

# The Harrier

June 2010

Bulletin No. 161



**Suffolk Ornithologists' Group**

# Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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**Cover:** *Kittiwakes on Claremont Pier, Lowestoft* – Paul Lacey.



# The Harrier

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

## A Birding Weekend in Outback Australia

*Malcolm and Rosemary Wright*

Most of the regular rainfall in Australia occurs around the coast, in the north east, which has an annual monsoon, and also in the south-east and south. Consequently all of the cities and large towns, most of the infrastructure and the vast majority of the population are also concentrated around the coast. The birding near the coast is excellent in many places but inland there are vast areas of desert and semi-arid areas that hold a good percentage of the country's c.850 species. These birds of the outback are much less easy to get to grips with. So while on an extended trip to see our son, who currently works in Sydney, we booked a weekend with a well-known guide, Philip Maher, who is based in the town of Deniliquin. This was in the Australian spring of 2009.

Deniliquin is a small town in inland, dry New South Wales, about a full day's drive south-west of Sydney and three hours north of Melbourne. It is situated on the Edward River, part of the huge Murray-Darling river basin. We booked into a cabin on the banks of the river on the late afternoon of 13th November. A quick look around the well-wooded site that evening produced Blue-faced Honeyeater, Superb and Red-rumped Parrots, lots of noisy Galahs and a couple of the yellow "*flaveolus*" race of the Crimson Rosella. Philip collected us at 06.00 the next morning. There were seven of us for the weekend, a friendly mix of two Australians, two from the USA and three from the UK and we travelled in two 4 x 4s, with a second guide, Robert Nevinson.

The Saturday morning was spent in and around the Gulpa State Forest, south-west of the town. We soon came on a pair of Varied Sitella and their little mud and bark nest plastered high onto a tree. Sitellas look very like our Nuthatch in size and shape but are not the same family. The forest was very dry and Philip explained to us that a huge area of south-east Australia is now into its 12th year of drought. Before this drought began the long term average rainfall around Deniliquin was 450mm (16 inches) per year, but over the past 12 years it has shrunk to just 225mm (8 inches). He said that previously you could only see for a few metres between the

trees but now all the understorey has died and you can see for two to three hundred metres. We had seen similar drastic effects of climate change a few days previously in the You Yangs Regional Park, near Melbourne. Phil told us that small bird populations had held up well for the first 7/8 years but had then collapsed and he estimates that they are now down by 60% to 80%. People are badly affected too – a cotton growing industry based on irrigation water from the Murray-Darling basin has been abandoned and some farmland is being left uncultivated.

In spite of the drought Phil showed us some excellent birds: Masked and White-browed Woodswallows, Red-capped Robin, Crimson Chat, Gilbert's Whistler, Crested Shrike Tit and Hooded Robin all followed in quick succession. Especially memorable was a Diamond Firetail, singing high on a bare branch of a large tree. As we returned to the vehicles a noisy and very active family of White-browed Babblers and a party of Yellow Thornbills captured our attention.

After a break for lunch and an hour cooling off in the air-conditioned cabin, we joined the others and set off north towards the town of Hay. The semi-desert plains hereabouts are very flat and the temperature was close to 35°C but an exploration of a large area of very dry, open scrubland produced fine views of a roosting Owlet-Nightjar, three Southern Whiteface, a family party of White-winged Fairy-wrens (an absolute gem of a bird) and then Blue Bonnets and Mallee Ringnecks, the latter two species both members of the parrot family. We moved on into a very open area, where you could see for miles across the shimmering near desert and the vegetation was just a low, sparse mixture of grasses and herbs. Both Rufous and Brown Song-larks were quite common and we were delighted to see a large pack of c.25 Red Kangeroos, as this largest species is not that easy to connect with. Visiting a small farm dam we flushed a superb Black Falcon, a rare inhabitant of the inland deserts. It was a most impressive bird, larger than we expected with long wings and clearly a very powerful raptor. Phil then showed us a brilliantly plumaged Orange Chat, a pair of Ground Cuckoo-shrikes at the nest and flocks of Cockatiel, assembling to go to roost, that were good fun. In the half-light we came on an Australian Pratincole.

