Heron** was photographed in the Church Farm Marsh Caravan Park in Aldeburgh on the morning of the 31st, it then flew north and was not located during the following days. Unfortunately it was found dead on North Warren during April. The adult **Glossy Ibis** continued to be present throughout March on the Eastbridge Levels and occasionally roosted at Island Mere, Minsmere. There was another at Hopton near Ixworth from the 4th to 13th at least. A **White Stork** of unknown origin was in the Boyton/Hollesley area on the 29th. Three **Common Cranes** seen on the 31st in Lowestoft area at Barnby/North Cove and three north over Easton Bavents late morning.

In Ipswich Cemetery, two **Ring-necked Parakeets** reported on the 9th. A **White-spotted Bluethroat** was seen at Trimley SWT on the 18th and it was relocated in bushes by the main lagoon on the 20th. Then on the 19th a cracking male was trapped and ringed at LBO. To add to the excitement a second male was also at LBO on the 20th and 21st with only one reported on the 22nd; it is always good to catch up with **Bluethroats** as they are very smart birds and have become scarce in recent years in Suffolk. **Ravens** have become regular sightings in Suffolk these days reported from the Pippas Ford/Needham/Stowmarket area and one at Hollesley RSPB on the 31st. The very long-staying and very confiding **Coues's Arctic Redpoll** plus two **Mealy Redpoll** and up to 20+ **Lesser Redpoll** continued to show very well near the car park at Hazelwood Marshes through the whole of March giving birders and photographers excellent views and what a stayer. Although the bird did go missing from 15th Feb to the 4th of March, it surely could not have been far away! Another **Coues's** was present in South-east Suffolk at a private site on the 5th and ringed on the 6th and still present on the 14th, but no reports since. On the **Parrot Crossbill** front only one report this month with 12 from Santon Downham on the 9th.



Photo: Andrew Moon

April 2018

Weather:-

April had plenty of rain during the month with 18 days when rain fell, with 89mm for the month it was well above the average. There were only 2 days when it got into double figures with 17mm on the 2nd and 21mm on the 30th. Although wet, it was a much warmer month with 14 days reaching 15C or above, the highest recorded was 26C on the 19th. No frost occurred with lowest temperature being 3C on the 1st. The month's average high was 14C and low 7C.

Birds April 2018:-

The six **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were present until the 13th April at Trimley Marshes. **Garganey** numbers increased throughout April seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Snape Botany Marshes, Pippas Ford, Minsmere, Southwold and Livermere. Two drake **Goosander** were still at Minsmere on the 1st and two redhead Smew at Minsmere from the 1st to the 3rd. A few **Great White Egret** sightings came from Dunwich Shore Pools, Walberswick, Camps Heath Marsh Lowestoft, Lackford Lakes and Trimley SWT.

Red Kite sightings for April were good with 18+ from around the county and indeed being reported so regularly that BINS has asked for them not to be reported any more. The only **Hen Harrier** was a nice male in the Lowestoft area on the 15th. An **Osprey** was reported over Kessingland Sewage Works on the 1st, and also seen at Micklemere, Ramsholt and Hazelwood. A **Stone Curlew** was found on the beach at LBO on the 14th, this being only the 4th site record. Two **Common Cranes** were seen over Lowestoft on the 14th and one on the 20th. At Thorpeness, two circling high on the 23rd, then later another one found at Botany RSPB, viewed from Langham Bridge on the 23rd and 24th.

The continuing **Glaucous Gull**, presuming all the sightings relating to the same bird, has been seen at North Warren, Minsmere and Thorpeness south offshore. A likely different bird was at Trimley SWT on the 8th on the

reservoir. At Great Barton a 2cy **Glaucous Gull** in ploughed field on the 24th. A 2cy **Iceland Gull** came into roost at Livermere on the 6th. A **Bonxie** was a late record, being seen at Mistley Walls on the 9th.

