

# The Harrier

March 2010

Bulletin No. 160



**Suffolk Ornithologists' Group**

# Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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**Cover:** *Duncock with nesting material* – Paul Lacey.



# The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group  
Bulletin No. 160 – March 2010

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

## Targeting Priority Farmland Birds

Steve Piotrowski

### Introduction

**S**OG members can play a pivotal role in attempting to reverse the fortunes of the county's farmland birds as previously reported in *The Harrier* (e.g. December 2006 and March 2007). Many species that were formerly abundant on farms have become vulnerable to agricultural intensification and are now in steep decline. The early submission of records for six species, known as the 'Arable 6' (Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Turtle Dove, Yellow Wagtail, Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting) could result in a government-backed Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement being offered to farmers in that area. This would allow wildlife-friendly habitats to be developed which would provide the 'Big 3' for farmland birds – nesting habitats, and summer and winter food. These six species are important indicators of the ecological health of the wider countryside. In an effort to bring about a significant recovery in the populations of these species, Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) in partnership with Natural England (NE) and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB (SCH AONB) is leading the Targeting Priority Farmland Birds Project. It will also call upon BTO Atlas research and work in alliance with RSPB and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) to draw up HLS applications.

The principal aim of the project is to deliver tailored advice during one-to-one farm visits and at workshops for farmers, agronomists and advisers. A key message will be that farmers can adapt their methods to provide better wildlife habitats without compromising profitability. The project will particularly target farms in 'Arable 6 hot-spot' areas and focus on those where agreements in the now-closed Countryside Stewardship (CSS) and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) schemes are nearing an end and those whose Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) agreements are soon to be reviewed as well as those not yet in any scheme.

Although the advice will specifically target the 'Arable 6', it will also benefit other farmland species, such as Barn Owl, Yellowhammer, Skylark, several species of bat, brown hare, as well as plants such as shepherd's needle and corn marigold.

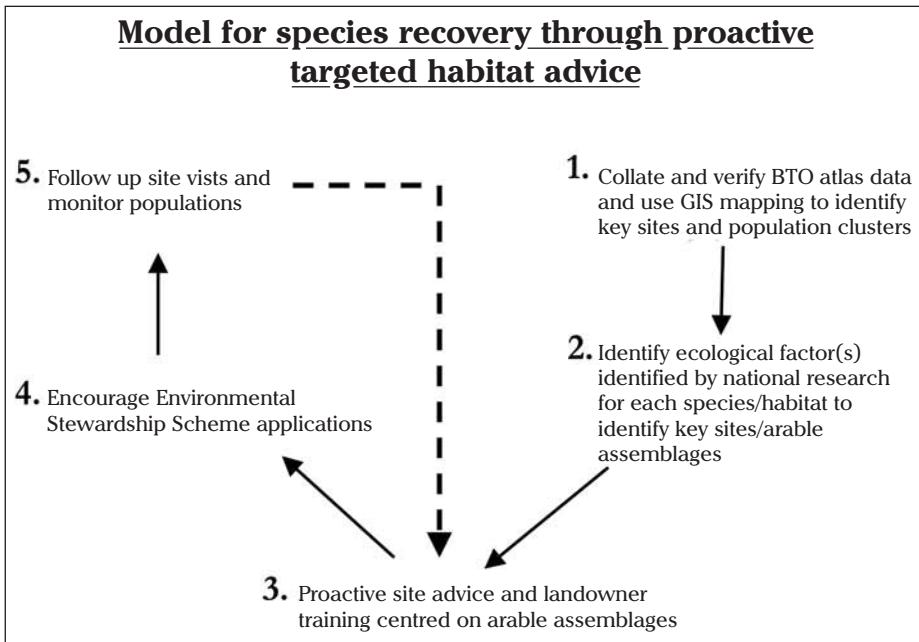
## Farmland Bird Index

The government has adopted a target to reverse the decline in farmland birds in England by 2020. Progress against the target is assessed annually using the Farmland Bird Index, which is made up of the trends of 19 widespread bird species closely associated with agricultural land.

The Farmland Bird Index was developed by Defra, BTO and RSPB. It is produced annually using data for the following species: Kestrel, Rook, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Woodpigeon, Greenfinch, Lapwing, Goldfinch, Whitethroat, Linnet, Yellow Wagtail, Reed Bunting, Stock Dove, Starling, Yellowhammer, Jackdaw, Turtle Dove, Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting. The Farmland Bird Index indicates a decline in farmland bird populations in England of around 50% since the mid-1970s.

Statistics released in May 2009 showed the Farmland Bird Index for England had fallen by 13% between 1994 and 2007. This included a 7% decrease between 2006 and 2007, the biggest one-year decline since 1998. The figures also showed a very clear north-south divide with only minor changes in northern regions of no more than  $\pm 2\%$  to decreases in excess of 12% in the more intensively-farmed southern regions. The latest Breeding Farmland Bird Index for the UK (published 29th Oct. 2009) was 47% lower in 2008 than in 1970. Most of the decline in the Farmland Birds Index occurred between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s, but the index increased by 1% between 2007 and 2008.

## Methodology



**Figure 1:** Methodology followed during the pilot project.

## **Principal Objectives**

1. Halt the decline of the 'Arable 6' for which Suffolk is a national stronghold or has a national responsibility by providing proactive advice and training for landowners to stabilise core populations.
2. Create conditions for targeting the 'Arable 6' to allow them to recover and respond to factors such as habitat fragmentation and climate change by creating local networks and micro-networks of habitat through which they can disperse and re-colonise.
3. Collect an evidence base to improve ecological understanding of population density, habitat requirements and dispersal mechanisms of target species.
4. Secure positive management of existing species-rich habitats and identify opportunities for habitat restoration and recreation through the Environmental Stewardship Scheme.

## **Landowner Contact**

Landowners are being contacted with a view to:

- Discuss options/habitat requirements.
- Confirm advice given (in a letter and brief report, e.g. one page A4 template to indicate specific mixes of habitat required).
- Distribute fact sheets giving detailed advice on habitat management, seed mixes and other requirements for target species.
- Promote liaison with NE.
- Promote partnership working with FWAG/RSPB.

## **Monitoring Outputs**

- A brief report will include a summary of lessons learned and potential next steps.
- Locate and mark nests of ground nesting birds using specialist volunteer nest finders to avoid damage by farming operations.

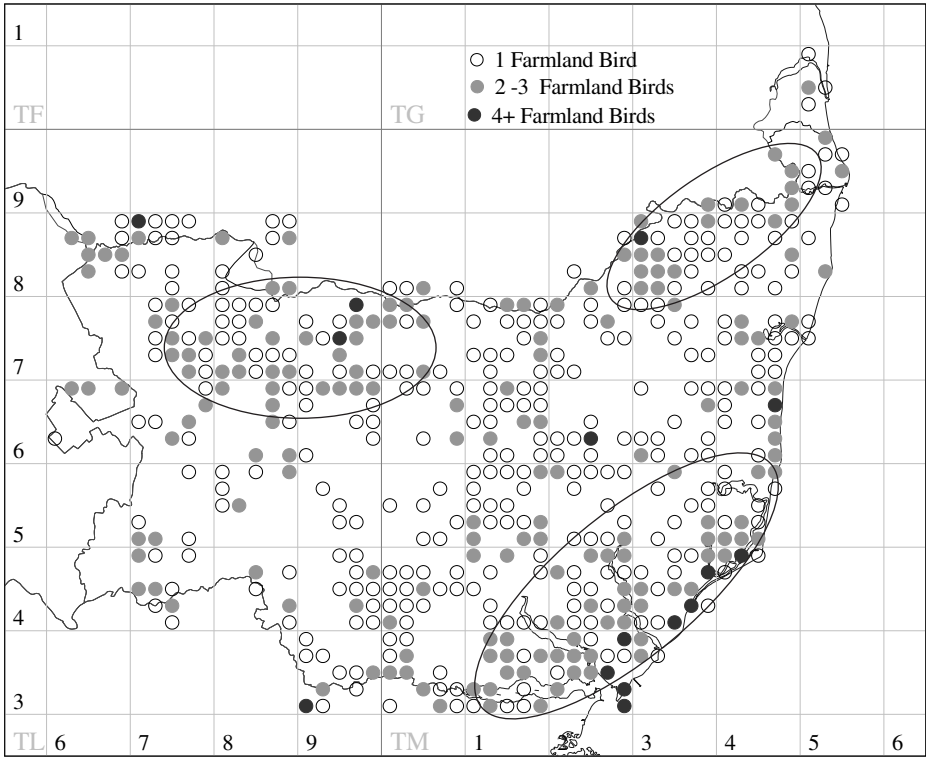
## **Promotion**

- Education/training events are being held in the form of workshops and/or farm walks.
- Landowners are to be supplied with fact sheets giving detailed advice.
- Press releases targeted at farming journals will be forwarded to other publications to inform the wider public.

## **Preliminary results and discussion**

Figure 2 shows the arable bird assemblages based on fieldwork carried out during the summers of 2008 and 2009 for the BTO Atlas. The key areas for arable birds have been circled: Breckland, the lower Waveney valley and the Suffolk coast. The concentration of 2-3 and 4+ records in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB is noteworthy particularly as some landowners in this area have been slow to enter into Environmental Stewardship agreements (the Suffolk Coast and River Valleys is an HLS Target area). The light soils of the Sandlings, within the AONB, are excellent for vegetable growing and provide a profitable business for farmers.

## Farmland Birds



**Figure 2:** Map showing known coverage of 'Arable-6' in Suffolk based on BTO Atlas fieldwork.

The adviser's role is to inform farmers of the importance of the birds present in their area and look at options for providing and/or improving nesting and feeding habitats without detriment to farming profitability. The visits would hopefully pave the way for the preparation of HLS agreements with Natural England. Follow-up work, including the preparation of a Farm Environment Plan (FEP), would be carried out by other agencies such as FWAG, RSPB or the farmer's choice of land agent for those receptive to the proposals.

Since the start of the pilot project, 274 farms (35,796 ha) have been targeted for a consultation and 35 advisory visits have been made. A total of 13 of these visits are in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

### Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to SWT, Natural England and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB for sponsoring this project. The author acknowledges the contribution of the British Trust for Ornithology which has allowed the use of Atlas data and the trends graphs. The graphs were derived from data submitted as part of their Common Bird Census

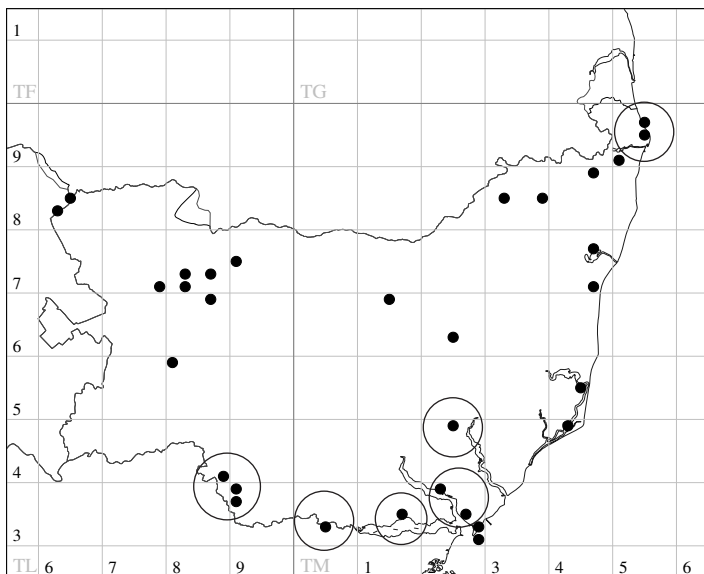
and Breeding Bird Survey projects. Margaret Renault has completed data processing and cartographic work based on BTO Atlas data. Simon Evans has coordinated the colour ringing of Tree Sparrows and the success of this part of the project is due to the extraordinary efforts of John Walshe, Jan Cawston and Simon himself. The colour-ringing was sponsored by bursaries from SOG, SNS and SWT. We acknowledge the contribution of BTO Atlas fieldworkers who together have made a herculean effort in achieving good coverage for Suffolk and to other observers for their timely submission of records. I would particularly like to thank Joe Davis, Colin Jakes, Malcolm Wright and Dave Cawdron for their help in monitoring the west Suffolk Tree Sparrow flocks. Thank you to Adam Gretton, Julian Roughton, Dorothy Casey, Celia Rhodes and Nick Collinson for their comments on the draft.

## Appendix I: Current status of the ‘Arable 6’ in Suffolk

### Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* – Red Listed

Nationally, Tree Sparrow populations crashed between the 1970s and the early 1990s with the current population about 3% of that in the 1970s. Undoubtedly, the loss of the Tree Sparrow from Suffolk would have national implications. The decline has occurred at the same time as decreases in the numbers and/or range of other farmland birds which share its diet of grass, wildflower seeds and some cereal grains. Components of agricultural intensification, such as reductions in winter stubble availability, are likely to be implicated in the decline.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)



**Figure 3:** Map showing summer distribution of the Tree Sparrow following two BTO Atlas breeding seasons.  
(Records circled require verification)



Recent work completed by SWT as part of NE's 'Countdown 2010 Project' show the Tree Sparrow distribution to be in clusters around Mildenhall, Lackford/Ampton, Debenham and Kessingland. It is surviving in small numbers in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB with small colonies noted in early 2009 at Sizewell and Sudbourne along with wintering flocks at Benacre, Henstead, Giselham and Kessingland. However, early indications for the 2009 breeding season are not good for the coastal populations with nesting failing to take place at either Sizewell or Sudbourne. The latter is most disappointing as breeding colonies have been present at this location for several decades. However, West Suffolk colonies have fared much better with stronger populations at Ampton and West Row raising two or three broods. All known colonies are currently being monitored by a dedicated team of volunteers, and landowners are being advised on conservation measures available, nest boxes fixed and an all-year-round food supply maintained.