After a picnic meal of sandwiches, cake and tea, eaten in the dusk, came the centrepiece of the weekend. Philip is about the only man who can pretty well guarantee to find you the enigmatic Plains Wanderer, a rare denizen of the arid outback. And yes, it is a bird and not a Clint Eastwood film, as Colin Jakes maintains! The Plains Wanderer is in a family of its own and its origins were debated until the last 20 years, with some claiming it as a wader and others that it was an aberrant quail. DNA analysis has now proved that it is a wader and its nearest relatives are the seedsnipes of South America, so presumably they had a joint ancestor many millions of years ago on the giant landmass of Gondwana. On this occasion it took Philip just 20 minutes to find us one, traversing the plains with a powerful spotlight on the vehicle. In fact he found four in no time at all, including a more brightly plumaged female. We carried on spotlighting for a further two hours, finding Inland Dotterel, Tawny Frogmouth, another Owlet-nightjar, Brushtail Possums and a little flock of Stubble Quail. We arrived back at the cabin after midnight but Phil wasn't finished. He whipped out his tape recorder and quickly pulled in a Southern Boobook Owl, right over our heads. Shortly after that we collapsed into bed.

Just over six hours later we were out again for another six hours in the field. On a

small lake in Deniliquin we found Sacred and Azure Kingfishers, Kookaburras and Clamorous Reed Warblers were singing. This time we went south-east from the town and first inspected an area of rice paddies. Rice was another industry that depended on irrigation water but most of the paddies have gone now and a mill in Deniliquin for processing the rice has closed down, throwing 200 people out of work. On the paddies we saw Straw-necked Ibis, 50 Glossy Ibis, the ubiquitous Great White Egret and a Pacific Heron, whilst a small farm dam nearby had lots of Black-tailed Native Hens. A farm reservoir/lagoon produced a selection of duck, Whistling Kite, Australian Stilts, Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterels and winter visiting Marsh Sandpipers all the way from breeding grounds in eastern Siberia. At some gravel pit lakes Philip taped out an Australian Spotted Crake.

Down a long sandy track (once you get off the main highways, all the roads in the outback are very long, sandy tracks) we were shown Apostlebirds and White-winged Choughs and then, at a group of flowering bushes, the nectar feeding Black, Striped and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters. On the way back to town we stopped at a Tawny Frogmouth's nest with chicks and saw that the birds were being threatened by two tree-climbing Goannas (a large monitor-type lizard). Perhaps the Frogmouths can take care of themselves, as they are as big as a Tawny Owl and have a really heavy bill. We finished off a really good birding weekend at three wetland sites around Deniliquin, which produced among others, Musk Duck, Hoary-headed Grebe and two Latham's Snipe, the latter in a gutter near the road.

Philip and Robert were excellent guides, relaxed and easy going but very knowledgeable and competent. Philip has an interesting website at [www.philipmaher.com](http://www.philipmaher.com) and you can find there a full list of the 140 species he showed us over the weekend.



*Tawny Frogmouth – Malcolm Wright*



## Memoirs of a Retired Birdracer

David Tomlinson

**T**hirty years ago I had one of my more inspired ideas. How many species of birds was it possible to see in Britain in one day? As far as I could gather, it was a challenge that few in this country had ever attempted before, and if they had they'd not reported or recorded their effort. Of course, my idea wasn't original. My shooting pal Peter Smith had entertained me with stories of what he called his tally days in Suffolk in the 1950s, when, in company with his school friend David Pearson, he had tried to see as many species in a day as possible. Peter and David were, however, limited to pedal power, though one year they did manage to persuade their French mistress to transport them for part of the day in her car.

Peter and David's tally days were always held in mid May. Peter assured me that this was because all the summer migrants were back by then, including the first Red-backed Shrikes. Back in those days there were lots of birds that were a struggle for the intrepid duo to find. Collared Doves had scarcely established themselves, Canada Geese were local rarities and required a special effort to locate, while finding a Magpie was regarded as something of a triumph. On the other hand, Grey Partridges could be found in almost every field and Tree Sparrows and Corn Buntings were birds that could be taken for granted.