There was a late record of a **Shorelark** at Minsmere RSPB in the dunes on the 22nd. April produced good numbers of **White Wagtail** in the first half of the month with counts of 20 in the Lowestoft area on the 4th and 12 on the Hollesley RSPB scrape on the 14th with a total of 38+ reported. It was also a good month for **Ring Ouzel** with many sightings around the county, 32+ at least reported to BINS with high count being three at Minsmere on the 14th and three at Shingle Street on the 21st with four there on the 22nd.



Photo: John Richardson

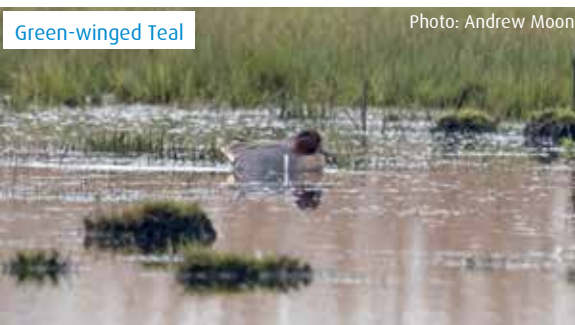
Black Redstart migration also still continued on into April and still too many to list but in total 58+ reported - a very good spring for this species. Good numbers of **Firecrest** still during April with high counts from Southwold with 5 on the 2nd and Bawdsey with 5 on the 11th. Other summer migrants started to arrive in small numbers during April.

Scarcer April Sightings:-

News came out of an amazing mega, an **American Bittern**, at Carlton Marshes late on Saturday evening on the 7th; I am sure nobody would have had that bird on their radar and it is another first for Suffolk. It had been photographed earlier in the day by Gavin Durrant but he had not realized he had got a shot of an **American Bittern** (photo on the front cover); it transpires that from record shots from another photographer that it was actually present from the 30th of March.

The bird showed in flight over Share Marsh a few times on Sunday the 8th to the delight of many Suffolk birders; most days from here the pattern remained the same, mostly flight views being obtained and briefly on the ground.

A few lucky birders and photographers did manage to see it on the ground in the middle of the month with close views in a dyke near the path and some amazing photographs were obtained. The **American Bittern** continued all month with visitors from not only across the UK but also from various European countries. The **American Bittern** has been a great asset for the SWT Reserve as they had buckets out for collecting donations to help with their fund raising to purchase land in the area and expand Carlton Marshes.



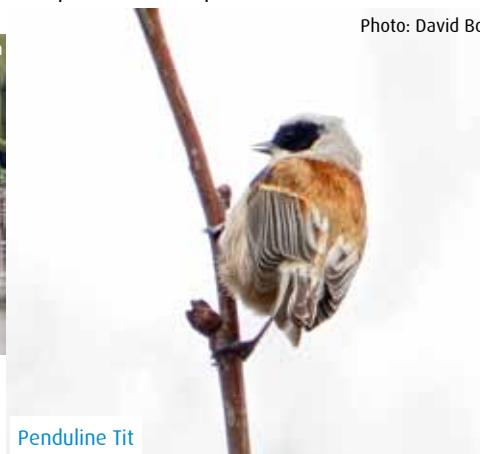
Green-winged Teal

Photo: Andrew Moon

A nice **Green-winged Teal** was found on the Flash at Southwold on the 14th. A **Black-throated Diver** was seen off North Wall Minsmere on the 5th and another going south off LBO on the 13th. A full summer plumage **Black-necked Grebe** was reported from Broadwater Lake Livermere on the 15th. On the 19th a **Goshawk** seen low north over Aldeburgh and also the same day a **Black Kite** drifted low over Bowbeck near Ixworth. The adult **Night Heron** was reported again on the 3rd fishing in the Conservation Area at Aldeburgh. As reported in the March round up it was found dead and photographed on Church Farm Marshes on 13th April. The long-staying adult **Glossy Ibis** remained on the Eastbridge Levels and occasionally on Minsmere until the 19th. Then presumably the same bird on North Warren on the 20th then no further sightings from this date.