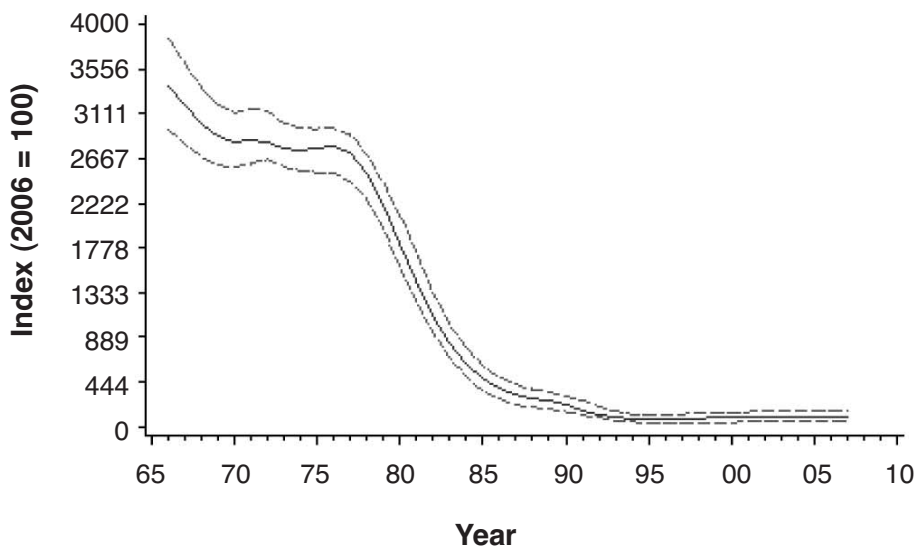
Studies are underway to determine whether there is any obvious correlation between wintering and summering populations. It would appear that the majority of birds at Ampton are of local origin with five pairs using the boxes provided as part of the project and an unknown number nesting under the eaves of nearby cottages. The large late-summer flock of 150+ birds from August must have been of local origin and the wintering population was probably reinforced by birds from colonies in village gardens near to Ampton. From the 310 birds ringed at this site to date, there has yet to be a recovery of any significance and no visiting birds from outside Suffolk have been found. The behaviour of the West Row colony is quite different. All birds use the nest boxes provided, but the colony disappeared from the breeding site soon after birds had fledged from the final broods, but returned to winter a few weeks later. Visitors from elsewhere in the UK have joined the wintering flocks. Suffolk Ornithologists Group and Suffolk Naturalists Society have jointly sponsored a colour-ringing study on movements and, although it is too early to determine origins with any certainty, early evidence suggests that wintering flocks are bolstered by birds moving from breeding colonies in the East Midlands through to South Yorkshire. To date, Suffolk ringers have controlled four individuals from Spurn and others from Eyebrook Reservoir, Lincolnshire, Wiltshire and Hertfordshire. There is also evidence of presumed migrants moving from coastal locations to join wintering flocks inland. A full report on this species is to be published in this year's edition of Suffolk Birds (Piotrowski, Evans and Walshe *in prep*).

SWT's Lackford Nature Reserve lies at the heart of Suffolk's strongest population clusters and, in spring 2010, wild-bird seed strips will be planted in fields that adjoin the driveway leading to the reserve centre. A mix thought most likely to meet the Tree Sparrow's requirements has been selected. Suffolk's wintering flocks appear to have an affinity for strips containing tall plants that provide a structure, for example maize or sorgham, along with seeding plants such as red, white or reed millet growing at lower level. Another essential ingredient is a tall, thick hedge or an area of scrub from where flocks can descend but hastily retreat at the slightest sign of danger.



## Population changes

### CBC/BBS England 1966-2007 Tree Sparrow



#### Critical limiting factors for Tree Sparrow:

- nesting sites and year round food availability

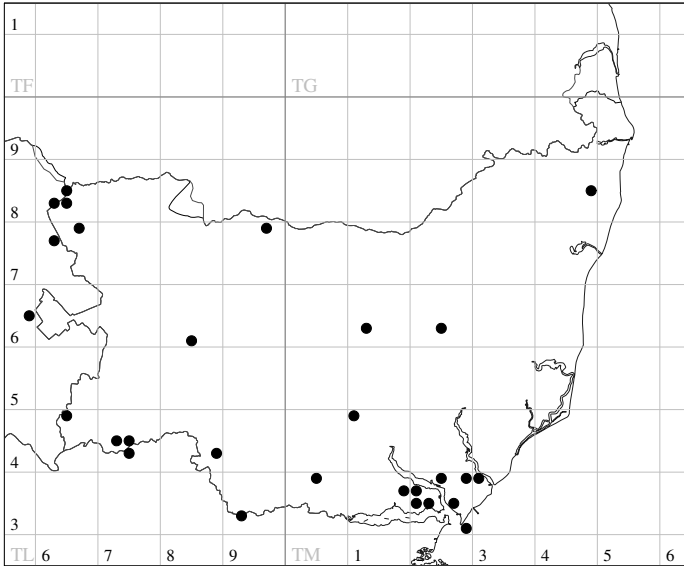
#### Focus for landowner advice:

- increasing the availability of wild bird seed strips and duration of seed availability
- provision of nest boxes at core sites to allow colonies to expand
- appropriate management
- securing Environmental Stewardship support

#### Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* – Red Listed

The Corn Bunting is estimated to have declined by 61% across Europe during 1980–2005. With declines across much of its European range, this previously ‘secure’ species is now provisionally evaluated as ‘declining’. It was once considered to be common throughout most of Suffolk but, by the 1960s, the breeding population was almost entirely confined to a narrow strip along the coast, along the Stour Valley and in north-western areas of the county. By the end of that decade, the coastal population crashed in line with that seen nationally. A decline of at least 60% was noted during the late 1970s and 1980s and, from 1994-2005, BBS data shows a further decrease of 35% in Eastern England.

Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*)



**Figure 4:** Map showing summer distribution of Corn Bunting following two BTO Atlas breeding seasons.

The plight of the Corn Bunting in coastal Suffolk was highlighted in Mick Wright’s report entitled ‘Birds of Conservation Concern on Farmland in Coastal Suffolk’. This report was presented to NE and completed by SOG. The survey found only 24 territories in 13 plots. All territories were located in the southern section of the coastal belt with the species virtually confined to the Shotley Peninsula.

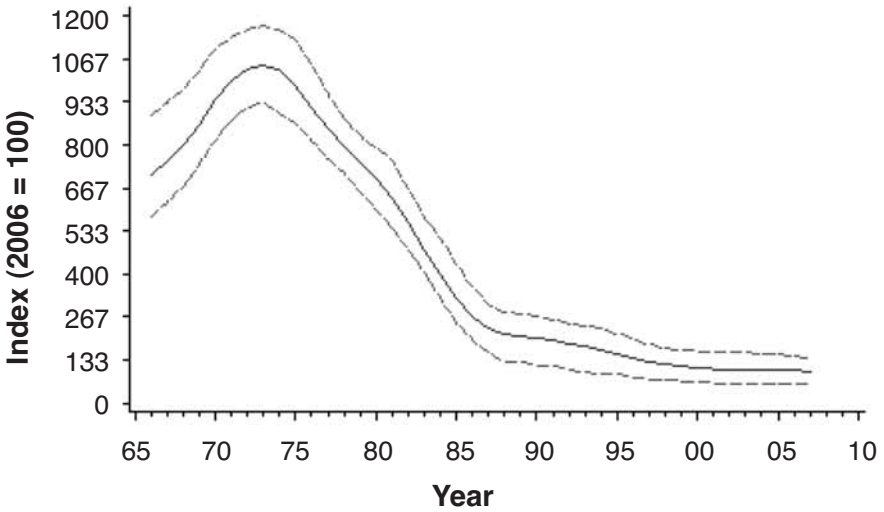
**Population changes**

A countywide Corn Bunting survey completed by SWT/SWT/RSPB on the weekend of 2nd/3rd June 2006 found the core of the county’s breeding population on the Shotley Peninsula and just across the River Orwell at Levington. There were smaller populations in southwest Suffolk, the Lark Valley, the Fenland Ridge. Fieldwork for the BTO Bird Atlas has revealed isolated pairs hanging on at traditional coastal sites at Falkenham, Bawdsey and Shingle Street and singing birds well inland at Earl Soham and Mickfield.

**Focus for landowner advice:**

- targeted restoration of lower-intensity cultivation;
- securing ES support;
- nest locating and protection.

CBC/BBS UK 1966-2007  
Corn Bunting



Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* – Red Listed  
European Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)

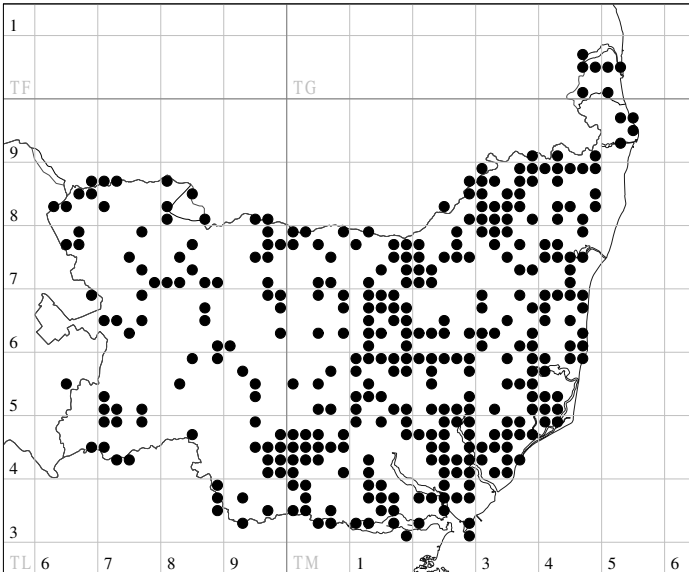
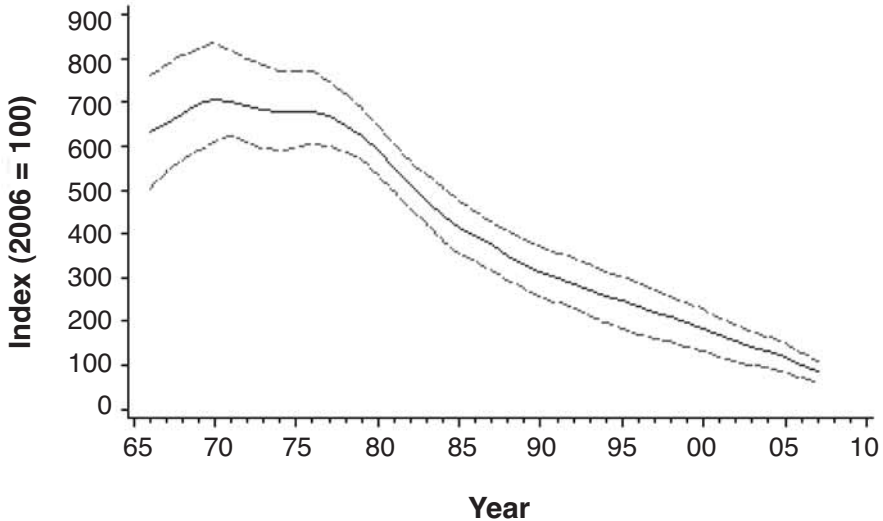


Figure 5: Map showing summer distribution of Turtle Dove following two BTO Atlas breeding seasons.

Turtle Dove once considered a common summer visitor, the UK population has fallen by over 60% since the late 1970s. The reasons for decline are many. Drought and loss of forest and scrub in sub-Saharan Africa have reduced food sources in its wintering grounds. In Britain, it has been adversely affected by widespread changes in agricultural practices. Since World War II the extensive use of herbicides and pesticides has reduced food availability in its breeding areas and the grubbing up of tall, ancient hedgerows has reduced foraging and nesting sites.

### CBC/BBS UK 1966-2007 Turtle Dove



The cooler, wetter summers experienced in Britain in recent years, possibly linked to climate change, have reduced breeding success. Although never as plentiful as in former years, a survey by SWT in 2008 showed that the Turtle Dove was quite common on Suffolk's coastal strip. These populations are therefore of national significance.

#### Focus for landowner advice:

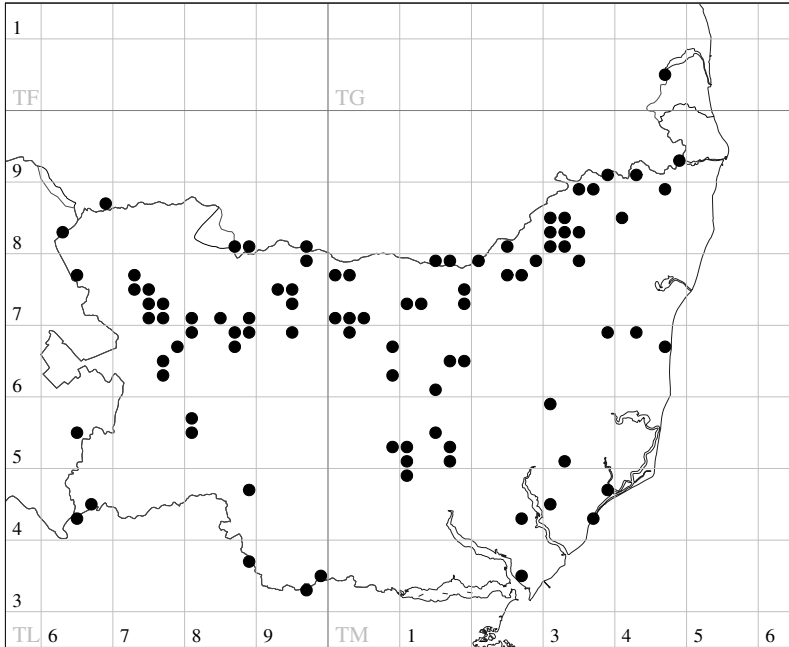
- Maintain tall, thick hedgerows and areas of scrub, and allow the shrub layer to develop along woodland edges.
- Cultivate field margins, but leave them undrilled, unfertilised and unsprayed.
- Adopt conservation headlands by avoiding spraying the outer six metres of cereal fields with broad-leaved weed herbicides.
- On set aside, sow small plots of wild bird cover with a biennial mix of seed-bearing plants.

## Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* – Red Listed

This species has declined enormously, probably because of the effects of agricultural intensification (specifically herbicides) on the food plants of young chicks' insect prey.

