

Magazine Winter 2014 No.179



# The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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**Derek Moore OBE, 1943-2014**

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Front Cover picture: Derek in The Galapagos Islands by John Tinning



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## Guest Editorial

Where has this year gone? It only seems five minutes since I was running round to the beach at Minsmere, arriving gasping for breath on the trail of the Collared Pratincole, only for it subsequently to stay for an eternity!

You may have already picked up that there are several changes taking place within SOG Council, and I would like – as guest Editor of this edition of *The Harrier* – to reflect on the contribution and many undoubted successes of one particular individual. As you may know, I do have a tendency to use a hundred words where ten will do and this person has been one to keep me in check with his confident wielding of the red pen. I expect many readers will have worked out by now that it is our own Phil Brown I speak of, and this edition comes out with a special 'thank you to you, sir'!

Phil has brought many qualities to SOG Council over the years, not least his vast knowledge and great wisdom plus a tireless dedication that has made the regular editions of *The Harrier* appear with seemingly effortless ease. Eddie Bathgate and Adam Gretton have had the task this time round!

Always willing to represent SOG at any event, often at short notice, Phil's presentational skills and dedication to all things ornithological have benefited audiences on every level.

In the case of SOG in general and *The Harrier* in particular, Phil has been responsible for much of the design and branding styles we now carry, steering the new-look *Harrier*

from being a great read, into the fantastic publication it is today. As well having his very own written style, Phil can boast a wide range of contacts, which, coupled with his ability to 'tease' article after article out of unsuspecting volunteers, will mean he is sorely missed.

Phil, we hope that we will be able to entice you back at some point in the future. In the meantime, we all look forward to seeing you at as many of the indoor and outdoor events as possible.

On a sad note, I couldn't write this piece without marking the passing of our dear friend and Suffolk birding legend, Derek Moore OBE. A massive character, adored by many, we are sorry to have had to say goodbye so soon. Steve has written a heartfelt and personal tribute to Derek which appears in this edition, and John Grant and Adam Gretton describe his final send-off.

I will write a more formal piece incorporating the rest of this year's significant changes and developments to deliver at the AGM next year, where I hope to see as many of you as possible: please do come along, it's a good night, and a great opportunity to catch up with friends, as well as to keep up-to-date with SOG events.

Finally, I would like to extend festive wishes on behalf of the Council and myself for a great Christmas and New Year break, and a bird-filled 2015.

*Roy Marsh*

## Derek Moore: a personal tribute

I had already corresponded with Derek before our first meeting at Sizewell on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1979. This was the day I saw my first ever Tawny Pipit and Derek was already there watching it when I arrived. He had just taken over as County Recorder and Bird Report Editor. We met in the company of Philip Murphy and I remember Philip commenting: "County Recorder out in the field? That's unheard of in Suffolk!" Philip introduced me to Derek and that was the start of a very long friendship. Derek was already an accomplished birder and had found Suffolk's first Cory's Shearwater, a massive ornithological discovery of that time.

Derek persuaded me to join the Suffolk Naturalists' Society (SNS), which was then responsible for the publication of the annual bird report – at that time it was included as a section of the SNS Transactions. Derek fought for the bird section to be published separately as a stand-alone report and persuaded the county's top artists to submit line drawings/vignettes to illustrate it. Black and white photographs were introduced for the first time – SNS couldn't afford colour! The arrival of the Bird Report was eagerly awaited and was one of the highlights of the year for Suffolk birders. The early editions depicted line drawings of Suffolk's iconic birds on a green cover, but from 1982 Derek upped his game further and the report arrived with some amazing colour paintings gracing its cover.

In 1979, Derek's account of his birding trip to the Isles of Scilly in the SOG Bulletin tempted Mike Marsh, Philip Murphy and me to go there the following year. I remember the long overnight drive and arriving at St Ives

before dawn, parking up on the Island car park ready for a seawatch. It was blowing a real "hoolie", so conditions were perfect for seabirds. When it was light enough to seawatch, Mike and I simultaneously opened the car doors, and bang, bang, the door hinges snapped in unison! We had most obviously underestimated the strength of the wind... Derek stayed at home that year, but we kept him informed of our exploits with telephone calls from the phone box in Old Town, St Mary's - there were no mobile phones in those days! On our return, birders were enquiring as to how we got back without car doors? Derek had told them that our doors had completely blown off and were last seen floating up the Bristol Channel!

Derek travelled with us to Scilly for several subsequent years and we had some amazing experiences and saw some wonderful birds. Like most birders in the 1980s, Derek and I got into the twitching scene and we had some memorable trips to far-flung places like Hartlepool Harbour for White-billed Diver, North Wales for Cattle Egret, Devon for Hudsonian Godwit and South Wales for American Bittern. We did fall out over one bird, however, and that was the River Warbler in north-west Norfolk. The privileged few (which included me) were sworn to secrecy about the bird's presence, but on arrival we found the site swarming with twitchers, trashing cereal crops underfoot. Really, the words "Norfolk" and "secret" should never appear in the same sentence and I was dreading getting home and telling Derek that I had sneaked off to see the bird without him! However, we soon made up and there was never a dull moment in the car on our many twitches as Derek kept us amused with some amazing stories. Many of Derek's tales were outrageous, but they were immensely funny and he became affectionately known amongst his twitching companions as Hans Christian Moore!

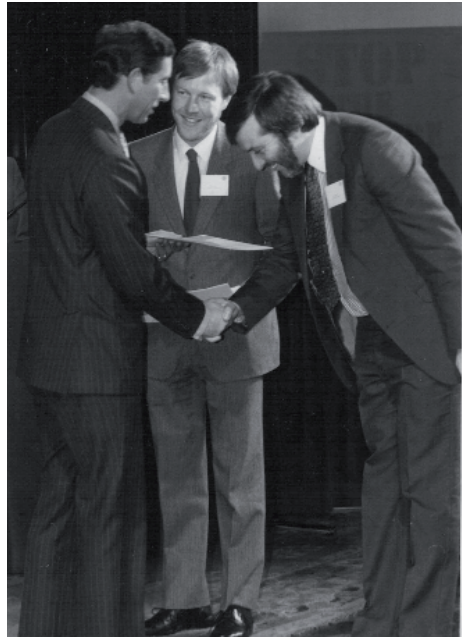
Many of his stories revolved around his days as a footballer. He freely admitted that he wasn't the quickest player on the field, but he was certainly the dirtiest. Derek told us once that if any young whippersnapper thought that he could place the ball through his legs and shout "nutmeg" as he sped past, he would get his comeuppance as a swift upwardly thrusting elbow would land on his jaw! Derek said that a fleet of ambulances were stationed outside the Beccles Town Football ground ready to ferry injured players to hospital and, as only one sub was allowed in those days, it was always an easy win for the Beccles boys!

I played for Derek's beloved Boxted village cricket team on one occasion. Derek was captain and played as a wicket-keeper batsman. I didn't bat, I didn't bowl and fielded way out on the boundary, but I was terrified! I just prayed that the ball didn't come anywhere near me and when it did Derek bellowed "get the ball in". Needless to say, I fumbled it allowing the opposition an extra run! I was never asked to play again!

By the early 1980s, Derek and I were great friends and we holidayed together in the UK and abroad. Derek worked for a printing company in Tiptree whilst I worked in Colchester. We used to meet every lunchtime at the Layer Bretton causeway at Abberton Reservoir where we would eat our packed lunches, birdwatch and chat. On one occasion, we were chatting in the car when two elderly ladies, with field-guide in hand, arrived trying to identify the array of domesticated Mallard and Muscovy ducks that had gathered around their feet. They went away puzzled and I said to Derek (tongue in cheek of course) that we ought to do something about the increasing numbers of "Daffy-ducks" that were littering the causeway. "How are we going to do that?" he said. "Easy" I said as I opened the car door and tossed the corner of a sandwich in the direction of the duck flock.