A **Wryneck** was at Middleton on April 12th. At LBO, on the 21st, a **Red-rumped Swallow** was seen flying south. A **Blue-headed Wagtail** was found on Hollesley RSPB Scrape on the 14th, then maybe a different bird, a stunning male on the 21st and 22nd and also one on Aldeburgh Town Marshes on the 15th. A nice **White-spotted Bluethroat** reported at LBO on the 2nd in roped-off area near the point. At Minsmere, from other side of Island Mere, a **Savi's Warbler** was reeling from the 11th to the 29th at least but rarely visible. A **Wood Warbler** heard singing at Marlesford from private woodland within the Marlesford Estate on the 22nd may have been audible from permissive footpath. A fantastic male

Photo: David Borderick



Penduline Tit

Penduline Tit was discovered in the afternoon of the 2nd at Leathes Ham feeding on Reed Mace and still showed well on the 3rd. The only **Raven** sightings this month were from Offton on the 8th. The amazing and very long staying **Coues's Arctic Redpoll** with **Mealy Redpoll** and **Lesser Redpoll** continued to show and perform very well in the field near the car park at Hazelwood Marshes, it continued until 11th April and had been present from 28th November 2017. What pleasure this bird gave to Suffolk birders and many visiting birders during those dull winter months. Another **Coues's** made an appearance on Upper Hollesley Common on the 6th and 7th but sightings were brief.

May 2018

Weather:-

On the whole May was a dry month with only eight days of rain recorded although the 44mm total was well above the 28th; the last eight days were all 19C or above. The average high for the month was 19C and the average low was 8C.

Birds May 2018:-

A late record of a **Velvet Scoter**, with 30 **Common Scoter**, off Minsmere on the 26th. Several **Garganey** in the month with sightings from Lowestoft, Southwold Flash, Tinkers Marsh, Minsmere, Town Marshes Aldeburgh, Lackford Lakes SWT, Micklemere and Lakenheath RSPB. A late **Shag**, was reported flying up the River Stour, on the 22nd. **Great White Egrets** continue to be seen around Suffolk at all the usual sites as reported in previous Harrier issues. **Osprey** reports came from Flatford, Minsmere, Trimley Marshes, Broomhill Road Ipswich, Felixstowe and Botany Marsh. A good passage of **Wood Sandpiper** at a number of sites. A **Temminck's Stint** put in an appearance at Trimley SWT with another at Tinkers Marsh. A late **Iceland Gull** was off the point at LBO. A **Roseate Tern** reported at Minsmere RSPB on South Scrape at 07.00hrs on the 28th. A number of reports of **Arctic Tern** moving north through the County. At Lakenheath RSPB six **Black Terns** passed through with odd ones and twos also passing through at coastal sites. The odd over-summering **Short-eared Owl** were still being reported throughout May, with sightings from Aldeburgh Town Marshes, Boyton Marshes RSPB and Trimley SWT Reserve. The only **Turtle Dove** reports for May were one singing at Boyton RSPB and another singing at North Warren. How sad that our Suffolk birds have nearly gone; it was not many years ago when they came to my garden every year. Will it come to a point when we will not see this beautiful dove in the County? A single **Ring Ouzel** remained at Shingle Street in the garden of Battery Cottage at the start of the month with also one at LBO; this saw the end of an excellent spring for this species. A few

Pied Flycatchers, including some nice male birds, were found at Corton disused rail track, Southwold, Leathes Ham, LBO and at Gunton.

Scarcer May Sightings:-

The amazing **American Bittern** continued to be present at Carlton Marshes and the bird continued to show in flight and occasionally on the ground in the Share Marsh area of the reserve. It also started to call and sing, mainly in the evenings, and this attracted birders back to Carlton to hear this rare sound and to get a comparison with Eurasian Bittern also calling there. It seemed strange that there were no more reports of the **Bittern** after the 16th of May, maybe it decided to move on which is a shame as most birders thought it would over-summer. On the 28th a **Purple Heron** flew over Thorpeness Old Caravan Park then recorded at Minsmere RSPB on the 29th and remained until the 31st at least, although typically elusive. A **Cattle Egret** was at Minsmere RSPB on Chapel Field on the 15th. One flew north close inshore at LBO on the 26th, then an adult plumaged bird at Hollesley RSPB on the 30th was seen from river wall before flying north and then relocated flying over Minsmere RSPB.