Despite years of research and the application of a government Biodiversity Action Plan, the continuing decline shown by CBC/BBS suggests that all efforts to boost the population have so far been unsuccessful. Local extinctions are now likely to be widespread, but masked in some areas by continuing releases of hand-reared birds onto shooting estates.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

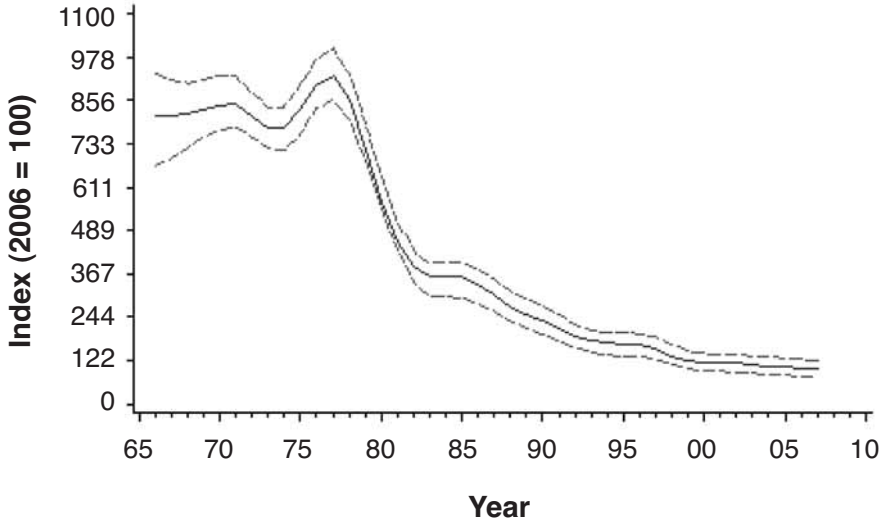


**Figure 6:** Map showing summer distribution of Grey Partridge following two BTO Atlas breeding seasons.

Artificial rearing has increased since the mid-1980s, despite the failure of restocking as a means of restoring breeding numbers, while releases of non-native gamebirds, which have increased greatly, can be detrimental to the native species. Grey Partridge is one of the most strongly declining bird species in Europe, having decreased at an annual rate of 7% during 1980–2005. Figure 6 shows that the main concentrations are in north Suffolk, but also that the coastal and south Suffolk populations are weak. The latter is particularly worrying as BTO Atlas results show almost 100% coverage for TTVs in the coastal region.

## Population changes

### CBC/BBS UK 1966-2007 Grey Partridge



#### Focus for landowner advice:

- targeted restoration of lower-intensity cultivation
- securing ES support

#### Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* – Amber Listed

Lapwings have declined continuously on lowland farmland since the mid 1980s, probably because changes in agricultural practice have led to their breeding productivity dropping below a sustainable level. Surveys in England and Wales showed a 49% population decline between 1987 and 1998.

In Suffolk, a 1987 national census showed that the county's population was in the region of 1,840 pairs with 58.7% choosing semi-natural grassland and the remainder cultivated land. A repeat survey in 1998 revealed that the Suffolk population had declined by 53% to around 860 pairs. The Lapwing still frequents arable in the Brecks and on the coast, although breeding success rates are poor.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

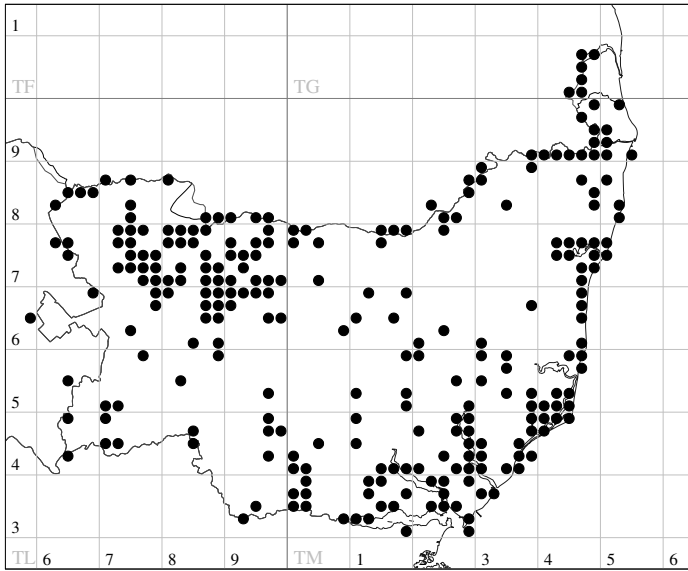
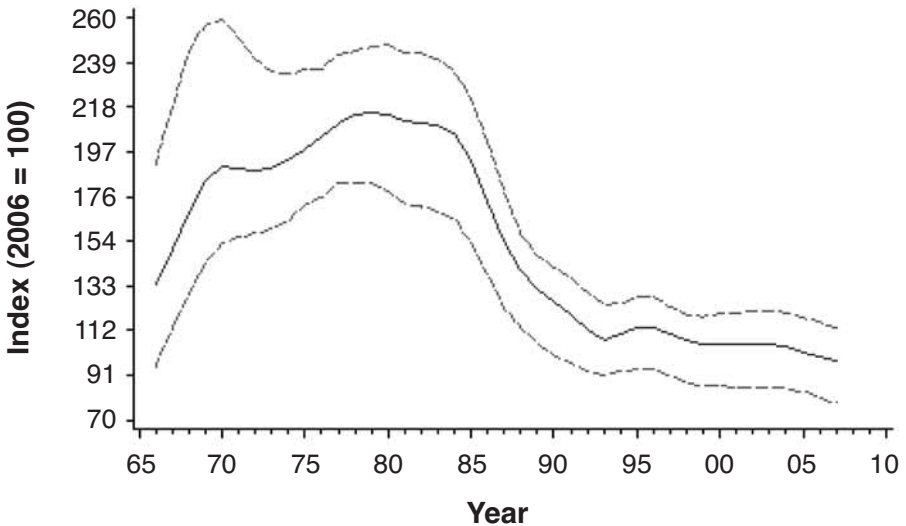


Figure 7: Map showing summer distribution of Lapwing following two BTO Atlas breeding seasons.

Population changes

CBC/BBS UK 1966-2007  
Lapwing





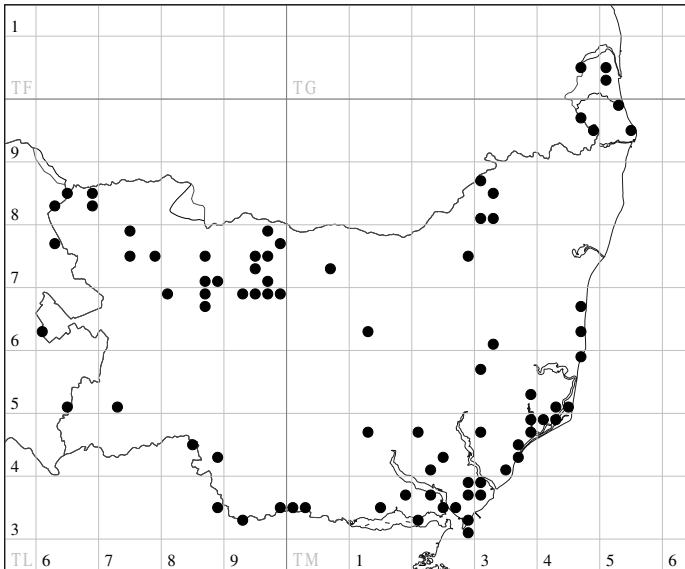
**Focus for landowner advice:**

- targeted restoration of lower-intensity cultivation, but without hedgerows
- securing ES support
- nest locating and protection

**Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* – Amber Listed**

Britain holds almost the entire population of the distinctive race *flavissima*, so population changes in the UK are of global conservation significance. The Yellow Wagtail has been in decline since the early 1980s. The 1988-91 Atlas identified a range contraction towards a core area in central England, concurrent with the early years of decline. Farmland drainage, the conversion of pasture to arable land, the change from spring to winter cereals and the loss of insects associated with cattle have been cited as possible causes. The European trend, which includes other races of the species, has also been downward since 1980.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)



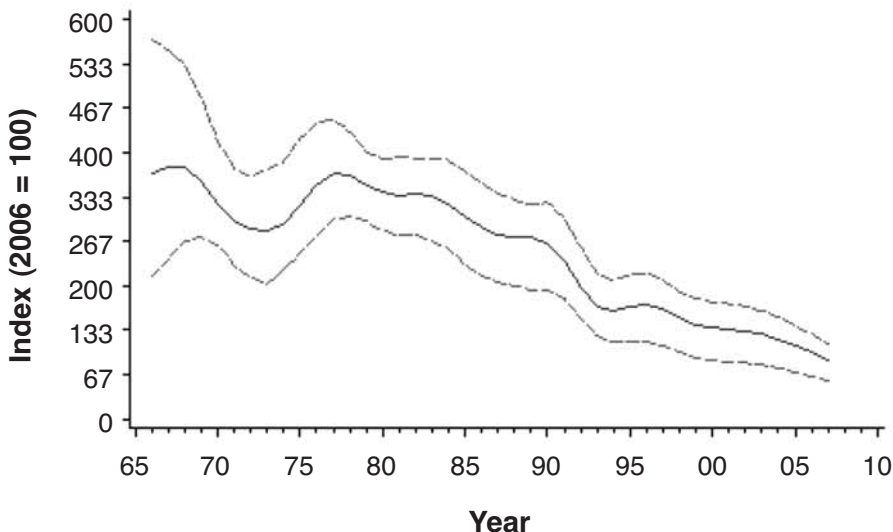
**Figure 8:** Map showing summer distribution of Yellow Wagtail following two BTO Atlas breeding seasons.

In Suffolk, the drainage of marshland habitats and the reduction in dairy herds along with the general intensification of agriculture has resulted in local declines and extinction in some areas. The species was once plentiful on the immediate coastline, sometimes nesting on shingle towards the back of the beach and famously on the heath at Dunwich. However, disturbance has resulted in desertion

of these habitats and now the Yellow Wagtail is only found sporadically, mostly in wetlands. However, there are a few lingering on in arable areas, most notably on the Shotley Peninsula and in The Saints in northeast Suffolk.

### Population changes

**CBC/BBS UK 1966-2007  
Yellow Wagtail**



#### Focus for landowner advice:

- targeted restoration of lower-intensity cultivation
- securing ES support

## Suffolk Tree Sparrow Project

*Steve Piotrowski*

The following short paragraphs provide an update on the Suffolk Tree Sparrow Project with a summary of recent wintering and breeding records.

### West Suffolk

There were flocks of up to 306 wintering at 12 sites which involved a minimum of 600 birds. Breeding was recorded at four of these sites, although results are still being submitted and analysed. Very healthy colonies (Suffolk's most important sites) were logged at Ampton where 32 chicks fledged from at least four double-brooded pairs and West Row where 37 chicks were reared. Highest counts at these sites were 306 and 200 respectively. Wintering birds mostly frequented wild-bird seed mix strips and game cover and bird feeding stations and breeding pairs used

the nestboxes provided. Tree Sparrows undoubtedly benefited from all-year feeding opportunities that were provided at some sites.

### **Suffolk Coast**

Flocks or single birds were noted at 13 winter sites, but the populations were weak and involved around a total of 75 individuals. Tree Sparrows were located during the breeding season at Flixton and Ilketshall St Andrew with five pairs confirmed breeding at the former site. Potential breeding colonies have been lost from Sizewell and Sudbourne. The latter was formerly a well-established wintering and breeding site.

### **Central Suffolk**

Flocks or single birds were noted at five wintering sites involving around 20 individuals. Breeding was noted only at Thorndon and Earl Soham where a single double-brooded pair fledged about 15-20 chicks.

### **South Suffolk**

Lots of red herrings here! BTO Atlas returns show birds present at Little Cornard, Great Cornard, Stratford St Mary, Stutton, Wherstead, Levington, South Ipswich and Seckford Hall Golf Course, but despite an exhaustive search and chasing the original observers I have failed to verify these records. Any help that SOG members are able to give would be very much appreciated.

## **Freedom at Last**

*Colin Carter*

*“A Robin Redbreast in a cage  
Puts all Heaven in a rage. . . .”  
(from Auguries of Innocence by William Blake)*

**T**his is a disturbing tale, not about a Robin, but about another small bird, a Mealy (Common) Redpoll. One day in mid-October 2009, at our regular ringing site in north-east Suffolk, we trapped a Mealy Redpoll in amongst a large group of Lesser Redpolls. It was in good condition but it had two unusual features. Firstly it had a yellowish-orange (not crimson) poll, and secondly it was carrying a split blue darvic leg-ring inscribed with 11 white numbers and what appeared to be the letters BDF. A cage-bird? The bird was weighed and measured and seemed normal, with no wear such as would be expected in a bird kept in captivity. It was then released (without its ring) and flew off strongly.

Andrew Easton drew attention to the little-known fact that red plumage fades in captive birds unless they are fed a sulphur supplement; hence the discoloured poll reinforced the cage-bird theory. Andrew also pointed to several cage-bird web-sites including that of the *British Bird Council*. One of the other sites advertised Mealy Redpolls for sale – \$40 each. Enquiry to the *British Bird Council* revealed that the ring was not one of theirs and they referred us to the other UK cage-bird organisation, The *International Ornithological Association* (grand titles!). A very useful chat with

RL of the IOA quickly followed. He confirmed that it is the law in the UK for cage-birds to be ringed with close-rings, i.e. unbroken bands, which are slipped over the feet of nestling birds, showing that they have been bred in captivity, so a split ring had to be a foreign one, most likely Belgian. RL also said there is a Europe-wide convention to use a different colour for rings each year and blue was the colour in 2008.

So the trail led to Belgium. DR is coordinator of all colour-ringing (legitimate) schemes in Europe and agreed to help. He immediately said “BDF? Could it be BOF?” Of course, a tiny square O was mistaken for a D. The *Belgische Ornithologische Federatie* is the umbrella organisation for cage-bird clubs in Flanders. DR emailed them and a reply came back that the ring was indeed one of theirs and the bird had been ringed in Leper (it used to be known as Ypres, and to the Tommies in the First World War trenches “Wipers”). “It must have escaped.”