I sat down with a checklist and reckoned that with a bit of effort we should be able to tick off at least 125 species; with luck, 130 plus was possible. There was no doubt in my mind where we should start: Minsmere. It has long been one of those magical places where, in spring, seeing 100 species in a day is relatively easy. What was more, I knew the then warden, Jeremy Sorensen, sufficiently well to not only ask him if I could undertake the Big Day at Minsmere, but to ask him to join my team, too.

At the time I was working for *Country Life*, so it wasn't difficult to gain the magazine's backing for the day, which soon became known as the *Country Life* Record Birdwatch. My idea wasn't simply to see as many birds as possible, but to gain sponsorship for every bird seen. I wrote letters to all the magazine's major advertisers, suggesting that they might back me at £1 a bird. Around a dozen agreed to do so, guaranteeing worthwhile sponsorship. Finally, a fast car was essential to attract media attention and make the day rather more special. Mike Cotton, the PR man at Porsche Cars GB, was amused by the whole idea, and agreed to lend me a Porsche 924. Those with good memories will recall that the 924 was neither the fastest nor the roomiest Porsche ever made, but it was more fun than the Escort 1600 Sport I owned in those distant days.

A date was fixed for the record attempt, and the week before I came up to Suffolk for the weekend for a recce. My plans weren't too ambitious, and I didn't plan to go any farther north than Benacre Broad, though an excursion south to Abberton reservoir was a possibility. We planned a full day, starting just before dawn at Minsmere, and not finishing until dusk, at around 9pm. There were to be just three of us in the team – Peter Smith, Jeremy Sorensen and me – but it just so happened that David Pearson was home on leave from Kenya for the Birdwatch weekend, so he was recruited, too. It was fortunate that both Jeremy and Peter weren't tall, as there wasn't much room in the back of the Porsche.

Thirty years is a long time, and I have to admit I can't remember many of the triumphs and disasters of the day. I do recall that the weather was reasonably kind to us and that it didn't rain. I recollect the satisfaction of finding a Stone Curlew not far from Minsmere – they were exceedingly rare breeding birds on the Suffolk coast in those days – and I do remember the final score: 133. There were, inevitably, a few birds we had missed that we felt we should have seen, plus a few surprises, but we reckoned that we'd done pretty well, and we had set a new and semi-official British record. It had also been a relaxing and thoroughly enjoyable day, and we had driven a mere 120 miles.

You might note the word relaxing. It was the first and last Big Day I took part in to which that adjective could be applied. Later that summer I had lunch with John Burton, then director of the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society (FFPS). John liked the idea of the Birdwatch, and suggested that the following year it should become a competitive fund-raising event. He would ask his old friend John Gooders to put a team together to take on the *Country Life* team, a challenge I rose to.

So for the next three years the *Country Life* and FFPS teams took part in titanic struggles to see the most birds, and every year the number of species we recorded rose accordingly. John Gooders recruited ex-Goodie Bill Oddie to his team, along with Walberswick warden Cliff Waller. Their fourth team member varied from year to year, and included top-twitcher Ron Johns and Tim Inskipp. My team remained constant, though with Norfolk-based twitcher Bill Urwin replacing David Pearson.

Star-studded though the FFPS team was, we beat them narrowly each time. This was down to hard-work and careful preparation rather than anything else, as we were meticulous in our planning. The first year we competed against FFPS we discovered that John Gooders had a number of his friends staking out birds for his team at strategic points, so the following year we recruited a dedicated back-up team, which was how I got to know such eminent Suffolk birders as Derek Moore and Steve Piotrowski, both of whom became heavily involved. I don't think that Cliff ever forgave Derek for helping us, though Derek told me later he only did so because I asked him, while Cliff hadn't bothered to do so.

Our final year of competition was 1983, a day immortalised in *The Great Bird Race*, written jointly by Bill and me and published by Collins. It never became a best-seller, but you might still come across a copy in a second-hand bookshop, and I'm conceited enough to believe that you will consider it's worth the £1 you are likely to be charged. For the record, we notched up 155 species that day, taking in both Suffolk and Norfolk, while we used a convertible Porsche 911. I have guilty memories of driving up what is now the A14 at speeds that embarrass me to even think about today, but it was all great fun at the time, if rather draughty.