The flock quickly scampered over and, when within range, I grabbed one of the ducks by its neck, pulled it into the car and sat it on my lap. "As easy as that" I said, as Derek looked on in amazement! That night I received a telephone from Derek's great friend and famous Essex birder Tony Marshall. "I'm so pleased that you are going to help us Essex birders out Steve by organising a cull of those pesky feral ducks at Abberton." Derek had certainly put the word around!

Derek and I were almost inseparable at times and, as we both had long black hair and hippy-like, bushy beards some people thought that we were brothers! I remember a day when we were at Cley and a rarity appeared in the middle of the reserve - Red-necked Stint I think! Derek and I were already up there, but he was a bit nervous about sneaking on the reserve without paying. However, the thought of missing the bird eventually got the better of him, so he followed me in.



Derek and Chris Durdin receiving the Eyewatch award from Prince Charles in 1987.

He had his name inscribed on his binoculars in red sticky plastic tickertape, so he peeled it off so he wouldn't be recognised. We saw our bird and went home well chuffed. A few weeks later Cley was to host another rarity, this time a Greater Sand Plover. Derek wasn't present this time, but I again sneaked on, saw the bird and went away happy. Back home that evening, I told Derek about the sand plover, but elaborated a bit, telling him that I had been caught trespassing by reserve warden Bernard Bishop who had gone berserk, shouting and waving his arms in the air, like a man possessed! I told Derek that all had ended well though as I said that I was Derek Moore, had been a great friend of his father Billy and an admirer of his work at Cley. I think you can imagine Derek's reaction?

Our families holidayed together in Cornwall and there was an episode when I went rock-pooling with my young sons at Crackington Haven where we caught two monster lobsters. I borrowed a cookbook from the farmer's wife at the farm where we were staying and cooked our catch to perfection. The next day we met the Moore family on Marazion Beach, near Penzance, and we together ate the lobster. The trouble was that we lacked anything to eat with it, so we bought a couple of packets of Jacob's cream crackers and sandwiched the lobster in between them. Beryl tells me that she and her family remember the lobster episode well and it was the best lobster that she has ever tasted!

In November 1982, Derek, I and three others Derek, Richard Woolnough, Mick Wright, Bill Last and I met on a very cold evening in an old gun emplacement at Landguard Point, which had recently been converted into a seawatching hide. It was here that the founding of Landguard Bird Observatory was discussed. Notes were taken under the light of a Tilley lamp that was used by

fishermen at Landguard, and so Landguard Bird Observatory was born. Derek was the observatory's first chairman and worked with the team every weekend to develop the site, cutting net lanes, building the Heligoland trap and renovating the buildings.

Derek's drive and enthusiasm was second to none and he was as competitive as they come, so it came as no surprise to anyone when he was snapped up by Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) to be their Director in 1984. He transformed what was then a small charity into the giant the organisation is today. Derek and I worked together on many projects and perhaps our biggest ever battle came in the House of Lords where we both spent 12 days providing evidence for a Parliamentary Bill that saw the expansion of The Port of Felixstowe. Conservationists fought hard and although the Fagbury mudflats were a wildlife loss, we gained Trimley Marshes Nature Reserve, one SWT's best nature reserves. Derek went on to bigger and better things, but I will always remember Derek as the birder, the storyteller and my great friend.

We have lost a brilliant conservationist, great naturalist and ornithologist, and an amazing man. Derek Moore - he will be missed but never, ever, forgotten.



Photo: Chris Durdin

Derek with Rob Macklin, France, Jan 2013

## Remembering a Suffolk legend

On 7<sup>th</sup> November a number of SOG members, including Steve Piotrowski, Cliff Waller, David Tomlinson, Eric Patrick, Patrick Barker and Ed Keeble (as well as the authors) joined leading figures in British nature conservation to say a very fond farewell to Derek Moore, former Suffolk Wildlife Trust director. The uniqueness of the event was very much in keeping with Derek's 'one off' character – and included a passionate rallying call from Chris Packham to honour his memory by making a “real difference” for hard-pressed wildlife. The outspoken TV naturalist said modern pressures on nature were now so great there was no room for conservationists to be complacent over achieving “small successes”.

The Humanist service was held at Parc Gwyn Crematorium, Narberth, Pembrokeshire. Derek had died in hospital in Carmarthen on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, aged 71 after a long battle with cancer. Beccles-born Derek Moore became Director of Conservation at The Wildlife Trusts and then led the merger of two Welsh wildlife trusts (Dyfed and Glamorgan) that became the Wildlife Trust of South Wales after he left Suffolk. At the service Chris Packham was joined in paying tribute by other leading conservationists, including the legendary TV naturalist Bill Oddie - a long-time friend of Derek - and TV presenter Iolo Williams, who worked closely with him in Wales. Bill Oddie described Derek as “a fearless performer, with terrific presence” whilst Chris Packham described Derek as “intelligent, articulate and charismatic”.

He said there had been “tremendous progress” in nature conservation during Derek's time, but added: “Are we winning? No. In Derek's lifetime there was a 51%

reduction in farmland birds.” Referring to Ian Botham's recent attack on the RSPB, he said it would be “easy to blame some ageing cricketer who's become a full tosser.” Chris Packham had begun his tribute by recalling his first meeting with Derek, at Santon Downham, when Derek had at first been convinced this young ‘peroxide punk’ was an egg collector with malign intentions; Chris was in fact guarding one of the UK's last Red-backed Shrikes' nests.

Bill Oddie recalled feeling like a rock star at the Birdfair, when Derek acted as his personal minder, shielding him from crowds of Springwatch fans. He also recalled how “protective, sympathetic and understanding” Derek often was, for example spotting when Bill was showing early signs of a bipolar episode. Bill said “he was very much my mentor because he taught me about conservation” and “the world is going to miss him.” Along with many of those assembled, he had never previously heard Derek's 1960s band, The Soul Concern, but their version of ‘Shake, Rattle & Roll’ was played later in the service, as was a recording of the dawn chorus.

The service also heard from David Barker, a good friend of Derek's, who said that Derek was a “towering figure in nature conservation” who worked closely with the Suffolk farming community for the benefit of wildlife. He added: “Derek's legacy is the Suffolk countryside, which is a much better place because of him.” David's family farm at Westhorpe, near Stowmarket, is acclaimed for its wildlife-friendly practices, acknowledged by awards such as the national Silver Lapwing competition (Derek was with the Barker family at Westminster when that award was announced, David recalled). But Chris Packham said: “While some farms, like David Barker's, seem like a piece of Utopia, the rest of the land is going to hell in a handcart. There have been some

small successes but we are the ones who are charged with making a difference. We have got to retain all our energy and reject any sense of complacency. We have got to stand up and be counted. Derek's legacy for me is one I intend to embrace and carry forward. It is a legacy of determination to make a real difference."

Iolo Williams said that Derek uniquely combined a modern outlook with core conservation values (not just the '3Ms: Marketing, Membership and Money') and had transformed Welsh nature conservation. He remembered being with Derek at a speech by the then Welsh Minister for the Environment (though that was shamefully only part of his wider portfolio). After some time, both were finding the speech decidedly dull, so Derek 'whispered' to Iolo "who is this bloody buffoon?" a comment clearly heard by the Minister as they were sitting right at the front. Iolo described Derek as "a breath of fresh air", who "always had time to listen"; he finished by saying even in his wicker coffin Derek "was still doing a better job than most conservationists I know!"