Meanwhile the BTO sent details of the capture to NR at the “Vogeltrekstation” at De Moeren, close to Leper, adding that this was the third such case in a couple of years.

NR said “When it is a ‘split’ ring, it is definitely (99% sure) an illegal bird, certainly when it shows 2008 as year of ringing. Bird keepers are not allowed anymore to put split rings on. What they sometimes do is re-use rings of dead birds in their aviary, or cut the official closed rings and put them on caught birds. If they have a check and the controlling people do not catch the birds out of the aviary they can only see that the bird is ringed. They use all sorts of tricks, like widening closed rings by either using heat and circlips pliers, or filing the inside etc., etc., so they can put them on an adult bird. Sometimes also they use chemicals to make the legs and/or feet shrink (like alum powder). I am nearly sure this bird has been caught during the 2008 winter invasion.”

So was our bird a wild Mealy, trapped in Belgium in winter 2008, ringed with an illegal ring and kept in an aviary until it escaped some time before it moulted in 2009 (as it had fresh plumage)? Escaped? Had all three known to the BTO “escaped”? NR then told of a past experience when he came upon a British coach near the Belgian coast, whose occupants were buying tobacco. A man in a car was selling birds in cages. The police were called and the coach was later stopped but only budgies were found. The car departed in a hurry but its number-plate was taken and the police went to see the owner, finding many illegal birds in aviaries, and the man was eventually sent to prison. The IOA told me that British people are allowed to bring birds in to the UK as “pets”. This is not true but it seems the practice does go on undercover. And if police or Customs approach, perhaps the birds are set free, in Belgium or here in the UK. It is amazing that in the EU, where unlicensed bird-catching is banned, this still happens.

But the story does have a happy ending. Somewhere out in the wild there is a Mealy Redpoll flying free, minus, of course, its ring. . . .

*[Ed comment – apologies for the rather cryptic reference to initials rather than people’s full names – this is how Colin submitted it and I left it too late to follow up!]*

## Recent Field Meetings

### *Kessingland to Benacre, 22nd November 2009*

*Ashley Gooding [Leader]*

As anybody having undertaken this meeting will know, it is often dogged with poor to downright appalling bad weather. As Gi, Dave and I headed up the A12 we discussed the day ahead in particular the weather and the fact that we had, according to the forecast, a four to five hour window of opportunity before strong winds and rain set in.

Once on the beach we headed north to find the Snow Buntings that are regularly here in the winter months, and also a Shore Lark that had been reported on and off during the week. After much searching in the marram grass and the dried out pool area we drew a blank; this is a large area to search and mindful of the time constraints we turned south and started striding out towards Benacre. We had not gone far when a flock of 30+ Snow Buntings flew over our heads and landed 20 metres or so in front of us. We spent quite some time admiring them, to the point where they came so close that Brian managed some great shots with his camera.

The wind was by now getting stronger by the minute! At the pits just south of the sluice we located Goldeneye, several Little Grebes and a Brent Goose flying south offshore. Beach Farm has always been good for Tree Sparrow but the last couple of years have been excellent. The farmer has planted several maize and millet game strips which attract good numbers of finches at this time of year, so we headed inland past the farm and soon found a pair of Tree Sparrows in a bush though a bit tricky to view. Further on we came across plenty of Reed Buntings in one of the game strips, and on the way back a nice flock of 12 Tree Sparrows coming down to drink from puddles in the track leading to the farm.



*Shore Lark, Benacre – Brian Buffery*

Back along the beach we had a Snipe in off the sea and a mixed flock of Skylark (20+), and Linnets (50+) feeding in the weedy fields. At the Broad the sand may have been blowing horizontal but Terry picked up two small birds on the beach. Scopes were quickly erected and we were soon enjoying some excellent close views of a pair of Shore Lark. Again Brian spent some time patiently waiting for the birds to approach him and was justly rewarded with some cracking photos.

We ate lunch as we scanned the Broad from the comfort of the hide. There were plenty of ducks present, mainly Mallard, Teal and Gadwall, with a few Wigeon and a single Pintail. A pair of Marsh Harriers were the only raptors of the day but always a pleasure to watch. Waders were few and far between with Snipe, several Lapwing, and single Spotted Redshank, Greenshank and Turnstone. Somewhat unusual these days Grey Heron outnumbered Little Egret. All the usual gulls were present as well as an adult and two 2nd winter Mediterranean Gulls.

Bang on cue our window of opportunity closed and the rain started lashing down just as we left the hide. Fortunately the wind and rain was on our backs and I smiled to myself as we headed back along the beach, not just because of the great day we had had but also it wouldn't be the "Kessingland trip" without some inclement weather. Many thanks to all for a great day out; a selection of Brian's photos can be seen on the SOG website.

### **Ramsholt, 12th December 2009**

*Steve Fryett [Leader]*

**T**he final outdoor meeting of the year was well attended, with 15 members. The fields looking towards Felixstowe Ferry held 1000+ Golden Plover and several hundred Lapwing. Heading upstream of Ramsholt Quay conditions underfoot were tricky following heavy rain during the week. The foreshore held the usual common waders with a single Rock Pipit noted on the high-tide line. Avocets are becoming more abundant on the Deben and a flock of 50 was noteworthy. Across the wet meadows adjacent to the church we located a Common Buzzard feeding on an avian carcass in a pine tree which may well have been a female Pheasant; a male Pheasant was seen wandering around underneath the pine tree possibly looking for its mate. Other waders noted before heading into the woods were seven Bar-tailed Godwit with a single Knot and a Snipe flushed from the marsh. In the woods several Bullfinches were heard calling but only fleeting glimpses were obtained. Finally we reached Shottisham Creek where we scanned for raptors noting both male and female Marsh Harrier with a single sighting of a Sparrowhawk. The river was very quiet with just a single Dabchick and one Great Crested Grebe noted. On the other side of the river we could see two large flocks of Brent Geese feeding on autumn sown cereal. Upon returning a Cetti's Warbler was briefly heard calling and back through the woods we found a large flock of tits of 60+ birds, mainly Blue Tit. Finally we returned via Ramsholt church where a Common Buzzard called as it passed overhead for the lucky few who saw it. There seemed an abundance of Red-legged Partridges and a maize patch not only provided good cover for the game birds but also for a sprinkling of distant finches that certainly included Chaffinch as we concluded the meeting.

## *Levington Marina and Trimley St Martin – 16th January 2010*

*Justin Zantboer [Leader]*

**W**ell I have to say that this outing was memorable but for the wrong reasons! The morning started off in superb fashion as I was met at Levington Marina by no less than 13 avian-crazed SOG members where we were then greeted by the spectacular Black-necked Grebe that had frequented the Marina since 10th January. Much to the pleasure of all, the grebe performed to perfection as it showed down to a mere few feet away. That unfortunately though was as good as it got – maybe we should have halted proceedings there and then!

The walk to Loompit Lake saw the arrival of the rain. Driving rain in fact encouraged by a stiff, cold south-easterly wind. Apart from several Shoveler and Pochard, the mostly frozen lake produced no surprises so we didn't linger. Next stop was the 'cliffs' off Sleighton Hill that afforded both good views over the River Orwell and some welcome shelter from the elements. Those that could still see though their optics were treated to a flypast Peregrine Falcon as well as several Avocet amongst the wader flock while, to the rear of our position, a flock of Redwings and Fieldfares busied themselves in one of the paddocks.

A brief respite in the rain gave us the encouragement to continue so our next stop saw us hot footing it through the saltings adjacent to Trimley Retreat. However, after what I deemed a gallant effort, our sought after quarry failed to delight although a Snipe and two Rock Pipits did reluctantly leave their dry spots! A half-hearted scan over the mudflats before the rain returned revealed absolutely nothing so it was here that our numbers dwindled as four of our members succumbed to the weather. Surprisingly, one of those was a Welshman so it just goes to show that us old Suffolk boys and girls are hardy sorts!

The return trudge up Sleighton Hill and Thorpe Lane produced good numbers of Redwings and Fieldfares as well as two Mistle Thrushes and a small flock of Golden Plover flying over while a pair of rather elusive Bullfinches typically only showed to some of the group near Broomhill Grove. A Woodcock scurrying through the trees of Woodruff Grove was unfortunately only seen by me unlike a Snipe which was flushed from cover on Fire Hill.

With the weather worsening, it was with a sense of desperation that we searched for Corn Buntings along the Levington Marina approach road. Fortune finally favoured the brave though as one plucky bird flew up onto the wires and, seemingly totally oblivious to the deluge of rain, gave us all decent views before our binocular eyecups turned into over flowing water butts!

Deciding that enough was enough, it was with deep regret that I called a close on the meeting at midday without continuing to the Levington Lagoon area. Hardcore that I am, I had to consider my aging group members of whom several might have developed rheumatism on their rheumatism had I pushed them any further! We did spend a few minutes rechecking the River Orwell but to no avail. The meeting concluded as it began with a wink from the Black-necked Grebe.

Thanks to all those hardy souls for making the trip an enjoyable jaunt. Today the elements definitely had the victory but next year, as the saying goes, we'll be back!



## *The “Magnificent Seven” in Rutland – 23rd January 2010*

*Bill Stone [Leaders: Ashley Gooding and Bill Stone]*

**S**even SOG members signed up for the trip to Rutland Water reservoir and its nature reserves. With car sharing the most suitable way of travelling, two cars set off from a cold and wet Suffolk and travelled to the historic and beautiful county of Rutland. The first car arrived slightly before the second and was welcomed into Rutland by a Merlin that flew across the road and onwards across road-side fields. The welcome continued with a small party of Lesser Redpolls feeding in the treetops of the Sykes Lane car park. It was going to be a good day!

**The Dam.** With the arrival of the second car and the health and safety briefing carried out the “magnificent seven” set off on the first leg of the trip and walked out onto the dam end of the reservoir. Here a scan through the ducks quickly gave us a male Scaup, male Red-crested Pochard and several other duck species. Looking down the reservoir revealed a large number of Great Crested Grebes together and a count of 60 birds was achieved. Continuing on to the south side of the dam we had our first waders of the day in the form of two Redshanks. A Pied Wagtail was seen and heard in sub-song, perhaps encouraged by a bright blue sky and the possibility of sunshine. Approaching the end of the dam we were able to scan a large mixed flock of ducks on the southern shore and here we found two male Smew, more Red-Crested Pochard and a large flock of Wigeon and Teal. Whilst watching these birds a Common Buzzard was seen over nearby woods.

On our return back to the car park the sun had finally come out. Numerous ducks were seen to fly past us and back into the area that we had checked on our arrival at the dam. Reaching here, a check on the new birds gave us closer views of one of the male Smew seen earlier, two male Scaup and at least eight females. Also now present were good numbers of Ruddy Ducks and some close in Goldeneye. A quick refreshment break taken before leaving the car park turned out to be a lucky move as good numbers of birds were again present in the area and included a stunning male Bullfinch and fly-catching Long-tailed Tit.

**Whitwell.** A quick stop here allowed for further scanning of the north arm and the north side of the Hambleton peninsula. Checking the meadows surrounding Whitwell Creek revealed a large number of Canada Geese and whilst checking through these the second Buzzard of the day was seen flying overhead. Out on the main body of water good numbers of ducks were again seen and some careful checking of some distant individuals revealed two female Smew. In the trees back at the car park singles of both Redwing and Fieldfare were seen.

**Barnsdale.** With the car park closed the group walked down through the woods and up into the scrub areas. Picking up on a large mixed flock of birds we were able to follow them as they moved along the edge of a ride and into a small plot of woodland. Checking each bird as it came into view we found several Treecreepers, a Great Spotted Woodpecker, various tits including Coal Tit, finches and both Blackbird and Song Thrush. Also heard here but not seen were a Nuthatch and a Green Woodpecker. Returning to the water’s edge and scanning out towards Hambleton more ducks and Great Crested Grebes were seen. Persistent checking of the constantly diving grebes paid off in the shape of a very mobile Slavonian Grebe.

Further close scrutiny of the many birds present gave us a Great Northern Diver. With some great birds seen and the prospect of lunch the “magnificent seven” returned happily to the cars.

**Eggleton Reserve.** After a brief lunch stop the group set off to explore the southern part of this excellent reserve that nestles in the eastern corner of the reservoir’s south arm. Research carried out prior to the trip revealed that a Long-eared Owl roost was present on the path to the reserve’s Fieldfare Hide and so with fingers crossed we set off to check the roost. After a very muddy trek the roost was found and after several moments two Long-eared Owls were discovered hidden up in thick cover. Reasonable views were obtained especially of one bird that was watched preening its ear tufts! After leaving the owls we headed off to the Fieldfare Hide and found it to be occupied by another bird group. During an exchange of pleasantries and a comparison of birds seen we learnt that a Short-eared Owl was roosting nearby in scrub behind the Long-eared Owls. Checking the view from the hide for a short while we found another male Smew and a pair of fly-over Goosander. However, the lure of the Short-eared Owl was too much and off we went to the view point.

On our arrival the Short-eared Owl was found perched on a branch amongst a scrubby area. Silence ensued as we watched this magnificent and proud owl preen itself and clean its talons. After a while it was clear that the owl was growing restless and we watched it as it flew off and down into the thick grass, brilliantly demonstrating how its plumage matched the ground colour. Another quick flight and it was gone, disappearing over the scrub and out onto the lagoon. With smiles firmly in place and with fading light it was agreed to head back to the visitors centre via the Harrier Hide. Here we found a gathering of 27 Stock Doves and a small number of Goosander, including some glorious peachy breasted males. However, the small number quickly grew as more birds appeared from all directions and when we left the hide in excess of 20 birds had been counted. On leaving the hide the Short-eared Owl was seen distantly as it hunted over the lagoon frequently dropping out of sight before re-appearing again.

Gathered together in the car park at the end of the day we all agreed that it had been a great day and that a SOG trip to Rutland should be repeated again next year but with an earlier start. With the light almost gone and the last sandwiches eaten the “magnificent seven” headed home to Suffolk. (Trip total 69 species.)