Today, 30 years on, many people enjoy the challenge of the Big Day, and some quite remarkable records have been set. I went on to take part in a 48-hour birdrace in Kenya in 1986 where my team saw 290 species the first day, and 443 over the two days. They were probably the most fun 48 hours of my life, memorable for travelling at speed through Kakamega Forest in a Range Rover driven by an ex-Safari Rally driver, and flying to the coast at night through an amazing and very frightening electrical storm. The birds were terrific, too, while one of the highlights of the race

was an encounter with a leopard. At the other extreme, I did a birdrace in 1989 in the Falkland Islands and struggled to get more than 30 species, but my tally did include Black-browed Albatross and Gentoo Penguin. I also did an environmentally friendly birdrace in Suffolk in 1991, using horses rather than cars. I can claim to be one of only four people to have seen a Bee-eater from the back of a horse in Suffolk, a feat that even the most hardened bird racer would be hard-pushed to better.

Now I'm a retired birdracer, but I still have nostalgic memories of those midnight starts, the thrill and exhilaration when the anticipated birds appeared, or the unexpected were found. Birdracing is a somewhat eccentric past-time, but I'm proud to have been one of its pioneers in Britain.

## Recent Field Meetings

### *Orfordness – 20th February 2010*

*Steve Fryett*

**R**arely does the leader have to cancel a meeting but such was the weather during the week commencing 4th January that I made a decision on the Wednesday 6th to cancel the Orfordness meeting planned for the following Saturday. On Saturday 9th the snow was deep enough to prevent me, as leader, from getting the car out of the road in Woodbridge and therefore the decision was justified not only on the grounds of practicality but also by the fact that Orfordness was frozen solid and bereft of birds.

Weather conditions were vastly improved for this rearranged visit although it was still cold. The legacy of the harsh winter was still evident as the site was generally quiet with few waders and ducks present. Raptors filled the top part of the day's list with Marsh Harrier, Barn Owl, juvenile Peregrine and ringtail Hen Harrier; the latter is a noteworthy sighting in Suffolk this winter. Maintaining the usual standards we had lunch in front of the lighthouse whilst sea watching; Red-throated Divers were noted but not in abundance. As we headed for the East Lagoons we located 20 Snow Buntings, another conspicuous species this winter, feeding on the shingle bank. On the lagoon the most interesting birds were two Yellow-legged Gulls with just a few Wigeon and Pintail. As we made our way back at least five Snipe were noted together with a calling Water Rail.

### *Shingle Street & Upper Hollesley Common – 16th April 2010*

*Steve Fryett*

**A** very pleasant, but chilly, spring morning greeted the 17 members assembled for this annual meeting to Shingle Street. The cool wind reduced species to the minimum with no warblers or wheatears, just two Swallows, a few Goldfinch, Linnets and Reed Bunting as we made our way from the Coastguard Cottages to the allotments. Some pristine Curlews were seen feeding on Oxley Marsh with several Lapwing. Continuing south we noted a single Corn Bunting holding territory, a rare species in this area nowadays, and two distant Grey Partridge that were very difficult to see in the haze.



At Upper Hollesley Common we walked to the next car park noting a pair of Woodlark clearly with a nest of chicks nearby as both had bills full of caterpillars; Stonechat were also noted. At the car park we recorded the first warbler of the day – a Chiffchaff. Heading north over the common we noted Willow Warbler, Yellowhammer, Goldcrest and Sparrowhawk. The dominant



*Redstart at Hollesley Common – Brian Buffery*

species of this area by a long way was Chaffinch with significant numbers of singles and flocks noted. One of the key species for this area is Common Redstart and we soon found a male in full view albeit not for long. It did not sing and could not be relocated. Alas the final heathland species, Dartford Warbler, could not be found: it is probably due to the harsh winter that Dartford Warbler numbers have fallen significantly. We also noted Brimstone, Peacock & Small Tortoiseshell butterflies on the common.

We then headed for Boyton Marsh where a number of new migrant species for the day were seen. This included House Martin, Sand Martin, three Yellow Wagtails, and Sedge Warbler (singing). On the marsh were two Avocet, a single Little Egret and an interesting White Wagtail. Raptors concluded the day with up to six Common Buzzards over Chillesford and Gedgrave with both male and female Marsh Harrier passing over Gedgrave to Orfordness.