Shaun Thomas (RSPB Operations Manager) recalled Derek saying "organisations come second, nature comes first" and described Adam Rowlands being delighted last year when Derek visited Minsmere and said it was looking "as good as in Bert's day". He said it was hard to over-estimate how much impact Derek had had on many people's careers in conservation with his "bloody magnetic personality." Julian Roughton (SWT Director)

remembered the "golden and heady days" working with Derek at SWT, when Derek's innate optimism and ambition drove both himself and the Trust on.

A fund is being set up in Derek's memory to offer bursaries to young people in nature conservation. It is linked to the 'A Focus on Nature' organisation (see their website for further information). Donations made payable to Suffolk Wildlife Trust should be sent to the trust at Brooke House, Ashbocking, Ipswich, IP6 9JY, marked "Derek Moore". Finally, for anyone who hasn't yet read it, Derek's autobiography 'Birds - coping with an obsession' (New Holland 2013) is an excellent way of remembering a great friend of SOG who will be very sadly missed.



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## Suffolk Memorial event for Derek Moore

There will be a memorial event for Derek at Redgrave SWT reserve on 9th May 2015, at which all who knew Derek will be most welcome; further details in the next Harrier and on the website nearer the time, but

please note the date. Beryl and the family realised that it was not possible for many Suffolk friends to attend the funeral, but have said that Derek's ashes will be divided between Suffolk and Skomer.



Eddie Bathgate

## Richard Crossley's Guides and The Launch Of CARP

*The Cut, Halesworth, 20th October*

As part of the Halesworth festival this year, Kathy Piotrowski arranged an evening event at The Cut jointly with the Waveney Bird Club. More than 200 people attended and the SOG stand was very busy with visitors. Viking Optics had generously donated a pair of binoculars for the raffle which was drawn by Kathy.

The main event of the evening was three talks.

Of the trio of well-respected speakers, the first two – author and former journalist Simon Barnes and RSPB senior investigator Guy Shorrock – spoke about raptor persecution, which has been the subject of a previous article in *The Harrier* 178; whilst Richard Crossley provided some light relief with anecdotes from his travels compiling his unique field guides.

to be the tip of a very large iceberg". A horrific surveillance video showed buzzards being killed by a gamekeeper. "One hundred and sixty-four people have been convicted of persecution since 1990, nearly three-quarters of them gamekeepers". Two of those convicted also had a 'vermin' diary detailing the killing of 102 buzzards, 40 ravens and 37 badgers during a spring purge of the shooting estate where they worked. Surprisingly, they were reported to the police by other keepers from the same estate, proving that, whilst persecution is clearly practised amongst the profession, it is not approved of by all.

The real target, Guy explained, is the employers who sanction raptor persecution. He went on: "getting these prosecutions is really hard work. Getting [the person] behind the gamekeeper is the real problem. In Scotland we have vicarious liability to try and make managers more accountable".

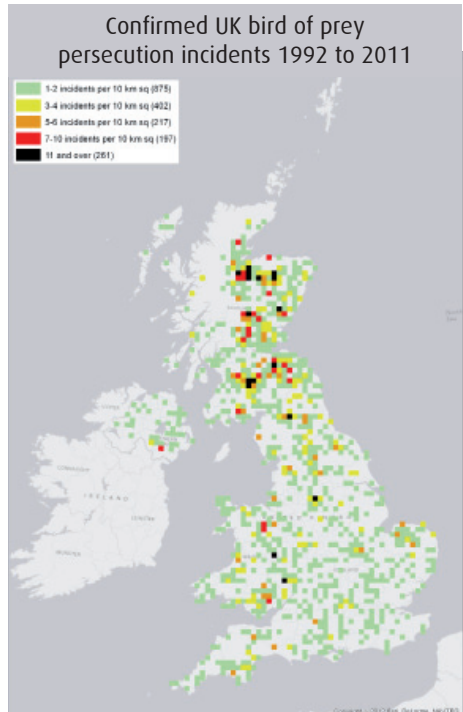


Photo: Gi Grieco



### RSPB

Guy Shorrock opened the event with a shocking talk detailing the scale of raptor persecution in the UK. "A hundred incidents are reported every year, and this is believed

Illustration: RSPB

## CARP launch

Simon Barnes, in his thought-provoking speech launching the Campaign Against Raptor Persecution (CARP) said that: "raptor persecution is against the law and is immoral". He went on to underline that CARP wishes to cooperate with individual shooting estates and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) in a non-adversarial way, in order to apply pressure to those bringing the sport into disrepute. Shooting estates will be invited to declare themselves "raptor-friendly" and to operate a zero-tolerance policy on wildlife crime, and gamekeepers will be encouraged to join the National Gamekeepers' Organisation.

## Crossley's ID guides

Richard Crossley followed this sombre brace of talks and he did so with a lively and fun exposition of his travels. He expanded

on many interesting experiences gained during the tens of thousands of miles he covered during the development of his revolutionary new field guides. He also talked enthusiastically about his Race 4 Birds Foundation, aimed at enthusing young birders in America (although British, Richard lives in the US) and his involvement in the Pledge 2 Fledge organisation, which encourages birders to take time to introduce others to nature through birding.

Both his innovative guides, 'The Crossley ID Guide – Britain & Ireland' and 'The Crossley ID Guide – Eastern Birds' were on sale during the evening. For a full review of his Britain & Ireland guide, see The Harrier 178.

A huge thank you goes to Kathy Piotrowski for arranging the evening, which raised £700 for Suffolk's farmland birds.



Photo: Jon Evans

Simon Barnes, Kathy Piotrowski and Richard Crossley

## Rehabilitation Of Injured Birds In Suffolk

Peter Merchant, a member of SOG, told the Harrier about his work as a Defra-registered Bird Rehabilitation Keeper.

Any injured or immobile bird found in East Anglia may well end up in the temporary care of Peter Merchant. Peter specialises in raptors and owls, but has also cared for other species including Swifts, Nightjars, Woodpeckers and Turtle Doves.

Under the Countryside Wildlife Act 1981, Rehabilitation Keepers may house injured birds for the purpose of tending to and then releasing them.

### Early days

In the early 80s, Peter held a Birdkeeper's Licence, which often meant that injured birds were passed to him for care. During this time he was involved in a captive breeding programme for Barn Owls under which owls were released with the co-operation of local farmers and landowners. Peter released 14 Barn Owls in 1983 alone, with ringing returns suggesting a 40% survival rate.

Following on from this experience, in 1984 Peter applied for and received a Bird Rehabilitation Keeper's licence and was mentored by Reg Snook, the Defra Area Inspector.

### Reciprocity

Birds that come to Peter for care are principally victims of collisions with traffic, fences or cables, or are suffering from malnourishment and exhaustion. He has not dealt with a poisoned bird since 2000 or a shot bird since 1995 though incidents have been dealt with by others. Injured birds usually come to him from vets and local wildlife organisations. It's a reciprocal arrangement where he gets access to expertise and facilities in return for the birds' pre-release care. Vets do not charge for their services on wild birds and he has always found landowners extremely co-operative when it comes to release time.

Any birds handed in are first weighed and physically inspected. It is often purely a case of feeding them up to their normal weight before they are ready for release. Recently, a female Kestrel was handed in weighing only 180g. Mal-nourished, its first pellet was soil, indicating it had been surviving by eating worms. Initially force-fed small morsels, the bird soon fed naturally and was released after eight days, having achieved a weight of 245g. Barn Owls are often found in ditches after continual periods of rain, suffering from exposure and unable to fly. These typically take 7-10 days to feed up for release.



Photo: Bill Baston

After veterinary assessment and any required treatment, Peter keeps the birds in close confinement, moving them to an internal aviary when they are able to stretch their wings. Except during examination, contact with people is non-existent to avoid any risk of human imprinting. In the later stages when they're fit for release, they progress to an external aviary, which is constructed so that their only view is of the sky.