A **Black Kite** was reported flying north at Minsmere RSPB on the 12th and one at Stutton village drifted over heading towards Alton Water on the 14th. There were not many **Honey Buzzard** sightings; the only ones came from one Minsmere RSPB on the 22nd, one Dunwich Heath on the 23rd, one East Bergholt also on the 23rd, one Lakenheath on the 27th, one over Norton/Thurston on the 28th and one over Bungay on the 30th. On the 9th a male **Dotterel** was found on Town Marshes Aldeburgh then flew off high North West. Late afternoon of the 30th at Pipp's Ford, two **Black-winged Stilts** arrived on the gravel pit workings and showed well until mid-evening at least. There were several sightings of **Common Crane** during May some records maybe of the same birds; seven over Carlton Marshes on the 19th, five over Reydon at 13.20hrs also on the 19th, with probably the same five seen

to land on Westwood Marsh at 14.00hrs. Two flew north-west over Southwold Golf Course on the 22nd, two south over Westwood Marsh at 10.30hrs then the same birds over South Levels Minsmere at 10.50hrs, both on the 22nd and three at Minsmere RSPB on the 29th.



White-winged Black Tern

Photo: Barry Woodhouse

At Lackford Lakes SWT, on the 7th, a **White-winged Black Tern** was found late morning, it soon departed but was re-found a little later at Great Livermere and showed well in the afternoon before flying off high North East. A **Hoopoe** was reported from Benacre on the 16th in an area of no access. A Bee-eater was heard over Bawdsey Marshes on the 23rd. A number of **Red-rumped Swallow** sightings; one was found at Alton Water off Rabbets Wood on the 2nd and 3rd. On the 7th, one flew North over Sluice Cottage at North Warren, one was found over sea wall between Shingle Street and East Lane on the 13th then drifted south, then possibly the same bird over Lagoons at East Lane on the 17th. Later in the month one at Corton Old Sewage Works on the 28th. On the 11th during a breeding bird survey at Boyton Marshes RSPB reserve a cracking **Red-throated Pipit** was found, but unfortunately due to location of no access it was impossible to locate from the river wall. A stunning **Bluethroat**, of the red-spotted form, found at LBO on the 15th and showed very well all day. At Minsmere, from Island Mere, the **Savi's Warbler** continued to be heard reeling all month and was occasionally visible. At Lakenheath RSPB reserve from the river wall at the end of the first plantation, a report of a **Great Reed Warbler** at 05.25hrs but was not subsequently heard or seen thereafter. A small influx of **Marsh Warblers** arrived in Suffolk

starting with one singing at Thorpeness Old Caravan Park on the 26th and 27th, one singing at Gunton on the 28th with another nearby at Links Road Lowestoft the same day and lastly one singing all day at Shingle Street on the 29th; all birds typically very elusive.



Red-backed Shrike

Photo: Eddie Marsh

A nice male **Red-backed Shrike** was found on the path from Eastbridge to Minsmere Sluice on the 18th, possibly the same bird seen again on a few dates with it at Minsmere RSPB from Bittern Hide on the 24th and Whin Hill on the 25th, then out of the blue re-appeared again at Whin Hill on the 31st. The first **Serin** for the year was at Bawdsey MOD Compound (no general access) singing on the evening of the 19th. At LBO a **Common Rosefinch** was heard singing on the 31st. **Raven** sightings this month from the Gipping Valley and Icklingham with news that the species had bred in Suffolk for the first time for about 150 years.

Insect News:-

On the dragonfly front, a very rare **Large White-faced Darter** was found at LBO on Sunday the 27th. To make it more amazing this was LBO's second record which was also on this day in 2012 and is only the 4th UK record.