## ***Falkenham and Kirton Creeks – 30th January 2010***

*Justin Zantboer [Leader]*

**T**his trip, I have to say, was nothing short of pure perfection! I have to confess that on the eve of the trip, I had severe reservations as snow was falling and a blustery northwest wind was a howling. However, the aftermath just couldn’t have been better as the wind had just about blown itself out and we were bathed in glorious sunshine.

After the traditional bacon and egg muffin breakfast from a well known fast food chain, I was met at Falkenham by the perfect ten. Whilst enjoying the usual greetings, we were treated to Coal Tits singing above us and Fieldfares flying over

us. With a spring to our step, we ventured forth into the unknown. The churchyard and hedgerows didn't give away too much although a Green Woodpecker was noted.

From then on, it has to be said that the birding went up a gear or three. Whilst waiting for laggards at Falkenham Wood, I heard a familiar but totally unexpected call just as the shout of white rump went up from elsewhere in the scouting party! We were all amazed as I called Green Sandpiper before spotting it just after it had exploded from an adjacent dyke. Fortunately the forward party all connected but unfortunately, those who had delayed were to be gripped!

Five minutes on, we encountered a frenzy of activity as Yellowhammers (26) and Reed Buntings (six) joined a flock of 40 or so Chaffinches feeding amongst a maize strip next to Corporation Farm. Whilst enjoying the posing Yellowhammers, eagle-eyed Will picked up a skein of Grey Geese flying inland over Kirton Marshes which were quickly identified as all being Pink-feet. A rare treat down in south Suffolk. Again, the scouting party forged ahead but this time, it cost them as a Little Owl was found by those bringing up the rear, sunning itself on one of the barns.

It didn't take long for the next goodie to present itself to us. Whilst picking through yet another frenzy of finches within a maize strip, my attention was drawn to a raptor flying straight at me with long, bowed wings. With suspicions suitably aroused, I muttered something unrepeatable to gain the attention of those nearby and was then elated as the raptor gracefully turned, revealing its forked tail – Red Kite I bugled, causing chaos for both birders and birds amongst the maize. After a frantic dash for open ground, we were all treated to exquisite views of this most pleasing of our raptors before it was lost to view heading upriver. Fantastic.

Unbelievably, there was still more to come. Continuing towards Kirton Creek, we noted a Great Spotted Woodpecker before then having to side step off the path to avoid being flattened by a convoy of four wheeled drive vehicles containing a host of obnoxious shooting clientele! Fortunately their departure coincided with our arrival at the Creek and it didn't take long for a calm to be restored amongst the birds. First task as always when presented with the opportunity was to scan the Brent Goose flock for any surprises. This revealed no less than three Pale-bellied Brent which were easy to pick out in flight but proved a little more challenging when the flock took to the water. From our vantage point, both Will and I then noticed a second flock of Grey Geese on the foreshore and saltings opposite Kirton Creek. With the sun in the perfect position, it was easy to note several pairs of bright orange legs and several pairs of duller, pink legs! Careful counting then revealed a mixed flock of eleven Tundra Bean Geese and ten Pink-footed Geese. Amazing. The whole flock then took flight and heading south-west, flying directly overhead, gave us all an excellent direct comparison of the two species in flight together – what more could we ask for?

We continued on our merry way, taking the sea wall from Kirton Creek to Falkenham Creek. Good numbers of waders were noted, including an impressive flock of Avocets numbering close to a hundred while a mighty flock of 33 Bar-tailed Godwits was a delight. More of shock though was the unintentional flushing of a single Grey Partridge from the river wall. We must have given it quite a fright as it traversed the whole of Kirton Marshes before dropping into cover. During this time,

small flocks of Brent Geese were continually flying upriver. Our arrival at Falkenham Creek was greeted with several small finches feeding amongst the vegetation. After some very intense scrutiny, we managed to pick out two Twite amongst several Linnets and Reed Buntings. A distant Common Buzzard inland of the Creek was another pleasant addition to the day's already impressive list of species before we began the long journey back to our cars, ending our perambulation but not the trip.

As we were in blistering form, to bring the morning to a close we decided to test our luck by heading to Waldringfield to try for a grand finale! We were not to be disappointed as our quarry appeared almost instantly on the river – a majestic Slavonian Grebe! We watched it for a good while as it entertained us by flying short distances, allowing good in-flight views. Scanning distantly across the river revealed four Common Buzzards, ending probably one of my best SOG trips ever!

As ever, my thanks to those who attended. I'll be keeping my fingers crossed for fine weather next year.

### ***Dingle Marshes for east coast wintering birds – 7th February 2010***

*Ashley Gooding [Leader]*

**F**ourteen of us met in the car park at Dunwich on a rather damp and misty morning, where we welcomed new member Eddie to the group, before making our way north towards Walberswick.

It was rather quiet before we got to the shore pools with a scattering of Skylarks moving ahead of us, and a Spotted Redshank heard but not seen off to our left hidden in vegetation. At the shore pools there were a few waders including Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew and Avocet. Several Wigeon also graced the pools with Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall and a single Brent Goose. It was at this point that Eddie earned his “wings” by picking up a very handsome male Hen Harrier. It was very much in hunting mode as it quartered the pools and marshes giving us all excellent views and even flew back for a second show. Out to sea it was surprisingly quiet with just a handful of Red-throated Divers on the water.

We moved further on and encountered a most unusual creature stranded on the high water mark. At first I thought it was a small harbour porpoise but as I got nearer I could see that it was in fact a conger eel! It was huge, about 5 to 5½ feet long, about as thick as my thigh beyond the huge head and in very good condition. We estimated it to weigh about 50 pounds which was confirmed by a fishing friend of mine at work, who also said that, during the very cold winter in the mid-eighties, several were washed up as the very cold water affects them somehow.

Anyway back to the birds, we had very good views of Rock Pipit feeding on the pool edge and discussed its separation from Water and Meadow Pipits. A somewhat elusive Water Rail kept appearing from behind a bund on the pool in front of us and by the time we left I think we had all seen some part of it. Close scrutiny of the sea produced a flock of 60 or so Common Scoter but we could not detect any white wing flashes of the more sought after Velvet Scoter. There was a steady trickle of Red-throated Divers moving north together with large numbers of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, and smaller numbers of Common and Black-headed Gulls; were they heading back to their breeding areas already?

Unfortunately our normal route inland was blocked by over-running footpath maintenance so we had no choice but to retrace our footsteps. In doing so we picked up Little Egret, Turnstone, Snipe and Spotted Redshank. Unfortunately we could not locate the Twite this year.

After lunch we headed off to Westleton Heath which was disconcertingly quiet. I had spoken to the group about going to Haddiscoe during the day and so we set off to the very north of Suffolk to look for the recently present raptors. We were not disappointed, after some debate as to which path to take to get to the view point on the edge of Waveney forest, we eventually came good. Within a few minutes the first Rough-legged Buzzard was picked up, hovering in flapping flight as it hunted for its prey. A second bird was picked up to our right perched on a fence post; great stuff. Several Marsh Harriers were seen and as the light started to fade we picked up the first of three Short-eared Owls quartering the marsh with their slow, lazy flight. The owls could also show a good turn of speed as they mobbed a Rough-legged Buzzard on the ground. The last raptor to put in an appearance was a ring-tailed Hen Harrier which at one point came very close and gave exceptional views of its beautifully marked under parts.

An excellent day was had by all, with some great birds and good company.

## **SOG News**

### ***The SOG AGM and changes to Council Members***

*Richard Rafe*

**T**he SOG AGM was held on 25 February 2010 at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Ipswich. As usual full details of the event and the annual accounts will appear in the June *Harrier*.

The revised list of Council members as elected at the AGM is displayed inside the front cover of this *Harrier*. We say farewell and thanks to Andrew Gregory, Trevor Kerridge and Steve Abbott (who was immediately co-opted back onto Council). We welcome Bill Stone, who takes over as treasurer/membership secretary, Roy Marsh and Jon Warnes.

### ***The list of Suffolk listers***

*Richard Rafe*

**S**ome of you may have noticed the absence in the last couple of years of any updates on who are Suffolk's top listers, and the list which I used to publish periodically in *The Harrier* of people's Suffolk list totals. Unfortunately I haven't given this recent attention, at least in part because my own work and personal commitments have meant I have done very little Suffolk birding and therefore I have not added anything to my own Suffolk list in recent years. The rather out of date list of Suffolk lister totals still appears on the SOG website.

I am pleased to say that Roger Walsh has agreed to take on the upkeep of Suffolk listers' lists. I have passed everything over to Roger who will undoubtedly be chasing people for updates, but if you want to be proactive, you can look on the SOG website

at the full species list for yourself (or anybody else) and send Roger an update of any recent additions.

I will endeavor to publish an update of people's Suffolk list totals in a future *Harrier*.

## ***Bird Atlas 2007-11***

*Mick Wright*

**T**hank you! I wish to extend a big thank you to all of you who have sent in records for TTVs (Timed Tetrad Visits) and Roving Records. Atlases provide vital information for bird conservation and the results from this atlas will be the basis for the conservation of birds in Suffolk and Britain for the coming decades.

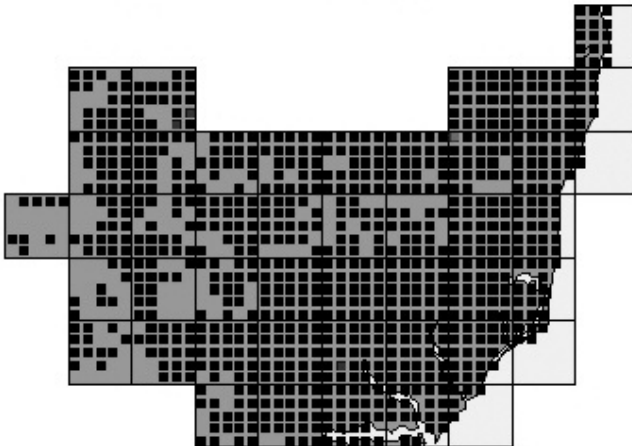
In Suffolk, fieldworkers have worked exceptionally hard; just over 700 tetrads have been allocated. However, time is short; three winters of fieldwork have flown by and we still have around 300 tetrads to cover and a number of partial squares on our boundaries with neighbouring counties.

On 1st April we start fieldwork for the third breeding season. Help is still needed across all parts of Suffolk but particularly in the west of the county. We need volunteers for timed counts in tetrads (2 x 2 km squares); just two visits are required in the breeding season and two in the winter. We also need birders to submit general bird watching records as Roving Records to build up species lists for every tetrad in Suffolk. This breeding season we need to pay special attention to recording breeding evidence for all species we encounter – even common species like Blackbird still need to be confirmed breeding in many tetrads. We also need to make evening visits to record the presence of nocturnal species such as Woodcock.

From the map below it is clear which tetrads need further coverage.

### **Tetrads allocated for coverage:**

**black = both seasons; grey = outstanding either winter or breeding only**



*Tetrad map of Suffolk showing tetrads allocated for winter and summer coverage.*

Please send in all TTV and Roving Records. If you wish to take on a new TTV for the summer of 2010 and the winter of 2010/11 or be a Roving Recorder please contact Mick Wright, Atlas Co-ordinator for Suffolk, on 01473 710032 or email [mickwright@btinternet.com](mailto:mickwright@btinternet.com). By visiting [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) you can easily see the vacant tetrads and be able to select the one/s you would like to survey; this will automatically generate an email to me – just follow the online instructions. On 1st April we start fieldwork for the third breeding season.

*Members of the Suffolk Atlas working group are Steve Piotrowski, Peter Lack, Andrew Green, Colin Jakes, Nick Mason, Andrew Easton, Rob Wilton and Mick Wright.*

## News from the Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee

*Justin Zantboer*

Right then folks, I am going to get straight down to business. As I mentioned within the previous article, with the departure of Steve Piotrowski, Lee Gregory and Brian Small, 2010 began with the arrival of a new Chairman and no less than three new members of the Committee. First and foremost, Malcolm Wright kindly agreed to take over as SORC's acting chairman for 2010. This will hopefully give SORC a little more time to groom a new chairman from 2011, unless of course Malcolm decides to serve a full chairman's term.

Malcolm's move left three vacancies for voting members. We have attempted to fill these vacancies with seasoned birders whilst retaining the cross-county geographic spread. With this in mind we have welcomed Derek Beamish, John Walshe and David Fairhurst.

Okay then – that's the pleasantries attended to. Most of you reading this are probably aware that the 'Suffolk List' has altered again. Before you start applying varnish, it was nothing to do with us! The first alteration concerns the removal of a species that I'm fairly certain none of you will have on your lists – indeed it would be rather interesting if you did. Apparently, two Eskimo Curlews were claimed as being shot near Woodbridge during November 1852! The BOURC had already found one of these records to be wanting and it would seem that after further investigation, they have now found that the remaining record is no longer acceptable. However a record of a species that I'm sure many of you would have seen at Minsmere during November or December 2001 has been upgraded to Category A by BOURC – Baikal Teal. Their reasons for both of these decisions are, as you would quite expect, lengthy, so if you have a desire to know more then I am afraid you will have to refer to recent issues of *British Birds*.

Another issue I should address is the categorisation of species on the 'Suffolk List'. At present, category one is for national rarities and category two is for county rarities – no problems there. However, categories three and four seem to be a little dated and in need of some review. For example, currently there are species that are on the Red List within category four that at present only asks for breeding or exceptional records. Clearly this is a problem, so SORC has taken it upon themselves to update this list as a matter of urgency. I'll keep you posted on how this develops as I suspect



that the process will take longer than desired as it is not simple bread and butter. That said, we are hoping to have this done quickly due to the obvious importance of obtaining the desired records.

As I stated within the last article, our section on the SOG website has remained quiet of late. SORC has had very little to do with regards to actual record assessment as, rather disappointingly, submissions of County Rarity descriptions have been sparse to say the least. I think we all acknowledge that 2009 wasn't the best of years for County Rarities but the accompanying list of outstanding descriptions will testify that it wasn't that bad either. Surely not all of these records were just figments of the imagination? Time is now of the essence for submitting notes as preparations for the 2009 Suffolk Bird Report are already well under way so for records to be included they will need to be presented as soon as possible. Again I have only included 2009 records but of course we would welcome descriptions for any of the historic records that can be found listed on the SOG webpage. I will close as always by wishing you all an avian extravaganza for spring 2010.