Whilst the imperative for resident species is to release them close to where they were found as quickly as possible, migratory species are housed over winter until the first migrants return.

### Orwell Peregrines

Peter has had close ties with the Orwell Bridge Peregrine project. Not everyone is in favour of this project, however, and Peter has, from time to time, had to deal with unpleasant telephone calls from the racing pigeon fraternity.

Two Peregrines – one from the Mill Building and found on a street in Ipswich and the second a fledgling rescued underneath the Orwell Bridge – were both successfully rehabilitated. The Orwell Bridge survivor was however struck and killed by a lorry at

Cattwade just five weeks later. An Osprey on migration was discovered in a state of exhaustion, again under the Orwell Bridge, and swiftly re-released.

### Recent cases

Some species react better than others to rehabilitation. Sparrowhawks are particularly difficult to examine and treat, being highly strung, so their survival rate is poor. Tawny Owls by contrast are much more robust. One owl hit by a train leaving Felixstowe clung to the windscreen wiper until being rescued by the Westerfield Stationmaster. The owl, suffering from concussion, was handed over to Peter and released back in Felixstowe just two days later.

Two Rough-legged Buzzards were found immobile on the coast. Whilst one was released after regaining its normal weight, the other one did not survive and is now on display – stuffed – in the Ipswich Museum.

### Today

Of the 12 birds handed to Peter this year, ten have been released to date. He is currently caring for a Common Buzzard as it awaits the moult of its damaged primary feathers, and a Turtle Dove which will be released in the spring. The preceding two years saw 27 birds come and go. Any captive-bred birds can also end up in Peter's care, although since 1990 these cannot be released back into the wild, with the exception of certain rarities under special Defra licence. Attempts are made to pass non-native species on to zoos and falconers, but native species can be used to foster recuperating fledglings. Peter retains a pair of captive-bred Barn Owls he uses as foster parents, as well as a pair of Great Horned Owls waiting for a permanent home following the bankruptcy of their original owner. Peter feels it is both a privilege and a pleasure to be involved in such important local bird work. Anyone finding an injured raptor should contact Peter Merchant on 07860 829060.



Photo: Bill Baston

Juvenile Peregrine

## Turning back time and tide at Wallasea

What do you do with 3 million tonnes of soil, mud and clay dug out from beneath the city of London by the Crossrail tunnelling project? The RSPB saw an opportunity to work with industry and develop a major coastal habitat creation project. The largest project of its kind in Europe, the project has involved bringing earth and clay by barge from the London Crossrail tunnel project to Wallasea Island in Essex, transferring it by conveyor belt in order to raise land levels, before breaching the island's sea walls to create stepped levels of lagoons, saltings, islands and pastures criss-crossed by ditches that will be home to birds, water voles, reptiles and marine species.

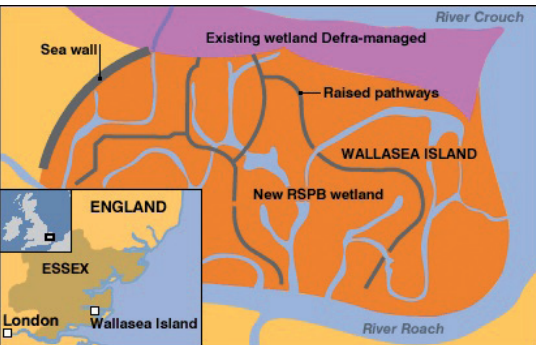


Illustration: RSPB

### Saltmarsh history – ‘between a rock and a hard place’

Saltmarshes and associated coastal habitats survive as arguably the last unmanaged wild space in East Anglia. Subject to ‘coastal squeeze’ – caught between hard sea defences and the sea itself – they are forced out of sync with geological time, leading to increasing inundation and erosion. British saltmarshes are under threat: four hundred years ago there were 30,000 hectares of inter-tidal saltmarsh around the Essex coast. This now stands at just 2,500 hectares.



Photo: Gi Grieco

Common Seal

lagoons of Wallasea Island fell back and reformed according to the whims of an indifferent nature, land and sea becoming merged in a truce understood by Redshank and Curlew, yet still coveted for the high quality grazing land that could be squeezed dry with sea walls and drainage. By the end of the 16th century the island's marshes were replaced by a flat coastal plain lower than the highest tide, intersected by ditches and protected by walls of clay and turf. Only fishermen and wildfowling valued the untamed transition zone beyond the seawalls that had to be rebuilt and strengthened after every storm.

By the end of the 20th century, Wallasea was still economically viable agricultural land, but the seawalls had fallen into poor condition, while the value of the land itself failed to meet the Environment Agency's criteria for continuing flood defence. Here was an opportunity to create wildlife habitat on a landscape scale, with the creation of 680 hectares of coastal habitats.

### Adjacent conservation projects

Sited within the Crouch & Roach river estuaries, the project lies adjacent to the Wallasea Wetlands Creation Project, completed in 2006 and which was carried out to replace similar bird habitats lost to port development during the 1990s. Covering 115 hectares and originally Defra-led, this neighbouring project is now also managed by the RSPB. It is intended that the current project will build on the success of the neighbouring Defra scheme.

### Benefit for species

The presence of water voles, native reptiles and badgers – all legally protected species –

proved to be an added complication, albeit one that has prompted discussions between Natural England, RSPB and the project's ecologists about how new habitat for water voles may actually benefit breeding waders.

Before work began, the island was crossed by a series of eutrophic ditches found to support populations of water voles, while the sea walls and ditch sides provided habitat for common lizard, adder and badgers. In order to progress the project it has been necessary to carefully capture and relocate or displace populations of protected species to replacement habitat, comparable with the new saltings and lagoons.

When work is completed around 2025, it will include two large saline lagoons, where a series of pipes and culverts – connected to the estuary – will allow precise control of the water level for breeding, feeding and passage birds. A complex network of ditches specifically created for water voles, in combination with the mosaic of islands and lagoons, will create a 'cryptic' landscape to prevent ground predators from roaming freely and avian predators from finding perches, thus offering protection to nests and vulnerable young birds. The scale and openness of the site should encourage mobbing behaviour amongst colonial nesters, such as Avocet and Lapwing. The increased effectiveness of such behaviour would consequently allow non-colonial nesters, such as Ringed Plover and Redshank, to rear more young.

### Benefit for people

Wallasea Island lies in the heart of an internationally important estuary close to the Thames Gateway and for many people in southern East Anglia it will be their closest accessible wild coast. Although the work will not be completed until around 2025, visitors can still visit and view the project's

progress from the North (Defra) sea wall, as the marshland naturally regenerates and each phase of the project gradually comes to life.

Members of SOG may feel inspired to ask whether there are opportunities for similar projects in Suffolk. Whilst there have been some small 'managed realignment' sites, for example at Orfordness and Trimley, there have been no clear opportunities yet in Suffolk to consider projects on anything like the scale of Wallasea. However, the storm surge of December 2013 saw 'unmanaged realignment' take place at SWT's Hazelwood Marshes reserve with interesting results that show there is space in Suffolk for large-scale habitat creation projects that give nature a free hand. The Wallasea Wild Coast Project has proven to be an opportunity for industry to work together with wildlife conservation to the benefit of both. Time and tide will continue to seek an ancient balance between land and sea, regardless of how high we build our walls. The real opportunity lies in our perception of landscape and natural systems and acknowledging that the wild is on our doorstep. Our so-called crowded island has more space and opportunity for wildlife than we perhaps realise, if we are just prepared to be creative.

Artist's impression: RSPB



## RSPB North Warren gets a facelift

North Warren is the oldest RSPB nature reserve in Suffolk, but it often remains in the shadow of nearby Minsmere. It is, of course, a wonderful place to visit, with vast coastal grazing marshes that attract huge flocks of geese and ducks in winter, a hidden reedbed where Hobbies and Bearded Tits may be seen in summer, and remnants of Sandlings heath where Adders and Grayling butterflies breed.