## ***Minsmere & Dunwich, 2nd May 2010***

*Gi Grieco [Leader: Ashley Gooding]*

**I**t was a case of would our hardy leader complete the long walk – a circuit of Minsmere and Dunwich from Eastbridge – with painful back problems. So that Ashley could concentrate on finding birds, note taking and report scribe was delegated. Sixteen members convened early Sunday morning keen for this popular yearly trip even though the cold north/north-easterly had not abated and the sky was grey looking.

Most years warbler species and Nightingale are a feature of the first section along the road and through the woods; all we could manage was a single singing Blackcap and some female red deer that allowed good views. Just before the open area we encountered more Blackcaps and a valiant singing Chiffchaff, but on leaving the shelter of the trees the bracing wind blew in to our faces and kept the birds subdued. We encountered a Wheatear and a couple of Red-legged Partridges. The next section of wood provided a Treecreeper and a pair of Mistle Thrushes, and then we

ventured out on to a wet and windy Dunwich Heath, where it had a barren feel and all we could muster was a single male Stonechat.

Walking along the beach towards East Hide, the faint singing of a Cetti's Warbler was heard by some on the reserve side, while a Whitethroat sang in tamarisk on the dunes. Some foolhardy types tried to sea watch but the buffeting wind and streaming eyes soon put paid to that. Shelter was sought at East Hide and this is where most species were seen on the trip; close in Avocet, a few Mediterranean Gulls amongst the numerous Black-headed Gulls and a few Common and Sandwich Terns. A smart male Pintail, a couple each of Common Sandpiper and Ringed Plover and at least three Ruff, including one colourful male with a partial ruff that was one of the highlights of the day. The other highlight was a Temminck's Stint that appeared briefly, before flying off again, unfortunately missed by some.

Out again braving the elements the group took the path from the sluice back to Eastbridge where we did just manage to hear a Reed Warbler near the ruins, while further along some had a brief view of a Cuckoo. A short snatch of Nightingale in song was a treat and around the poplar plantation there were several Swifts with low flying Swallows over the adjacent field.

Our thanks to Ash for bravely leading the trip despite being in pain and the good camaraderie between fellow members who made it an enjoyable trip.

### ***Westwood Marshes, Walberswick NNR, 8th May 2010***

*Steve Fryett [Leader: Adam Gretton]*

**W**eather conditions on the day were predictable with NE wind, drizzle and exceedingly cold for early May. From Westwood Lodge we entered the reserve managed by Natural England and were guided by the warden Will Russell. A single Woodlark provided a good start with a male Northern Wheatear also noted. As we skirted the edge of the reed bed little could be heard from singing warblers. One of the more notable species of the marsh are Marsh Harriers and they were in abundance with at least three females and two males, one male was a particularly well-marked individual. They hunted and displayed all morning with the females uttering their unusual whinnying call during the breeding season. The other key bird of the marsh is Bittern, although not seen they were certainly heard.

Cetti's Warbler seemed to have survived the harsh winter with at least five singing as did the Bearded Reedlings with a number of sightings during the morning. Two Little Egrets were noted with Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler, although these seemed to be low in numbers due to the weather perhaps.

As we turned to head towards East Hill the weather worsened but an area of cut reed provided good shelter and food to about 30 Swallows. On East Hill we could not locate Dartford Warbler but did note Nightingale, the third of the morning, with Common Whitethroat and Blackcap. As we headed back to the Lodge the rain became more persistent and there we ended the meeting. Our thanks go to Adam and Will for providing the leadership and informative details of Westwood Marshes to those who attended.

## ***Health & Safety advice for SOG field trips***

Reprinted from *The Harrier*, 128, March 2002 – as a useful reminder to members attending field meetings.

**F**or most field meetings, no prior booking is necessary and participants should assemble at the time and meeting place described on the programme card. For some field meetings with restricted numbers or other particular circumstances, participants are asked to make arrangements through either the leader or outdoor meetings organiser beforehand; details of meetings requiring pre-booking are clearly indicated on the programme card.

SOG field meetings are generally led by members acting in an amateur capacity on behalf of other members.

Children are welcome on field meetings but those under 12 must be accompanied by an adult. Dogs, except guide dogs, are not permitted on SOG field meetings unless by prior arrangement.