### Outstanding BBRC Rarities Descriptions for 2009

08/03/09	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere	M Currie
16/05/09	Thrush Nightingale	Thorpeness	
29/07/09	Pacific Golden Plover	Breydon Water South Wall	

### Outstanding SORC Rarities Descriptions for 2009

20/01/09	Great White Egret	Micklemere	J Rankin
03/02/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Semer	
04/02/09	Great White Egret	Minsmere	D Newton
16/02/09	Great White Egret	Somerleyton	
24/02/09	Black Brant – Adult	Falkenham Marshes	D Craven
26/02/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	St Olaves/Somerleyton	
07/03/09	Raven	North Warren	LGR Evans
15/03/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Reydon Marshes	
15/03/09	Willow Warbler x2	East Lane	
27/03/09	White Stork	Thorrington Street	
27/03/09	White Stork	Lackford	H Vaughen
31/03/09	Purple Heron	Ipswich	
05/04/09	Goshawk	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
05/04/09	Goshawk	Purdis Heath, Ipswich	PJ Merchant
14/04/09	Goshawk	Felixstowe	P Oldfield
16/04/09	Great White Egret	Micklemere	
16/04/09	Purple Heron	Ipswich	
17/04/09	Goshawk	Benacre	P Whittaker
17/04/09	Red-footed Falcon – Female	Great Ashfield/Norton	
22/04/09	Red-footed Falcon – Female	Castle Marshes, North Cove	D Moore
25/04/09	Great White Egret	North Warren	D Craven + ML Cornish
25/04/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Weston, nr Beccles	
26/04/09	Great White Egret	Breydon South Wall	A Easton

## Outstanding SORC Rarities Descriptions for 2009 *(continued)*

26/04/09	Serin	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
26/04/09	Serin	Landguard	N Odin (heard only!)
27/04/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Thornham Magna	
30/04/09	Kentish Plover	Minsmere	
02/05/09	Golden Eagle – Sub-adult	Orfordness	S Rutt, PJ Ransome <i>et al.</i>
02/05/09	Montagu's Harrier – Ringtail	Southwold	CA Buttle
03/05/09	Red-rumped Swallow	Landguard	P Oldfield
03/05/09	Red-rumped Swallow	Livermere	D Balmer + P Wilson
06/05/09	Bee-eater	Butley	
07/05/09	Great White Egret	Herringfleet Mill	C Jacobs
07/05/09	Raven	Lakenheath Fen	
10/05/09	Bee-eater	Lound	
21/05/09	Black Kite	Rendlesham	
30/05/09-31/05/09	Purple Heron	Minsmere	
31/05/09	Black Kite	Haughley	
01/06/09	Bee-eater	Dingle Marshes	PD Green
11/06/09	Bee-eater	Stowmarket	C Fulcher
12/06/09	Balearic Shearwater x2	Kessingland	P Read
13/06/09	Montagu's Harrier	Sutton Heath	R Tomlinson + G Button
14/06/09	Ferruginous Duck	Minsmere	
14/06/09	Honey Buzzard	Minsmere	
14/06/09	Willow Tit	Landguard	N Odin
25/06/09	Honey Buzzard	Minsmere	
27/06/09	Bee-eater	Sutton	R Tomlinson + G Button
01/07/09	Honey Buzzard	Trimley St Mary	DT Langlois, E Luckin + R Biddle
24/07/09	Black Kite	Woodbridge Airbase	
25/07/09	Cory's Shearwater	Kessingland	P Reid
05/08/09	Montagu's Harrier	Melton	
08/08/09	Great White Egret	Nr Aldeburgh	
08/08/09	Honey Buzzard	Elveden	
11/08/09	Honey Buzzard	Martlesham	
16/08/09	Montagu's Harrier – Male	Orford	G Grieco + W Stone
29/08/09	Raven x2	West Stow	
30/08/09	Spotted Crane	Minsmere	S Nixon
05/09/09	Cory's Shearwater	Southwold	
05/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Pipps Ford	J Walshe
09/09/09	Spotted Crane	Minsmere	
10/09/09	Purple Heron	Southwold	C Fulcher
13/09/09	Sabine's Gull	Corton	JA Brown
15/09/09	Sabine's Gull – Adult	Gorleston	JA Brown
16/09/09	Sabine's Gull	Lowestoft	R Murray
17/09/09	Sabine's Gull – Adult	Sizewell	JH Grant
17/09/09	Hooded Crow	Sizewell	H Maclean
18/09/09	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Minsmere	JM Gibbs + JA Rowlands
19/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Corton	
19/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Hollesley	PJ Merchant

## Outstanding SORC Rarities Descriptions for 2009 *(continued)*

19/09/09	Red-necked Phalarope – Juvenile	East Lane	D Craven
19/09/09	Richard's Pipit	Corton	JA Brown
19/09/09	Icterine Warbler	Minsmere	S Patterson
20/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Corton	
23/09/09	Icterine Warbler	Kessingland	
24/09/09	Balearic Shearwater	Kessingland	P Read
24/09/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Landguard	PJ Merchant + B Mackie
24/09/09	Tawny Pipit	Landguard	N Odin
01/10/09	Honey Buzzard	Wickham Market	M Riley
03/10/09	Balearic Shearwater	Kessingland	P Read
03/10/09	Balearic Shearwater	Lowestoft	AC Easton
10/10/09	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Sizewell	R Harvey
14/10/09	Great White Egret	Hopton	JA Brown
14/10/09	Sabine's Gull – Juvenile	Orfordness	D Crawshaw
17/10/09	Great White Egret	Shingle Street	S Babbs
18/10/09	Rough-legged Buzzard x3	Mutford	
26/10/09	Pallas's Warbler	Gorleston/Hopton	N Blacker
28/10/09	Great White Egret	Havergate Island	
29/10/09	Radde's Warbler	Lowestoft	R Wincup <i>et al.</i>
29/10/09	Hooded Crow	North Warren	
07/11/09	Great White Egret	Lackford	
07/12/09-10/12/09	Whinchat	Alton Water	GJ Jobson <i>et al.</i>
07/12/09-15/12/09	Nordic Jackdaw	Aldeburgh	R Drew <i>et al.</i>
28/12/09	Great White Egret	North Warren	S Nixon

## Short Notes

### ***Kittiwakes at Lowestoft – 2009 – more about fish suppers***

*Colin Carter*

There must be a possibility that hardly any Suffolk birders are in the least bit interested in what Kittiwakes feed their chicks on. Probably most people can but wonder at why ringers would collect the smelly pukes occasionally regurgitated by the chicks being handled and how scientists such as Derek Eaton of CEFAS and Mark Newell of CEH have the patience, let alone the expertise, to identify fish species and size by examining their otoliths (ear-bones).

But there seems some merit in chronicling the results of each year's samples in case they give some indication to the quantity and quality of the Kittiwakes' prey species off Lowestoft, and in consequence the health of the two little colonies at the Harbour and at Claremont Pier.

In 2007 the fishy remains consisted almost entirely of 1+ group sandeels (1 year-old or older = large), with a slight presence of shrimps. In 2008 clupeids (sprats and herrings) predominated over sandeels although there was evidence of sandeels (some 0-group, = small) in 70 % of the samples.

In 2009, the remains consisted almost exclusively of clupeids, in some cases identified as sprats. There were also ear-bones of small gadoids – whiting, in two samples. So the diet has changed from year to year.

Whatever our Kittiwakes are finding to feed to their chicks, the birds are doing very well. It is estimated that productivity was 1.6 young per nest in 2009, more or less the same as in the two previous years. Perhaps this simply shows that the birds will take whatever prey is available.

After two poor breeding seasons on Tyneside and the Isle of May, both of those colonies also enjoyed good success in 2009. At the Isle of May, where Mark Newell collects comparable pukes, the remains consisted almost entirely of sandeels. So the sandeel shoals seem to have moved north last year. This tends to undermine a previous scientific theory about the known lower rise in the surface water temperature in the southern part of the North Sea benefiting sandeel spawning (Frederiksen 2007).

One other curious feature was noticed at the Harbour colony. A number of nests had whole sprats on the rim of the nest. The chicks are fed by regurgitation so were these whole fishes carried back by parent birds with already-full crops?

Soon a new season will begin – 1st March saw the return of the first birds last year. It remains to be seen if the changing fortunes of the harbour impinge on the success of the colony there.

### Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to Derek Eaton for his work on the samples and for improving this article, to Mark Newell for his advice and the reanalysis of the samples, and to SLP, Hamilton Dock, Lowestoft and Paul and David Scott at Claremont Pier for allowing access to the colonies and for their support and interest in our study.

### References

Frederiksen *et al.* 2007. Climate and regional demography in Black-legged Kittiwakes. (*Mar.Ecol.Prog.Ser.*350:137-143)

## ***Journeys of a Sanderling***

*Paul Lacey*

**W**aders can be a difficult group for occasional birders like me to tell apart. Some I can distinguish – Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Turnstone – even the odd godwit. But waders *en masse* give me problems. Then I sit quietly whilst others with better field skills point out what's about. When I go for spring and summer walks along the Suffolk coast with my camera, the waders I encounter are usually alone or in small groups. I am familiar, therefore, with the regular inhabitants of the quiet sandy beaches either side of Kessingland Ness, my local area. In June, however, I spotted a group of small waders on Benacre Beach that both tested my limited wader recognition skills and turned out to have an interesting story to tell.

These birds were feeding around the damp channel between Benacre Broad and the sea, so I took up a position next to a fallen tree trunk and waited quietly. Waders will approach fairly close if you sit still and have enough patience. They often seem

to cover an area of beach several times and you may be able to predict their movements reasonably accurately and set your camera up accordingly. As I watched I hazarded a guess that, from their diminutive size and behaviour, the birds were Sanderlings. Constantly active, they proved quite hard to photograph but I was lucky with the light that day and after about an hour I had managed to get some reasonable pictures.

Processing the photos on my computer the following day established that they were indeed Sanderlings *Calidris alba*, and in summer plumage as one would expect in June. What I also spotted that hadn't been obvious in the field was that one bird had a selection of coloured rings around its legs.

Richard Rafe suggested I send some pictures of the ringed bird to the BTO. In due course I received an e-mail from Mark Grantham who put me in touch with Joroen Reneerkens. Joroen leads the Sanderling colour-ringing project, which can be found at <http://www.waderstudygroup.org/res/project/sand-colrings-en.php>, a fascinating website. Joroen replied with some interesting news about 'my' Sanderling and a copy of a paper entitled 'Sanderlings using African-Eurasian flyways: a review of current knowledge'.

Firstly, my Sanderling had been one of a number of birds that was given their coloured rings about a year prior to my sighting – at a coastal site called Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania, West Africa. Furthermore, my bird had been spotted again a week later on the east coast of Scotland.

It would be safe to assume that my bird, along with its colleagues, were not engaged in breeding activity. From Joroen's paper I learned that in June, on a quiet warm beach in Suffolk, the birds would be several thousand kilometres from the Sanderlings' regular breeding areas.

Before the start of the coloured-ringing project, surprisingly little was known about the breeding habits of Sanderlings compared to other waders. Although there is still much to be learned, we know that the birds breed at sites north of the Arctic Circle, principally on the Taimyr Peninsula in Russia, and on the islands of Northern Canada and northern and eastern coasts of Greenland. There appear to be three main flyways used by the birds between their breeding grounds and the non-breeding areas around the coast of Africa and western Asia. One of these passes along the west coast of Africa including Mauritania, where 'my' Sanderling was ringed, and then across the eastern Atlantic via Iceland to Greenland and Northern Canada. One of the two flyways to the Siberian breeding grounds crosses the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, whilst the third uses the Indian Ocean and then crosses the whole of Asia.

An important issue raised by the study concerns the birds' habitat. Hardly any other bird species uses sandy beaches to the extent that Sanderlings do and, worldwide, these are under increasing threat from development, increased human recreation and pollution. Given the great distances covered by these small birds, it would seem obvious that the loss of a regular stopover site and reliable feeding station (Sanderlings show great site-fidelity it appears) would have a considerably detrimental effect on population numbers.

Lastly, I hope, my experience demonstrates the value of using modern digital photography to assist with studies such as the colour-ringing project. Although

ringing recoveries have taught us much about many bird species, additional information can be gathered without recapturing birds, purely by using a coloured coding system that can be observed at a distance. So check those photos carefully as even the duff ones can provide added value for conservation.



*Colour ringed Sanderling, Benacre Beach – Paul Lacey*

### ***Migrant at Cape May***

*Derek Moore*

**O**n a visit to Cape May, New Jersey, last October I ran into a migrant from East Anglia. Many SOG members will remember Mike Crewe who came to Suffolk from Oxford some years ago. Mike was working as a horticulturist at Notcutts in those days and was very active as a ringer at Landguard Bird Observatory. He took an active part in all aspects of natural history and is still especially keen on moths and regularly runs his light trap. Mike was a volunteer for the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and later also worked for the BTO at Thetford for a while.

One of Mike's strengths was communicating his enthusiasm for wildlife and so it was no surprise when he joined up with Limosa Holidays in North Norfolk which is where he has spent the last decade.

Mike married Megan an American Bird Tour leader from New Jersey about eight years ago and this has led to both going to the USA to begin a new chapter in their life. Mike is now employed as an ornithologist/naturalist with the Cape May Bird Observatory, a position he is already enjoying. He is responsible for arranging and leading walks and giving general advice to members and visitors. His very British personality and good communication skills are already ensuring he is a big hit with the Americans.

Busy getting his New Jersey list up to scratch Mike is also already into the local moths and aims to create a field guide to this tricky order, something he considers is overdue for the USA.



*Mike Crewe and Derek Moore, Cape May – Bob Abrams*

### ***A Bittern stirring up the ducks***

*John Hampshire*

**O**n the evening of 5th September 2009, just five days after the start of the wildfowling season I was birding from Island Mere hide, Minsmere. A small group of fowlers were shooting on nearby marshes and each shotgun blast produced mass panic amongst the 300-400 ducks present on the Mere. In fact, far more panic than is normally seen from the ducks at the site when shooting is taking place nearby.