North Warren has a justified reputation for being one of the best places to watch winter wildfowl on the Suffolk coast, with huge flocks of Wigeon, Teal and other dabbling ducks present, alongside good numbers of Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and Snipe. High tide roosts can include hundreds of Dunlin and Ringed Plover.

But it's the geese that North Warren is most famous for, with several hundred White-fronted Geese over-wintering here, alongside feral Greylag, Barnacle and Canada Geese and a few Brent Geese. It's also home to the most reliable flock of Tundra Bean Geese in Suffolk, if not the UK, with numbers varying from just a handful to 40 or more each winter.

Until recently, though, it has often been difficult to get good views of the grazing marshes. That has all changed this autumn, thanks to an exciting project, funded by HSBC.

Four new viewing platforms have been built by Gilleards, specialists in hide design and construction. Two of these look west across South Marsh, are accessed via a new permissive path close to the sluice cottage, and will give great views of North Warren's ducks and waders. A third platform, accessed on another new path from the old railway line, is on the western side of South Marsh. These complement the platform built a couple of years ago overlooking North Marsh.

The fourth platform overlooks the reedbed near the boardwalk and will provide great views of roosting harriers and Starlings in winter or hawking Hobbies in summer.

In addition to these platforms, new scrapes, ditches and sluices have been created on South Marsh to improve the year-round wildlife-watching opportunities. These will allow much better control of water levels and should ensure that areas of open water remain throughout the summer. This should in turn benefit breeding and migrant wading birds, helping to strengthen North Warren's position as one of Suffolk's best nature reserves.

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## SOG Bird Boxes

Garden bird boxes will once again be available in the New Year with all monies raised going to SOG.

Boxes can be pre-ordered from Eddie Bathgate for collection at the AGM or any of the indoor talks.

Choose from two styles: for tits, sparrows and Starlings, boxes with holes; for Robins, Pied Wagtails and Spotted Flycatchers there are open-fronted boxes.

Later in the spring, Swift boxes will be available, to support the joint SOG and SWT 'Save our Suffolk Swifts' initiative.

Suggested donation for the garden bird boxes is £5 and £10 for the Swift boxes.

If you would like to order boxes, please email or call Eddie Bathgate using [harrier@sogonline.org.uk](mailto:harrier@sogonline.org.uk) or 07525 323750.

## BINS Autumn

### September 2014

Early month saw good numbers of common migrants along the coast which included: **Whinchat**, **Pied** and **Spotted Flycatchers**, **Common Redstart** and **Willow Warbler**.

The **EASTERN SUBALPINE WARBLER** remained at the Customs House along View Point Road, Felixstowe until 2<sup>nd</sup>, though it often remained very elusive during its stay.

Minsmere produced a juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** which spent an evening on Island Mere 2<sup>nd</sup>, the female **Ferruginous Duck** remained and also juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** seen offshore, further **Long-tailed Skuas** were noted off LBO 3<sup>rd</sup> and Thorpeness 7<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Wrynecks** were well represented in the county with single birds being seen (unless otherwise indicated) at Aldeburgh, Bawdsey, Dingle Marsh, Minsmere (2), LBO (3), Benacre (2), Westleton Heath, North Warren (2), Orford Ness and finally Thorpeness Common.

An **Ortolan Bunting** was found late in the day at LBO 5<sup>th</sup> also **Great White Egret** (south over Southwold) and **Honey Buzzard** in off at Dingle Marsh were found on this day.

A female **LESSER GREY SHRIKE** was found early on 6<sup>th</sup> along the river wall between Shingle Street – Hollesley Marsh; it remained until 7<sup>th</sup> and proved rather popular during its two day stay.

Two **Barred Warblers** were found at Thorpeness 7<sup>th</sup> with one bird remaining until 20<sup>th</sup>. **Ospreys** were seen over Bawdsey 6<sup>th</sup>, Stour Estuary and Kessingland 7<sup>th</sup>, Minsmere 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>.

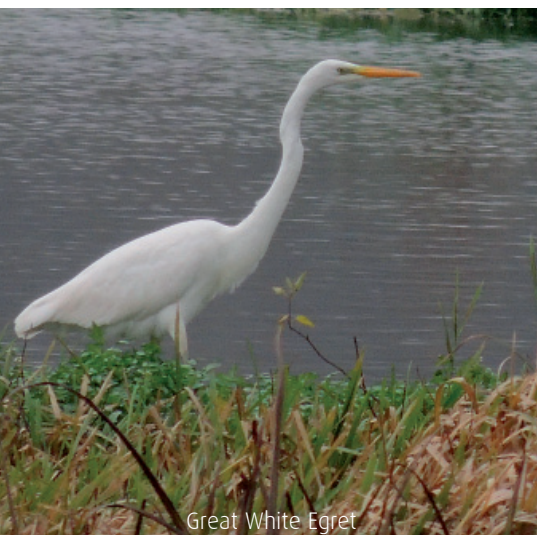
Two juvenile **Red-backed Shrikes** were found at Gun Hill, Southwold 8<sup>th</sup> with one bird still present the following day. A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was present at Minsmere on 10-14<sup>th</sup> and again 18<sup>th</sup>. Dark morph juvenile **Honey Buzzards** were seen at LBO before flying north-west along the Orwell 11<sup>th</sup> and Alderton 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-breasted Flycatchers** were noted at LBO (trapped) 15<sup>th</sup>, by the allotments on the evening of 17<sup>th</sup> at Thorpeness and Kensington Gardens, Lowestoft 20<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>. A 1<sup>st</sup> winter **Red-backed Shrike** was present at LBO 19<sup>th</sup> and three birds were then present on site on 21<sup>st</sup>!

A probable **Olive-backed Pipit** was seen by Sizewell power station 19<sup>th</sup>; the following day saw the first **Yellow-browed Warbler** of the autumn which was seen in private gardens at Burgh Castle 20<sup>th</sup>.

A **PALLID HARRIER** was seen by a lucky few as the juvenile bird flew through Minsmere early on the 21<sup>st</sup> (the only previous Suffolk record was 1999). **Corncrakes** were flushed from the pits at Benacre and lost to view 21<sup>st</sup> and along the footpath by Levington Creek 24<sup>th</sup>.

A **Red-throated Pipit** was seen briefly at Landguard on 23<sup>rd</sup> before flying over the dock complex. Minsmere hosted a **Wryneck** and **Great White Egret** 24/25<sup>th</sup> with the latter still present well in to November.



Great White Egret

Photo: David & Margie Carter





Hen Harrier

Photo: John Richardson

A **Harrier sp** was seen over Wades Lane, Chelmodiston 26<sup>th</sup>. A 1<sup>st</sup> winter **Red-backed Shrike** found at Ness Point 27<sup>th</sup> stayed for several weeks, last seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. This bird was mighty confiding and showing down to just a few feet!

Finally, a small arrival of **Yellow-browed Warblers** occurred late month with birds noted at Kessingland 27<sup>th</sup>, Bawdsey 28<sup>th</sup>, Corton and LBO 30<sup>th</sup>.

## October 2014

Big news broke late in the day on the 4<sup>th</sup> concerning a **LITTLE CRAKE** that had previously been reported a few days earlier as seen from Bittern hide, Minsmere. As expected, this bird proved popular during its 10 day stay and at times the hide proved rather cosy!

A **Siberian Chiffchaff** was present at Shingle Street 3<sup>rd</sup>. A very impressive count of **Great Skua** (Bonxie) was had from Ness Point with 123 birds seen on the 4<sup>th</sup> alone; nearby the 1<sup>st</sup> winter **Red-backed Shrike** remained throughout the month.