Photo: Craig Holden

Bluethroat

Field Trip Reports

Alex Rafinski

Carlton Marsh

Easter Sunday, 1st April 2018

Leader: Richard Smith

Following the report of a Black-crowned Night Heron the previous evening, we were expecting that a few of the people planning on coming on the Carlton Marsh walk may have decided to go to Aldeburgh instead. Nevertheless, around ten people were to be found standing in the SWT car park at 9am, nervously looking at the very grey sky. However there was no rain during the walk, and although the reserve was muddy, all paths were easily passable in boots or wellies.

Those who arrived early were treated to a distant Barn Owl and a nearby Kestrel, and we were to get both these species later in the walk too. We started the walk by heading in the direction of Oulton Broad to see if the Red-throated Diver was still there. On the pool, by the car park, there was a Shoveler and a couple of Mallards and on the way to Oulton we heard several Cetti's Warblers - this was particularly pleasing as there had been speculation that some Suffolk populations of this bird had been decimated by the late cold weather we had recently experienced. We also heard a Chiffchaff singing which, for some, was their first of the year. The first argument of the day concerned our first deer - was it a Roe or a Chinese Water Deer? The latter turned out to be very common on the reserve and we must have seen double figure counts of these before the end of the walk.

The Red-throated Diver didn't disappoint, giving us fantastic views, and we were also particularly pleased to see eleven Snipe lift



out of the reeds in front of us and fly further down the river. Eventually we got bored of constantly moving our telescopes to let dog walkers past and headed back towards the main reserve. We stopped for a brief coffee break on the raised bank to allow us to scan for raptors, and were rewarded with great views of several Marsh Harriers, including a male that started calling to a female and for a moment we thought we were going to be entertained by a food-pass display. However the female decided that he wasn't worth it - many in the group seemed to sympathise with the male, probably quietly remembering something similar happening to them.

We then approached the scrape which had a good selection of ducks (Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler and Gadwall etc.), a few Lapwing and Redshank, plus a very handsome Common Gull. The song of a Skylark kept us company whilst we scanned the marsh and reminded us that spring really was on the way, even if the weather was suggesting otherwise.

Finally we headed up on to the banks of the River Waveney before completing a loop back across the marsh to the car park. The Little Owl was not in its usual place by the car park entrance but a Buzzard flew over our heads and some people spotted a Sparrowhawk flashing through close to the ground. A total of 50 species and the great company meant that the morning had flown by!

Shingle Street & Upper Hollesley Common

Saturday, April 21st 2018

Leader: Steve Fryett

A fine, sunny day greeted those attending this meeting at Shingle Street. A singing Sedge Warbler was noted on Oxley Marsh with one or two Swallows heading north and a male Stonechat seen close to the car park. We headed south recording many Linnets in the vicinity of the tennis court along with our first sightings of singing Skylarks with several more throughout the morning. A very observant member of the group noted two gulls heading north along the road to be Mediterranean Gulls in full summer plumage.

The allotments were unusually quiet but we did manage a pair of Blackcap that gave us just the normal fleeting glimpses. Scanning over Oxley Marsh we observed at least two, maybe three, Kestrel, a Reed Bunting and a couple of distant Common Buzzards. Also noted on the marsh was an adult male Peregrine Falcon that had alighted on a telegraph pole close by with prey. We were all amazed as this stunning raptor de-feathered, ripped into and consumed an unfortunate Redshank in about ten minutes. On a softer note 12 Greylag Geese headed north over the marsh, presumably feral birds.

From the marsh footpath we could see the garden of Battery cottage and could clearly identify a male Ring Ouzel and, on closer observation, there were in fact three male Ring Ouzels present. Continuing south we noted a raptor very high over Hollesley village drifting on thermals which was eventually identified as a Red Kite. Heading towards the sea one of the Ring Ouzels had wandered a bit further south along the beach. We expected to find something of interest in the garden of Battery cottage as

we approached and were rewarded with closer views of the Ring Ouzels - the male of this species are always cherished sightings in spring. A female Wheatear was also noted in the garden. Heading back to the car park we noted another one of the three mobile Ring Ouzels as it appeared at the tennis court area and was initially detected by the its "clacking" call.