The next evening I was back in the hide and the ducks were still jumpy although no shooting was taking place. When a Bittern flew low over the western end of the Mere it triggered a reaction amongst the Mallard, Gadwall, Shoveller and Tufted Duck that I have never seen before. The Bittern landed within a few feet of the water's edge and was immediately lost to view in the reeds. The ducks stared towards the spot where the bittern had disappeared. They gave the impression of being very concerned and stayed close to the water's edge looking towards the hidden Bittern for a minute or so before dispersing. It was very reminiscent of the instances that I've witnessed where ducks will follow a fox or indeed, film that I've seen of duck decoys at work where ducks follow a fox-like dog into tunnels where they are trapped.

Usually the ducks on Island Mere take little notice of Bitterns and I've never seen them so interested in one before. A few days later I fell into conversation with one of the wildfowlers who had been shooting on the 5th. He said that all of them had commented on how nervous the duck had been on that evening. I asked whether it may have been due to the fact that the season had just started but he suggested that in fact they get more nervous as the season progresses.



I still don't know why the ducks were so concerned by the Bittern on that evening. Maybe they were stirred up by the shooting or maybe something else had spooked them, or perhaps the Bittern had flown closer to them than they were used to. Has anyone got any ideas or has anyone ever seen ducks follow a Bittern before?

### ***The Woodcock: Suffolk's most overlooked bird?***

*David Tomlinson*

**F**or most Suffolk birdwatchers, Woodcock are minor rarities, seldom seen except perhaps a roding male observed while looking for Nightjars on a summer evening. I've checked on-line the provisional Atlas winter distribution map for Woodcock, and it confirms a very patchy distribution for this species in Suffolk, with many areas where it is apparently absent.

My suspicion, however, is that almost every wood or even small covert in the county is likely to hold a woodcock or two in winter, even though these birds are rarely seen by birdwatchers. I'm probably in a very small minority of SOG members in that I spend many winter days on shoots, usually working my springer spaniels. A winter day when no Woodcock are seen is unusual: the score is usually two or three in November, rising to two or three times this number in December and January. Last season, during a late-January shoot on Euston estate, I counted well over 50, of which 19 were shot. I submitted this record as an Atlas Roving Record, and it was flagged up as Unusually High Bird Numbers. True, it's probably considerably more than most birdwatchers see in a year, possibly even a decade, but it was not particularly unusual. According to Euston's head keeper, the number of woodcock shot each season is constant at rather more than 100 birds on an area of around 7,000 acres.



*Woodcock – David Tomlinson*

The secret of finding these elusive woodland waders is, of course, having a small army of beaters and dogs to flush them. I've only recorded one Woodcock in my Atlas timed tetrad visits, but I know that if I'd taken my spaniels along, I would



have seen several. You can almost tread on a Woodcock before it flushes, and despite many hundreds of sightings I've rarely seen one on the ground before it has taken off.

On one occasion, watching the Suffolk Foxhounds draw a large, damp roadside wood not far from Lavenham, I saw at least 12 Woodcock flushed, with three or four in view at once, but without the hounds there's no doubt that I wouldn't have seen any.

So forget about Woodcocks being rare: they're not, and I'm sure that the number wintering in Suffolk is a matter of thousands, not hundreds. They are probably the most under-recorded bird in the county. If you don't believe me, ask your local shoot if you can join the beaters for a day next season, or make sure that you watch the foxhounds when they are drawing your local woods. You will be surprised at how many you see.

### ***Marsh Harrier attacking reedmace spikes***

*John Hampshire*

**O**n 13th September 2009 I watched a juvenile Marsh Harrier quartering just above the reedbeds surrounding Island Mere at Minsmere. It was a windy day and I didn't think the prospects of the harrier making a kill were particularly good. Suddenly it changed direction and with a single leg outstretched, plunged its talons into the sausage-shaped flower-spike of a Great Reedmace. The harrier gripped tightly and pulled, taking a large chunk out of the flower-spike.

I'm not sure if the young harrier had made a mistake. Perhaps it had caught the briefest sighting of the spike as it swayed about amongst the other vegetation or perhaps – bearing in mind the age of the bird – it was indulging in 'play'. More serious ornithologists will tell you that birds don't play so perhaps the youngster was perfecting its hunting technique by practising on the reedmace spikes.

I looked for more evidence of such behaviour and could see several other spikes with chunks out of them so I imagine that this behaviour was deliberate rather than a case of mistaken identity. If you ever see a flower spike of either of the reedmace species with lumps out of it, don't necessarily assume that a Penduline Tit is responsible.

### ***More on Sparrowhawks and Kingfishers***

*Chris Gregory*

**I** was interested to read Alan Shoote's account of the evasion tactics of a Kingfisher being pursued by a Sparrowhawk. On December 9th last year I was working at the Nunnery Lakes reserve at Thetford when I flushed a Sparrowhawk from a riverbank. It flew off but landed about 50 metres away and, as it appeared to be carrying prey, I went over to the place the hawk had flown up from and found a pile of feathers. Initially I was not sure of the identity of the prey but soon I realised the mixture of iridescent blue and small reddish brown feathers belonged to a Kingfisher. Evidently in this case the Kingfisher didn't escape! A year earlier a colleague of mine at the BTO saw a Sparrowhawk pursuing a Kingfisher in the same area

where I found the remains. Although there is no reference to this behaviour in BWP, perhaps Sparrowhawks target Kingfishers more often than we realise. It may be that the bright colouring of the Kingfisher makes it more conspicuous, or it may just be down to the opportunistic nature of the Sparrowhawk.

## Announcements and Requests

### *Give us back our bird names*

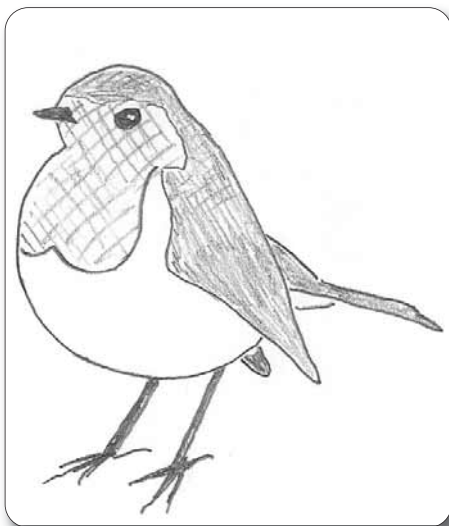
David Tomlinson

**W**hen did you last tick a Hedge Accentor, see a Wood Nuthatch or twitch a Lapland Longspur? Never? You're not alone. These ludicrous bird names were foisted upon us by *British Birds* back in the Sharrock era. Today they would be largely forgotten if it wasn't for *BB's* pedantic insistence on keeping to them, and the politically correct editors of county bird reports perpetuating them. Sadly, I note, Suffolk is one of those counties that has also adopted them, causing me irritation whenever I read through the otherwise excellent *Suffolk Birds* reports.

Fortunately the adoption of these contrived or even plain ugly names has been far from universal. Log your Bird Atlas results on line and you will find that the BTO doesn't bother with Eurasian in front of Sparrowhawk, Falcon after Peregrine, Common in front of Kingfisher nor Pied prefixing Avocet. Incidentally, all the world's Avocets are pied, so why ours had to gain such an adjective remains a mystery. The BTO simply uses the same names that most of us have been familiar with throughout our lives.

OK, you can call me unreformed old buffer if you want, and I do admit to having been brought up in an era when a Hedge Sparrow was, well, a Hedge Sparrow. However, I've never heard anyone use any of these long-winded, double-barrelled bird names in the field. I have, however, heard a Bearded Tit referred to as a Bearded Reedling, but note with some surprise that it's the former name that is used in *Suffolk Birds*. Of course, both names are sexist: it's only the male that has the beard. On second thoughts, it's not a beard at all, but a rather fine moustache. Perhaps we should rename the bird the Moustachioed Parrotbill.

I'm well aware that the use of these revised names is to ensure that an American or an Australia won't be confused when they pick up a copy of *Suffolk Birds*. Both the Yanks and Aussies have their own robins, so perhaps they really need to be reminded that ours is officially the European Robin, and not the



*Red-breasted Garden Thrush (aka Robin)*

pseudo robins they have. At least the American one is a thrush: the Oz birds are flycatchers that just happen to look like robins. However, *Suffolk Birds* always provides scientific names, too, so a confused Yank could always check out the identity of *Erithacus rubecula*. In fact I'm surprised that we have been allowed to keep Robin as its name, and it hasn't been switched to something like Red-breasted Garden Thrush, which is much more descriptive and avoids any possible confusion with other birds. The trouble is, I suppose, that in Finland Robins live in forests, not gardens.

So here's a plea to the Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee, or whoever it is who decided these things. Can we have our familiar bird names back, please, and scrap all this pretentious nonsense?

### ***The Bird Report and artwork***

*Nick Mason*

**W**e like to encourage as much artwork by Suffolk people in the Bird Report as we can. There is plenty of talent out there. So I am asking any of you who have bird or habitat illustrations that you would like to be considered to send them in, please.

It has been suggested that we could hold some sort of competition so that the best piece of art could be used on the front cover – not necessarily on the 2009 Report but on the following one. The 2009 Report front cover has not been chosen yet, however. The subject for this would need to be related to Suffolk and, of course, in colour. How many entries will we receive? Will you send yours in?

Having a photograph on the front has not been totally discounted. But photographers, now is the time to consider which of your 2009 shots to put forward for the Report – before I get to hassle you in the field!

Artwork can be sent to SOG or to myself, initially by email [nick.mason4@btinternet.com](mailto:nick.mason4@btinternet.com) or a phone call could make initial contact 01394 411150. Or for the 2009 Bird Report please send artwork to Phil Whittaker at [oakbarn@hotmail.com](mailto:oakbarn@hotmail.com), and photographs to Bill Baston at [billbaston@btinternet.com](mailto:billbaston@btinternet.com).

### **Local Patch and Garden Birds**

#### ***Update on the Christchurch Park Tawny Owl***

*Philip Murphy*

**I** refer to the note by Jean Garrod on pages 36 and 37 of the March 2009 issue of *The Harrier* concerning an easily-viewable Tawny Owl in Christchurch Park, Ipswich in the winter of 2008-09.

The owl went unreported during the summer months of 2009. However by late September I started to receive reports from regular park visitors of what was assumed to be the same owl at the roosting site used earlier in the year. I am pleased to report that this obliging bird was then regularly noted by many observers until the year's end and onwards into 2010.

Whether or not this Tawny Owl bred in Christchurch Park in 2009 is open to

speculation. However, the discovery of a very young juvenile Tawny Owl on the ground in the summer (exact date unknown) within the vicinity of the roosting tree obviously indicates that the species bred in Christchurch Park in 2009.

## Christmas competition – winner

The winner of *The Harrier* Christmas competition was John Clarke from Botesdale – John has been sent £20 of book tokens.

## Recent Reports – October to December 2009

*Justin Zantboer*

All national and county rarities are still subject to ratification by the relevant committees. It is also important to remember that probably most of these records will still need submitting to the relevant County Recorders so please ensure that if you found or saw any of the following mentioned birds, please submit them ASAP.

Most of the following records were received from the Rare Bird Alert information service although a large percentage was also received straight from several Suffolk birders so on this note, I would to thank Will Brame, Nathaniel Cant, Richard Drew, George Gregory, Lee Gregory, Paul Holmes, Mike James, Gerald Jobson, Peter Kennerley, Mike Marsh, Peter Merchant, Nigel Odin, Paul Oldfield, David Pearsons, Brian Small, Robert Wilton and Mick Wright for their updates during this period.

### October 2009

Although it felt like hard work for most of the time, we were well rewarded! Pride of place has to go to Suffolk's second ever Pied Wheatear at Shingle Street. Initially seen poorly on 18th, thankfully it was still present on 19th and entertained many people. Although mostly a lot more elusive but staying a lot longer was a Red-flanked Bluetail at Minsmere: found on 14th, it remained loyal to the Sluice Bushes up to 21st. Lingerer Glossy Ibises still featured with up to three birds noted. One flew south over Hopton, Pakefield, Southwold and Orfordness on 4th when another was seen at Walberswick. Another or one of the same was seen over Walton and Landguard on 6th and inland another was seen at Cavenham on 10th. Finally, one was at Minsmere on 18th. The month ended with a Red-breasted Goose reportedly flying south at sea with Brent Geese off Thorpeness on 30th.

County rarities were unfortunately not so well represented. The best was a Bee-eater at Sudbury on 17th and Radde's Warblers at Thorpeness on 22nd-23rd and at Lowestoft on 29th. Others included a Honey Buzzard over Wickham Market on 1st; a Balearic Shearwater past Kessingland and Lowestoft on 3rd; a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Sizewell on 10th; a Sabine's Gull past Orfordness on 14th; a Pallas's Warbler between Gorleston and Hopton on 26th; a Hooded Crow at North Warren on 29th and a Red-rumped Swallow over Thorpeness on 31st. The long staying Great White Egret was at Minsmere all month where a second bird was present on 27th before assumedly flying south over Havergate Island on 28th. Perhaps this was the same bird present at Shingle Street on 17th. Another was at Lakenheath Fen from 26th-31st.

Scarce species reported included a Red-crested Pochard, eight Great Northern and five Black-throated Divers, single Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes, two Leach's Petrels, four Red Kites, one Pectoral Sandpiper, two Long-tailed Skuas, two Puffins, two Long-eared Owls, one Wryneck, three Shore Larks, up to 16 Yellow-browed Warblers and three Lapland Buntings.

### **November 2009**

As has been the case the last couple of years, autumn ended rather abruptly with the arrival of November. With an absence of national rarities, the bird of the month was a Dusky Warbler at Gunton Warren from 2nd-8th. The only other county rarities were Great White Egrets at Minsmere from 1st-23rd and at Lakenheath Fen for the month – two were reported from the latter site on 11th.