A **Richard's Pipit** was seen to fly north over North Denes Lowestoft 7<sup>th</sup> and a **Great Shearwater** was reported north off Sizewell.

An adult **Iceland Gull** was a noteworthy find from Orfordness 11<sup>th</sup>. Favourable weather conditions from the 12<sup>th</sup> produced up to four **Yellow-browed Warblers**. The following day all eyes turned to the sea with the highlights being; **Leach's Petrel** off Pakefield, **Sabine's Gull**, **Leach's Petrel** off Slaughden and a dark-rumped **Petrel sp** off LBO.

The 14<sup>th</sup> dawned murky with an easterly

breeze resulting in good numbers of thrushes and finches coming in off. Up to 102 **Ring Ouzels** were reported along with 12 **Yellow-browed Warblers** and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher**!

The following day was not so exciting, although **Rough-legged Buzzards** were seen at Dunwich and Southwold, three **Jack Snipe** at Hollesley Marsh and six **Yellow-browed Warblers** remained at several locations for a few days.

A **Swift sp** was seen over Reydon Smere 16<sup>th</sup>; with 2 **Rough-legged Buzzards** seen over Minsmere and singles again over Dunwich and Reydon.

A probable **Raven** was noted over Hollesley Marsh 17<sup>th</sup>, also a **Great Grey Shrike** was present at LBO, **Hawfinch** south along the cliffs at Bawsdey and a pale **Common Buzzard** that resembled a Rough-leg was seen at Shingle Street and near to Hollesley.

**Great White Egrets** were seen on Haddiscoe Marshes 18-20<sup>th</sup>, Trimley Marshes 22<sup>nd</sup>, Benacre 23<sup>rd</sup> and the Minsmere individual remained throughout the month.

**Rough-legged Buzzards** were again seen over Minsmere 19<sup>th</sup> and Hinton crossroads 22<sup>nd</sup>. A juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was seen on roadside pools in the west of the county just north of Great Livermere 19<sup>th</sup>.

A single **Shorelark** was seen at Benacre 18<sup>th</sup>, this then rose to three birds from 21<sup>st</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> though mobile at times.



Horned Lark

Photo: Barry Woodhouse

A **Great Northern Diver** was seen on the Stour Estuary 24<sup>th</sup>. **Great Grey Shrikes** were seen on Cavenham Heath 24-27<sup>th</sup> and Butley 26<sup>th</sup>.

## November 2014

The month started with both **Ravens** still present and showing well at Gedgrave Marshes. The 1<sup>st</sup> winter **Red-backed Shrike** that was first seen 27<sup>th</sup> September was last reported 2<sup>nd</sup> as was the Framsdon **Hoopoe**.

A **Richard's Pipit** was flushed from long grass at Butley Ferry 2<sup>nd</sup>; the 2<sup>nd</sup> also saw an adult **Iceland Gull** briefly on East Scrape before flying north and **Great White Egret** still on Island Mere until 11<sup>th</sup> at least.

A **Purple Heron** or odd-looking **Grey Heron** was seen on South Marsh North Warren during the afternoon 4<sup>th</sup> and then again 8-9<sup>th</sup> though elusive throughout. An adult **Black**

**Brant** was present amongst Brent Geese both at Levington Creek 4<sup>th</sup> and Sudbourne Marsh 8<sup>th</sup>.

Favourable conditions saw several **Little Auks** off our coast 4-5<sup>th</sup>. **Grey Phalaropes** were seen on Stour Estuary 6-9<sup>th</sup> and south past Minsmere 10<sup>th</sup>.

A distant **Scoter sp.** thought to be **Common** was present on the Stour Estuary, Stutton Ness 3<sup>rd</sup>, however closer views of the bird on 5<sup>th</sup> resulted in it being confirmed as Suffolk's first ever **SURF SCOTER**. Thankfully the Surf Scoter remained into December at least, allowing county listers to add this species to their ever-growing tallies.

Other birds of note on the Stour Estuary included **Great Northern Diver**, **Velvet Scoter** and singles of both **Slavonian** and **Black-necked Grebes**.



Photo: Brian Buffery

A confident **Hoopoe** was present at Kessingland Sluice 25-27<sup>th</sup> and what was probably the same bird at Framsdon 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>. A **Raven** was seen over Gedgrave 26<sup>th</sup> then two birds seen together at the same location 28<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> gave many the opportunity to add this species to their county lists!

**Shorelarks** were seen to fly south along the beach at Slaughden (two birds 28<sup>th</sup>) and eight birds 30<sup>th</sup>). A **Grey Phalarope** spent one afternoon on Minsmere scrape 28<sup>th</sup>.

The 25<sup>th</sup> saw two **PENDULINE TITS** on Island Mere, Minsmere and a single bird at Botany Marsh, Snape. An adult **white-winged gull** (probably **Iceland**) was seen south off Minsmere 30<sup>th</sup>.

Finally, the 30<sup>th</sup> saw a massive southerly movement of **dark-bellied Brent Geese** off our shore with several thousand birds being seen!



Photo: Andrew Easton

Finally, a late **Yellow-browed Warbler** was present by the sewage works at Southwold 9-10<sup>th</sup>. Highlights from Minsmere included two **Raven** south 10<sup>th</sup> plus **Long-eared Owl** and a **Grey Phalarope** that flew south offshore the same day. On the 11<sup>th</sup> a **Rough-legged Buzzard** was noted and a **Shorelark** graced the Scrape 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Late news...

**Black Stork** initially at Trimley, **Dusky Warblers** at both Hollesley and LBO and a **Hume's Warbler** at Bawdsey. The first **Waxwing** was noted in Lowestoft on the 19<sup>th</sup> November.

The 5<sup>th</sup> saw two **DESERT WHEATEARS**: the first a rather smart 1<sup>st</sup> winter male was discovered along the sea wall at Links Road, Lowestoft and the bird performed impeccably throughout, staying until 9<sup>th</sup>; the second, a female bird, also performed well along Gorleston sea-front until 12<sup>th</sup>. These two individuals became the fourth and fifth county records with previous sightings being Landguard 1987 and Easton Barents 1990 & 2008.

Photo: Danny Porter



**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

## Editor required

We are looking for an editor for The Harrier. Steve Piotrowski and John Grant will be editing the Spring edition. Those interested should contact Roy.Marsh@suffolk.gov.uk

Merry Christmas and all the best for 2015, Eddie & Adam

**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

## A SOG Exile in London

The morning was grey, as they all seem to be in October, and it was more advanced than I had intended. Typically, I had got lost — spectacularly, comprehensively, hung-overly lost — and ended up cutting through hedges, scrambling up banks and receiving the wet slap and scratch of leaves and branches against my face. At last I stumbled across the Birches, autumn-bronzed, by the lake filling up with winter wildfowl, and a small knot of twitchers, blankly staring upwards. They reported it hadn't been seen for the morning. It took me ten minutes until I found it, shyly flitting around the top of the Birch with a Goldcrest and a Chiffchaff. I piece together leaf-broken views: a mossy green back and yellow stripes, two on the wings and two on the head. Somewhere between the Goldcrest and Chiffchaff in size and action. The Yellow-browed Warbler. A good bird... for London.

I never expected to see one surrounded by joggers and coffee-sipping dog walkers against an endless backdrop of football pitches and tower blocks. But then I never expected that I would also find myself a long way from home, as a Suffolk birder exiled in London.

It is more than just the physical distance. Basic things have to be re-learned. Take the bushes in the local park: they will always remain empty, no matter how far east the winds have come in from. That Parakeets can be interesting too, if you look at them hard enough. That Meadow Pipits might not have much luck breeding in an island of long grass in the park, but that they sing in spring with volume enough to drown out the train line, the ring of fast roads and the ever-wailing sirens. I used to pass over them quickly, having checked they were nothing more interesting; now I spend time with them, enjoying their manic energy that drowns out the rest of the city.