We then headed to Upper Hollesley Common where it was somewhat warmer in search of heathland species. Chiffchaff and Common Buzzard were first to be noted along with a calling Treecreeper as we made our way onto the heath from the car park. Chaffinch and Coal Tit were in abundance along the leafy rides with an occasional singing Woodlark noted. An interesting daytime flying moth was seen and photographed later to be identified as an Orange Underwing *Archiaris parthenias*, a moth associated with the upper branches of Birch woods found at Hollesley Common.



Orange Underwing Moth

Photo: Gi Grieco

We reached the half way point and turned west stopping to check around the heath and finally locating one of the singing Woodlark at the top of a fallen dead pine some 80 yards away. A male Common Redstart was also seen in the same tree and before long a female as well, both giving reasonable views. Since leading spring meetings to Upper Hollesley

Common we have never seen a pair before, only managing to record singletons. Unfortunately, the other two heathland specialities Dartford Warbler and Stonechat were not seen as their numbers may have declined since this year's earlier cold weather. Finally, we ended the meeting early afternoon back at the car park.

Gi Grieco

Melton and Bromeswell dawn chorus

Sunday, April 29th 2018

Leader: Gi Grieco

I had led a SOG dawn chorus walk previously around Melton and Bromeswell when it was my local patch and we had an excellent morning then, encountering eight species of warbler, Nightingale and Cuckoo. On occasion since then members, particularly Ivan and Val, have been requesting another dawn chorus walk. Therefore I decided to include it in the SOG events for 2018 and looking back was amazed that it was actually ten years previously that we had that dawn chorus – memorable trips must stick in the mind!

I was lucky to visit Morocco recently on a birding trip, visiting areas across the country from the snowy Atlas Mountains to the sands of the Western Sahara. The scenery was superb, as were the birds and what was great was at one hotel in the Atlas Mountains, an early morning walk was rewarded with a dawn chorus. This being early March, it was a bit of a surprise as in the UK it's from late April to early May when we enjoy this wonder. Things started off similarly with a number of Blackbirds, the first to start to singing, but then realisation that this was a different country with Common Bulbul joining in. There was then a nice mix of other birds including Crossbill, Chaffinch (slightly

different song), Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Serin and Levaillant's Woodpecker; only a couple of which we'd get locally.

It was pleasing that seven members turned up in the early hours of the morning, 04:30, as the weather, although forecast not to rain, had a light persistent misty drizzle. Walking through Melton riverside area it was pleasing to hear, in total, three singing Song Thrushes. As a bit of light started to show in the sky we crossed Wilford Bridge and on to the boardwalk through the reedbeds towards Bromeswell. In the adjacent woodland Robin and Blackbird could be heard and within the reeds, although not in full voice, we heard a Sedge Warbler. Walking along the lane we were alerted by the alarm call of a Blackbird to find it chasing a superb Tawny Owl just above the hedgerow. A great encounter, it was pleasing to see it at close quarters, especially for Marion who is a big lover of owls. Further along the lane we heard our first Nightingale, then a second started to sing when the first stopped. We did a loop of the wood of the SWT reserve Bromeswell Green, again hearing two more Nightingales, one blasting out its song at close range - a magnificent sound in that eerie, early

morning light. Around the woodland we also heard Blackcap and Treecreeper while a Buzzard flew over calling. Matt saw a Stoat briefly, described as going 'boing boing', as it ran along the edge of a wheat field! Back along the lane we were pleased to hear Cetti's Warbler, a species that suffered during the freezing weather earlier in the year. We headed to have a look at the river and saw Little Egret, Shelduck and Oystercatcher and heard two more warbler species, Reed Warbler and Whitethroat. One species we didn't manage to connect with was Garden Warbler, although on a recce the previous week I'd heard one singing at the site.

We headed back over Wilford Bridge to have a look along the river. Species seen were Greenshank, two Egyptian Geese and a nice find in a single Ruff. We heard two more Nightingales past Larkmans Yard and another two across the river from Melton sewage works. From here we also had Lesser Whitethroat and Bullfinch and scanning down river, towards Woodbridge, a number of Black-tailed Godwit and a further Greenshank.