The best of the rest was a Ring-necked Parakeet at Lowestoft on 5th; two Black-necked Grebes off East Lane on 8th; a juvenile Glaucous Gull at Minsmere from 9-11th and then presumably the same bird at Lowestoft on 14th and Kessingland on 28th then back at Minsmere again on 28th; a Grey Phalarope at Southwold on 19th and either the same or another past Landguard on 20th and a Sooty Shearwater past Landguard on 29th.

The last Swallows of the year were four at Dingle Marshes on 21st and two at Shingle Street on 25th. A Little Stint from 2nd and a Curlew Sandpiper from 10th at Melton were presumably the same birds that wintered last year while another Curlew Sandpiper was at Lakenheath Fen on 7-8th. Great Northern Diver numbers were also noteworthy with at least five individuals on rivers in the south-east of the county with a further eight birds noted flying past various coastal observation points.

The supporting cast of scarcities included two Tundra Bean Geese, two Pale-bellied Brent Geese, one Scaup, one Long-tailed Duck, six Velvet Scoters, five Black-throated Divers, one Red-necked Grebe, one Slavonian Grebe, two Red Kites, three Hen Harriers, three Pomarine Skuas, ten Great Skuas, one Puffin, one Little Auk, two Short-eared Owls, four Shore Larks, one Mealy Redpoll and three Lapland Buntings.

### **December 2009**

Rarities were just that – rare! The biggest surprise of December was the finding of a Whinchat at Alton Water on 7th where it remained until 10th. The Great White Egret continued to be seen on and off at Lakenheath Fen up to 15th and a Jackdaw showing characteristics of the 'Nordic' race *monedula* was seen at Aldeburgh from 7-15th

Of particular interest was the number of Great Northern Divers seen in coastal areas with at least seven birds commuting between Alton Water and the Rivers Orwell and Stour and singles on the Rivers Deben and Alde while up to eleven were noted passing at sea. Also of interest was the occurrence of two Velvet Scoters on the River Orwell after a few days of snow with an adult drake off Levington from 19-24th and a female/immature off Trimley Marshes from 19th-23rd. Prior to these, two flew north past Minsmere on 14th and one passed Landguard on 16th. Also of note was that both a Curlew Sandpiper and a Little Stint were still seen on and off throughout the month at Melton.

Other scarcities included two Tundra Bean Geese at North Warren on 1st and passing Landguard on 12th; two Long-tailed Ducks past Landguard on 7th and a single past there on 16th; a Red-necked Grebe past Landguard on 1st and another on the River Orwell from 22nd-26th (this bird is likely to have been the same individual seen more frequently on the River Stour from November); a Puffin north past Southwold on 13th; a Ring-necked Parakeet at Benhall Green on 28th; a Shore Lark at Kessingland from 19th onwards and a Waxwing in off the sea at Landguard 13th. A Pale-bellied Brent Goose at Southwold, the drake Red-crested Pochard commuting between Alton Water and Trimley Marshes, and two Smews at Minsmere with another at Alton Water rounded off the month.

## Looking back – January to March 1960 and 1985

*Philip Murphy*

**S**electd highlights from the 1960 and 1985 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period January to March.

### 50 years ago

Oil spillages at sea were of depressingly regular occurrence in the 1960s. Inevitably these adversely affected many birds overwintering off our coast. One such spillage in the early months of 1960 resulted in dead, oiled auks being found on our beaches: 50 Razorbills and 30 Common Guillemots were found in such condition on the beaches between Benacre and Minsmere in mid-March. A Great Skua present off Minsmere between 5th and 10th March was quick to take advantage of at least one unfortunate auk; it was seen to drag an oiled but still alive Razorbill from the sea's edge and was so intent on disembowelling its prey that observers were able to watch it down to a range of only a metre.

Minsmere also provided some wildfowl highlights with up to 50 Velvet Scoters offshore in early January and 67 Tundra (Bewick's) Swans in February – the latter departed promptly on 28th February. Also at Minsmere, up to 500 Yellowhammers fed on barley put out for Common Pheasants in January. Early spring arrivals on the reserve involved a Eurasian Spoonbill 26th & 28th March, and six Stone Curlews, 12th March – elsewhere in the county a Stone Curlew was at an undisclosed site on 20th February.

Suffolk's largest gathering of Greylag Geese in 1960 was of 32 on 19th January on Havergate Island; this site also attracted three Horned (Shore) Larks, 15th January. Interesting ducks on the Stour Estuary involved a Velvet Scoter, 17th January, and the year's first Garganey, 13th March. Just upstream from the estuarine section of the Stour there was an overwintering Common Greenshank at Flatford in late February, only the eighth such occurrence in Suffolk.

Winter records of Blackcaps were scarce 50 years ago so a female or immature at Leiston, 13th January, was a particularly notable sighting.

Additional reports included the overwintering Mediterranean Gull at Pakefield up to 19th March, two European Shags away from the coast at Saxmundham on 19th February, up to 17 Bohemian Waxwings at Ipswich and three overwintering Green Sandpipers in the Fynn Valley at Playford.

## 25 years ago

There were considerable rewards for those birders who were brave enough to endure the harsh weather which prevailed during the early months of 1985. The weather induced a marked influx of birds, principally waterfowl, into the coastal region. Although not on the same scale as that of winter 1978/79, there was an influx of Red-necked Grebes with at least 12 located and a maximum of four at Minsmere. Impressive totals of Great Crested Grebes in January involved 169 on Alton Water and 100 on Orwell Estuary. Perhaps the most remarkable grebe sighting was that of a Little Grebe observed swimming under the ice on the River Gipping at Bramford on 16th February.

Just as in January 1979, Lowestoft Harbour attracted some notable totals of European Shags with as many as 20 present during 9th to 16th January; we also read of European Shag that "*Single disorientated birds picked up in two Ipswich suburban areas during 10th-11th Jan were subsequently released at Shingle Street when the weather relented (RSPCA)*"

During the course of February, two Mute Swans were found dead, frozen into the ice on the River Deben, near Wilford Bridge, Melton. There were more Whooper Swans than usual, including one in Ipswich Docks, 20th January.

Brent Geese responded quickly to the onset of harsh weather with 4,000 south off Landguard, 4th January; two were located inland at Icklingham, 19th January and nine on the grass runway of the former Ipswich Airport, 25th January.

Eurasian Wigeon was the surface-feeding duck most affected by the weather; about 10,000 were assembled at Gedgrave in January of which many were in an emaciated condition – waste grain was provided for them. In addition, 3,238 Eurasian Wigeon flew south off Landguard during the course of January.

*Aythya* diving ducks featured prominently in the Ipswich Docks area of the upper Orwell Estuary in late January with 1,150 Tufted Ducks, 200 Common Pochard, up to 45 Greater Scaup and a female Ferruginous Duck. Even higher totals of Greater Scaup were present further north in the county with up to 140 in the Lowestoft/Pakefield area and 80 at Benacre – there was considerable interchange between these two sites. The Orwell Estuary was the top site for Common Goldeneye with up to 166 in January and 200 in February, but the species which really attracted birders' interest was the Smew of which probably in excess of 100 were recorded. Totals of Smew in January included 33 (14 adult males) on Alton Water, 25 in from offshore at Slaughden, 16th, 20 on Benacre Broad (only three adult males), 11 at Blythburgh, up to ten in Ipswich Docks, nine on Loompit Lake (seven adult males) and seven at Lowestoft. Up to 36 Red-breasted Mergansers were on the Orwell in January including 24 in Ipswich Docks. A county record total of 50 Goosanders (20 adult males) was off Sizewell, 16th January, during which month there were up to 39 at Lackford, 36 at Minsmere and 21 on Alton Water.

The weather conditions forced several waders to search for food in unexpected locations. Three Red Knot were watched foraging on an area of asphalt at the Bird's Eye Factory in Lowestoft, 25th January, and in the same town ten Sanderling actively sought food on a seafront lawn, 21st January. Eurasian Woodcock were noted feeding in gardens at seven sites in the coastal region while a Eurasian Curlew foraged in a Felixstowe garden, 13th to 15th January. A Ruff was observed pecking



at goose faeces on the ice amongst Greater Canada Geese at Lackford, 13th January. The wader species which suffered most in the harsh weather was the Common Redshank – 15 were found dead between Nacton and the Orwell Bridge, 23rd February.

Spectacular Dunlin totals were recorded in January with 20,854 on the Stour Estuary and 17,014 on the Orwell. Landguard attracted its first-ever Jack Snipe on 13th January and a Swedish-ringed Purple Sandpiper, 17th February to 21st March.

Despite the adverse weather, there was a remarkable record of an over-wintering Willow Warbler; initially discovered on 31st December 1984 at Oulton Marshes, this bird somehow managed to survive there until at least 24th February when it was heard singing. Other over-wintering records involved up to five Common Green-shank, two Common Sandpipers, nine Blackcaps and six Common Chiffchaffs. A roost of Winter Wrens at Minsmere totalled 50 on 15th January while hibernating Small Tortoiseshell butterflies in farm buildings formed the staple diet of a Winter Wren at Walpole in February.

Despite the weather's harshness in January and February, spring came early to some areas in March; on 16th a White-spotted Bluethroat, Suffolk's earliest ever at the time, was found inland at Barton Mills, while on the same date what remains as the county's earliest-ever Willow Warbler was found nearby at Worlington.

Finally on the last day of March, impressive totals of emigrating thrushes at Landguard involved 4,400 Redwings and 120 Song Thrushes.

### **Copy dates for *The Harrier***

**June Issue – Deadline of 15th May**

**September Issue – Deadline of 15th August**

**December Issue – Deadline of 15th November**

**March Issue – Deadline of 15th February**



## SOG – who we are, what we do



**S**OG is the Group for people interested in the birds of Suffolk, and provides a network and a voice for birdwatchers in the county. The Group is administered by Suffolk birdwatchers for Suffolk birdwatchers, keeping them in touch with what is going on and with each other. Through the Group's Council, SOG has good links with other naturalist and conservation organisations in the region.

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

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

The Group's bulletin, *The Harrier*, published quarterly, keeps members in touch with what's going on – stories about birds, conservation, reserves, and people.

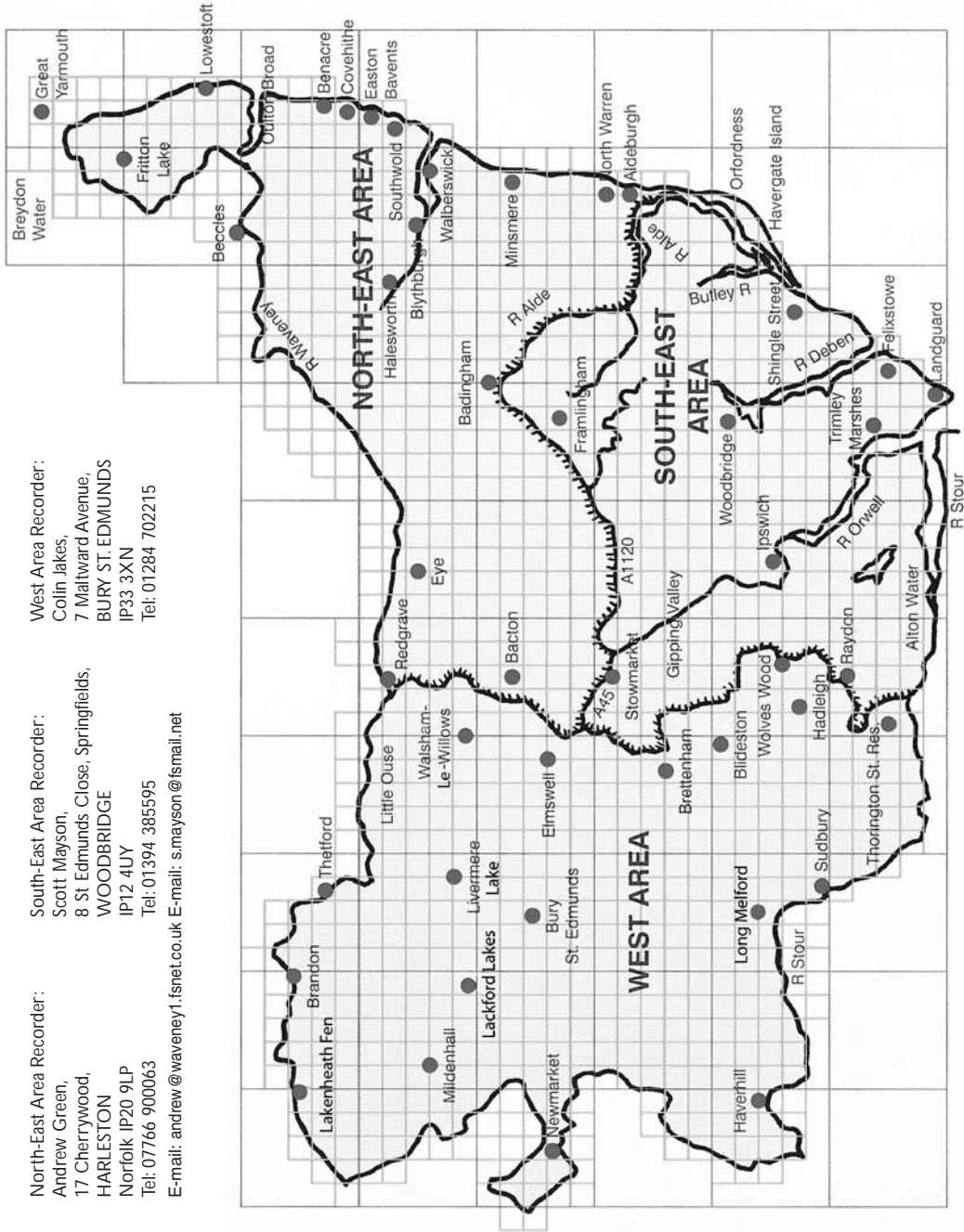
SOG organises and promotes surveys and projects on the birds of Suffolk, with an opportunity for members to participate. SOG is also able to support worthwhile projects through bursaries.

Membership of SOG is open to anyone with an interest in the birds of Suffolk. For details of membership, contact: Bill Stone, 27 Draymans Way, Ipswich IP3 0QU.

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## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

SOG:– Adults: £13.00, Family: £15.00

Joint SOG/Suffolk Naturalists’ Society:–

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