This is what the exile has. When pickings are slim, as they usually are, you develop a deeper appreciation of the mundane, the everyday extraordinariness of nature. You become grateful for what there is, rather than disappointed about what there isn't. Shieldbugs and spiders, and the stuff beneath your feet become as interesting as looking up for the birds that aren't flying overhead.

It's not that I don't miss Suffolk, I plan my return every day. And when I make it back, I will have a deeper appreciation for every bird around me.



Ring-necked parakeets

## Upcoming Projects

### SOG Rookery Survey 2015

In 2015 it will be 40 years since Suffolk Ornithologists' Group carried out a BTO Rookery survey, the results of which were published in a SOG publication, 'The Rook In Suffolk' by Michael JF Jeanes and Reg Snook.

The aim of next year's survey is get an up-to-date picture of the rookeries in Suffolk, using recent data from the BTO Breeding Bird Atlas 2007-2011 and Suffolk Bird Reports, comparing populations, rookery numbers and sizes then and now.

We will welcome all your records: a form is included in this edition of The Harrier and extra forms can be downloaded from the SOG website.

All surveys should be carried out between 10th and 30th of April 2015.

### BTO House Martin Survey 2015-16

The BTO will be conducting a House Martin survey to investigate why the species is in decline. In 2015 the first part of the survey will look at a number of random 1km squares throughout the UK in order to give a population estimate. The second part of the survey in 2016 will be regular observations at nests. Details can be found on the BTO website and there will be further information on the SOG website, as well as in the next edition of The Harrier.



## Field Trip Reports

### SOG Events for 2015

Once again, SOG have a packed calendar of exciting indoor and outdoor events set for 2015 and all are welcome to attend. There has been increased attendance at indoor meetings this year which will hopefully continue during 2015. The atmosphere is always enjoyable and the talks are always inspiring, and it's a good opportunity to socialise with other SOG members.

In response to requests from members in the west of Suffolk, we are holding meetings in Stowmarket and Stowupland – see programme card for details – and the joint meeting with the Waveney Bird Club will be held again in Halesworth. Please make sure to note the venue when looking at the programme card.

In addition there will be a series of talks across Suffolk in support of our unfolding 'Save our Suffolk Swifts' campaign.

Thank you to all the leaders who have led field trips during the year and to the members who have attended. Suffolk is fortunate to have a very good variety of habitats and associated birdlife and wildlife that can be seen and enjoyed by participants. If you haven't yet been on a trip, you can find many trip reports in The Harrier, with others on the SOG website, where we encourage SOG members to add their own photographs from the day.

Finally, please note that news updates can be sent by email. If you would like to register for these, please contact the SOG website.



'SOG cheering in the Chaffinches'?

Gi Grieco

## Orfordness

27-28 September 2014

**Leader: John Grant**

Our annual trip to Orfordness is one we all look forward to: the anticipation of which migrating species we might get to see (previous years have included Baird's Sandpiper and the famous Sandhill Crane) is enhanced by the feeling of being in a remote location. This year's trip had the extra treat for some of the group of an enchanting evening and overnight stay the night before the trip. This was facilitated by the warden, Dave Fincham, in negotiation with SOG, following a suggestion by Ivan and Val Lockwood.

### Saturday

Dave collected us and our bags and equipment by boat from Orford Quay at 5pm, for the short journey across the Ore. He then drove our kit to the dormitory accommodation whilst we took a leisurely walk to see

what we could find. One of the first birds we encountered was a female Hen Harrier, which looked fantastic as she got closer and closer to us in the late afternoon light. The first bit of scrub we came to held a Chiffchaff and some Stonechat, then we took the path across the old airfield, noting the increased amount of water in the pools which is due to an improved environmental management scheme. In this area were several Meadow Pipit, up to five Greenshanks, two Avocets, numerous Little Egret, Snipe, and further scanning revealed a Buzzard and at least three Kestrels.



Photo: Gi Grieco

We also counted 45 Cormorants and four Spoonbill flying over us heading south, presumably to roost on nearby Havergate Island. Near the accommodation, sitting on some old, twisted metal, was a fine Little Owl and further along from the viewing stand we had good views of a Chinese Water Deer.

With the light now fading, we collected our bags, settled in and prepared and shared a delicious evening feast. After the meal, we went for a short walk, past the moth trap, which we would check the following day. The remote location without light pollution gave a wonderful opportunity to see the night sky full of stars.

### **Sunday**

After a night during which some might have wished for better soundproofing, we blearily breakfasted and packed up our lunches. As the other trip members were due at the quay at 7.30am, we gave ourselves an hour to walk around before meeting them there. On the walk down we encountered a Green Sandpiper in the pools along with the Greenshank and a good number of Avocet, now totalling over 30. Joined by the rest of the group, we re-traced our steps, seeing Marsh Harrier, two Spoonbills – this time heading north – plus an amazing count of over 50 Little Egrets. Flying off the coast were two Brent Geese, flocks of Wigeon and Golden Plover as well as a distant Hobby heading towards Orford village and we had a second, albeit rather distant, sighting of the Hen Harrier.

Scanning the creek that enters the Ore we saw a variety of waders including Knot, Curlew and Dunlin with another Hobby flying over the shingle. At the moth trap, Mike Marsh showed us a variety of moths including Lunar Underwing, L-album Wainscot, Frosted Orange and Black Dart along with two insects, the invading Western Conifer Seed Bug and the spectacular Great Diving Beetle, one of the UK's largest insects. Across at the

ringing hut a few birds were being ringed and a couple of our number were lucky enough to catch up with a Firecrest which had been reported in the area. The migrants, including a Chiffchaff or two, were mainly grounded, although some of the group did see a Peregrine fly past.

### **Seawatch**

Then it was onwards to the beach for a seawatch and lunch; weather conditions weren't great with a misty horizon, glaring sun and southerly winds, but some birds nonetheless appeared out of the haze including a handful of Gannets, Brent Geese and – most unexpectedly and all the more excitingly for their proximity – two Sooty Shearwaters heading north. Usually this species with its typical arcing flight is seen in more blustery conditions, but these two were low across the water in a direct, flat flight, gliding with occasional flaps, giving excellent views to the assembled group. Other species noted offshore were two Sandwich Terns, a Great Skua and several Common Scoter along with a Grey Seal and a Harbour Porpoise with calf.

### **Rounding off**

Deciding to forgo the long walk to Pigpail, as the area beyond was reported as flooded from a river wall breach, we went back through the buildings area checking the scrub and brambles in search of migrants. Although very quiet, two Wheatears, new for the day, and another Chiffchaff were found along a track. Heading back now to the dock we first saw three Swallows and then a perched raptor that turned out to be not a Hobby as first thought, but on closer view a very smart-looking Merlin.

A rare treat to be on Orfordness in the twilight hours and dark starry night, which more than made up for the grounded migrants. Our thanks to John and Dave – we definitely hope to be back again next year for a repeat adventure.



Gi Grieco

## Corton

11 October 2014

**Leader: Gi Grieco**

When planning a trip a year in advance specifically to see migrants, you can only keep your fingers crossed and hope for easterly winds. This year's trip would have been ideal had it been two days later. Nonetheless, with the winds south to south-westerly, we had an enjoyable – and to some extent noteworthy – day's birding in north-east Suffolk.