Greenshank

Photo: Gi Grieco

Our next port of call was a walk through the heaths of Sutton Common and Sutton Heath. From the car park we heard Woodlark and, on the open grassy area ahead, we saw four Wheatears. On the first part of the walk we heard Mistle Thrush, another Woodlark as well as Skylark and a number of splendid Yellowhammers. Further along, despite it being lighter, the cold misty weather seemed to quieten the birds and we struggled to find much else. Adam spotted some deer under some pines and as these came out and across the heath we saw they were a group of seven Fallow Deer, males of different ages. These were deemed the 'mammal of the day', just ahead of the 'boing boing' Stoat. Back at the car park we saw another Stoat, although this one just sprinted low across the road. The Wheatears were still present and we admired a carpet of Wild Pansy, a lovely splash of colour in an otherwise grey day.

With the weather not improving, in fact forecast to get worse, we called it a day, although we had been out in the field for six hours. An enjoyable time, it was great to hear up to eight Nightingales plus encountering two Cetti's Warbler and the Tawny Owl. Overall quieter warbler-wise but that was likely due to the weather conditions. I'll make sure it won't be a ten year wait for the next dawn chorus!

David Walsh

Eastbridge 'off the beaten track'

Sunday, May 13th 2018

Leader: David Walsh

12 SOG members gathered at Eastbridge at 7am on a dull and cool morning. We were relieved that it was dry, the forecast having indicated we would get wet! A Cetti's Warbler was singing nearby, one of very few remaining in the area after the cold winter.

We walked briskly along the entrance road before heading left along the bridleway, a Treecreeper the only bird of note. Pausing at the spot where the reclaimed heathland became visible, we had excellent views of Garden Warbler; two were singing, and one

was giving its call, unfamiliar to many of the group. The sounds of Lapwing displaying in front and both Cuckoo calling and Bittern booming behind us was a fine combination. A little further on we had superb looks at a Woodlark singing from a wire before scoping a Stone Curlew from an appropriate distance.



Woodlark

Photo: David Walsh

We crossed the Westleton road and headed on through the woods. A Slow-worm on the track was a surprise before, despite the onset of steady drizzle, we managed to find singing Dartford Warbler and Stonechat on Dunwich Heath as well as a bonus Fox. We made a pit stop before heading south along the ever-narrowing shingle ridge. Our eagle-eyed group found a party of waders on the beach which turned out to be 18 Sanderling and two Common Sandpipers; to our right a Grasshopper Warbler reeled beyond the bank. It was fun to be the first people of the day to enter Minsmere's East Hide; we wondered what surprises lay in store. The antics of the nesting Mediterranean Gulls were studied, whilst those scanning for waders were rewarded by a pristine Knot; from the public platform we found 13 more on south scrape as well as a

Bar-tailed Godwit and two Turnstone, one in summer plumage. The only roosting terns were Common Terns, although we did see Sandwich Terns in flight; Little Terns, and a Little Gull, would appear after we had left.

On the sea a raft of 90 Common Scoter was distant but through the scopes we could easily see both males and females. A Grey Seal and a Harbour Porpoise were noted a little further south, both lingering long enough for everyone to see them. Lucky Pool gave us five Grey Plover, in a mix of plumages from winter to full summer, as well as a 'red' Bar-tailed Godwit. Two Hobbies over the ruin were enjoyed before we began the stroll along the Eastbridge footpath. The Chapel pools looked perfect for Wood Sandpiper but none were in residence today. We were rewarded in other ways, however, with a Cuckoo perching up and calling for ages; given the decline in its population, we were thrilled to have such a close view. Marsh Harriers over the reedbeds performed to order but, with the sun remaining firmly behind the clouds, there were no butterflies or dragonflies to detain us so we made haste for our vehicles, and lunch, arriving back at 12.15pm. We were delighted with our list, and the variety on offer meant that 'bird of the day' was shared between half a dozen species.

Photo: David Walsh



Mediterranean Gull

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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.



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For birds & for birders

SOG Registered Charity No. 801446

www.sogonline.org.uk