### *Seawatch start*

Our early morning start had us heading past old Corton sewage works to seawatch from the cliff top, hearing Jay and Green Woodpecker on the way. From the tops we saw a steady stream of Brent Geese flying south, along with several Gannet, a few Red-throated Diver, a couple of Curlew and what we were pretty sure were four Great Skuas heading south on the horizon – their distance just prevented certainty. Overhead some visible migration (vismig) was under

way with small numbers of Meadow Pipit, Skylark, a dozen Swallows and a Grey Wagtail heading south along the cliff. We met local birder James Brown, who was there specifically for a vismig watch and who had a good tally of birds moving through. Walking up to the disused MOD Radar station, we found two Wheatears, Reed Bunting, more Meadow Pipit and Skylark and spotted a distant Buzzard. Retracing our steps via the trees and hedgerow between Broadsands and the church, we stopped for a quick cuppa and then headed down the old railway line. This proved to be very quiet with just three Chiffchaffs, Goldcrest and three Stock Doves. The weather was by now quite warm and we noted several butterflies and dragonflies and on our return to the car park Marion spotted three Buzzards and a Sparrowhawk circling overhead giving lovely views.

### *Cheering sight of migration*

We decided to move on to Lowestoft North Denes, which was quiet. Seeing more Brent Geese offshore, we stopped for lunch before continuing to walk south past the old fishing net posts and on to Ness Point to look for a recently-reported juvenile Red-backed Shrike, which had been seen earlier that day.



By now the weather had become overcast and a bit windier and after a brief wait the Shrike showed extremely well. Inhabiting a seemingly small area it had been able to feed well and we watched on several occasions as it flew out to catch bumblebees and a wasp, while at other times it clambered through the Osmanthus bushes hunting prey. News came from Suffolk BINS that there had also been a Black Redstart further along near the wind turbine so we decided to have a look and managed to view two birds before rain started to fall. We started to head back, but as the rain worsened we sheltered by a structure right at Ness Point. In spite of the rain we were able to erect our scopes and began scanning the sea once more, again seeing Brent Geese, Red-throated Diver and Gannet, two definite Great Skuas and Guillemot on the sea. We were then treated to one of the best sights of the day, if not of the entire year! Small passerines were bouncing along just above the water. As they neared, we could pick out white on the wing and realised they were Chaffinches. In groups of a dozen to over a hundred, they were making landfall to our south and we counted many more groups of similar size.

Then, as the weather front started moving away, the birds began to veer towards us, and when a large group flew in directly over our heads we all let out a spontaneous cheer! More birds came in, with lots more still heading south over the water and as the weather cleared, the birds started to come in to our north. From our observation, they seemed to be following the weather front. In all, we saw over 500 birds make landfall and a few hundred more move south: we were all elated to have witnessed such a memorable example of migration in action, which was rounded off by Ash's identification on call of our last migrants of the day, two Grey Wagtails.



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Steve Fryett

## Shingle Street

20 September 2014

**Leader: Steve Fryett**

It was good to welcome a relatively new face to the group, as well as an established SOG member who had travelled from far-flung Lincolnshire. As ever, the weather played an influential role in the day, as on our arrival at Shingle Street, the hoped-for sunny periods were replaced by doom-laden clouds, followed swiftly by thunder rumbling overhead and then rain. The ten members of our group headed off south in conditions that

were far from ideal, with just one Chiffchaff and a few Goldfinch noted. Around the allotments we desperately looked for some shelter from the continuous rain but without success, so we decided to call it a day at the Street and regroup at Bawdsey.

### **Bawdsey**

We parked alongside the river and the rain stopped enough for us to venture into the Bawdsey picnic site. A Swallow was noted overhead and Goldcrests were heard singing in several places in the Holm Oaks. Reported calls of the Firecrest could not be confirmed. A Song Thrush flew from cover as we approached the car park entrance and scanning long distance over fields now under

the plough we noted at least one Common Buzzard being harassed by corvids. Looking up the River Deben and over the marsh we saw a Kingfisher perched on a post with Little Egret, Curlew, Stock Dove, Great Crested Grebe and Common Tern all nearby. Further upstream, a Common Buzzard was perched on a post on the river wall.

We then moved to the seaward side of Bawdsey checking the Tamarisk area. A warbler – almost certainly a Blackcap although not seen – was in sub song and several other unidentified warblers were clearly skulking. As conditions continued to improve, we saw several Chiffchaff and Goldcrest as well as having two sightings of what was possibly a female Common Redstart. Eleven Brent Geese flying down river and out to sea reminded us that autumn was on its way.

### **East Lane**

We moved once again, having decided to lunch at East Lane where the stable weather conditions would allow the birds to show themselves. A good number of migrant Meadow Pipits plus one Rock Pipit were seen amongst the rocks and grassy bank in front of the car park plus a juvenile Pied Wagtail looking splendid in pristine new plumage. The lagoons held a good number of Wigeon still in eclipse plumage, as well as Gadwall,

a couple of Shoveler and two Common Snipe. A flock of 50 Linnets rose from nearby rough grassland as hirundines began appearing: at least 100 Swallows were swirling around the lagoons and bunkers before being upset by a small unidentified raptor – possibly a Merlin – and quickly departing. Finally we walked back along the ridge to check the southern hedgerows, noting a female Wheatear on the rocks and a passing Sandwich Tern to the south. The hedges failed to provide any birds until we reached the Hawthorns beside the lagoon and here we located four Chiffchaffs all together. A final note is that we also managed to see a number of butterflies, including Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood and several Small and Large Whites, in spite of the seemingly rather unfavourable weather.

Photo: Ashley Gooding



Wheatear

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## **Books For Sale**

Peter Dare has a large collection of birding books for sale – a full list is available to view on our website – and he will pass on a part of any sale proceeds to SOG. Peter lives in Wenhaston and can be contacted on 01502 478061.

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## **Sheila Fisher 1918-2014**

SOG is very grateful for the generous donation received in memory of Sheila Fisher. She passed away peacefully on the 19<sup>th</sup> May. Her funeral was held at All Saints Church in Laxfield on 5<sup>th</sup> June.

## Council for 2014:

### Officers

Honorary President: **Steve Piotrowski**  
Chairman: **Roy Marsh**  
Vice-Chairman: **Steve Abbott**  
Secretary: **Phil Whittaker**  
Treasurer/Membership Secretary: **Matthew Deans**  
Projects Officer: **Gi Grieco**  
Interim Harrier Editors: **Eddie Bathgate & Adam Gretton**  
Website Co-ordinator: **Gi Grieco**  
Publicity: **Eddie Bathgate**  
Bird Report Editor: **Nick Mason**  
Outdoor Events Organiser: **Gi Grieco**  
Indoor Events Organiser: **Adam Gretton**

### Members

**Craig Fulcher** [to 2015]  
**Robin Harvey** [to 2016]  
**Edward Jackson** [to 2016]  
**Scott Mayson** [to 2015]

### Honorary Vice-Presidents

**Jean & Ken Garrod**  
**Mike Hall**  
**Robin Hopper**  
**Mike Jeanes**  
**Mike Marsh**  
**Philip Murphy**



### Bird Recorders

#### North-east Area Recorder:

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

#### South-east Area Recorder:

**Scott Mayson**, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY  
Tel: 01394 385595 Email: [smsuffolkbirder@gmail.com](mailto:smsuffolkbirder@gmail.com)

#### West Area Recorder:

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

### Treasurer/Membership Secretary

**Matthew Deans**, c/o 49c Oak Hill, Hollesley, Suffolk IP12 3JY



# Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



## Who we are

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

## What we do

### Networking

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

### Media

- Strong web presence - [www.sogonline.org.uk](http://www.sogonline.org.uk)
- Active Twitter feed - [@suffolkbirds1](https://twitter.com/suffolkbirds1)
- Quarterly magazine - **The Harrier**
- Annual review - **Suffolk Birds** report

### Trips and talks

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



### Protecting birds

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



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

*For birds & for birders*

SOG Registered Charity No. 871446

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