If you have a particular condition that could give rise to a medical emergency during a meeting (e.g. allergy to insect stings, blackouts, pacemaker) please contact the meeting leader a few days in advance of the meeting to ensure any necessary provisions are in place.

Members attending field meetings are reminded that they have a duty of care for their own safety and that of others during a meeting. It is expected that participants make every effort to draw the meeting leader's attention to any member of the group in distress. Do not attempt a walk unless you are fit and able to do so. Walks often cover several miles and you must expect at least the kind of hazards you would encounter on public footpaths in the countryside in lowland England. Take sensible precautions to avoid natural hazards – stay away from cliffs, water edges etc. Where a meeting requires a walk along a public highway, take care and follow the recommendations given to pedestrians in the Highway Code.

Wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Stout shoes are a minimum requirement for all walks. Be aware of forecast weather conditions, and come prepared for seasonal weather – hot days as well as cold.

Toilets and other facilities are not usually available. You should bring a first aid kit and any medical supplies for your personal use; meeting leaders are not expected to be able to administer first aid or to provide first aid equipment. You should not assume that mobile phone contact to emergency services will be available as meetings often take place out of range of mobile phone reception.

On all walks which involve a picnic, it is recommended that you bring your own wipes or water with you to clean your hands before eating.

Certain diseases are present in the Suffolk countryside (as everywhere). Ensure your tetanus vaccination is up to date. Keep all sores and wounds covered. Avoid so far as practical contact with water. Always wash your hands before a meal. In areas with deer, wear long trousers and tuck trouser bottoms into socks to lessen exposure to ticks.

It is sometimes necessary for participants to move between sites by car during a meeting. In instances where participants do not have a vehicle of their own there is normally somebody with a spare seat who is willing to convey them. In these

circumstances such travel arrangements take place by agreement between the various parties concerned.

Please take care and be safe, and enjoy field meetings with SOG.

## SOG News

### *The Chairman's report as given at the AGM on 25th February 2010*

**S**OG continues to do well – given the current economic climate and changes affecting all natural history societies. We retain about 500 members (single & family) and we remain solvent; the treasurer's report is given separately but we actually have had similar financial situations for the last three years – we are now about £400 worse off than this time at end of 2007.

Council has met five times since the last AGM. We maintained the successful programme of field visits – in 2009 there were about two field trips per month throughout the year; that's pretty impressive. Most field trips are well attended. This provision of field trips is one of our core services in providing this leadership for the county's birders, young, old, experienced or new – encouraging people to get out and birdwatch. There were also five indoor meetings, and four editions of *The Harrier* – this is our voice-piece, and provides the main contact most members will have with SOG. We have a strong and growing website – given the electronic age this will continue to grow in importance.

We have maintained a major engagement with the BTO Atlas and are putting in significant additional effort towards a greater coverage in Suffolk to underpin the publication of a subsequent Suffolk Atlas. We have financially supported the Suffolk Tree Sparrow project. We provide support to the *Suffolk Bird Report* Editor and have strong links with SORC.

I offer a major thank you to everyone who gives up their time on behalf of SOG – both in the public eye and behind the scenes. I shall not name everyone individually – there are too many people and I would be sure to embarrass myself by forgetting someone.

As for the future – we must not be complacent; we must ensure that SOG has a place in the changing world, and we should stay in tune with what's topical. This may require us to review the constitution and review our services and the way we work. We must maintain the quality standard of our core services – the bulletin and our meetings; this does not mean that they must stay static, and we shall continue to review how best to provide these services. We must embrace the electronic age – we should grow the website and what we achieve through it.

I would like us to make SOG the umbrella for the growing number of informal bird groups, networks and blogs that have arisen around the county; Council now has representatives from SORC, Waveney Bird Club, Bawdsey Bird Club, BINS, Lounge Lizards and West Suffolk birders. We must grasp the opportunities presented by "Gift Aid", though this may take some initial investment in modifying how we manage our membership systems.

If you have ideas, suggestions or comments – then please talk to me or any other member of Council.

## *Presentation of Cups at the SOG AGM*



*Will Brame being presented with the SOG Denis Ockelton trophy in recognition of his rarity finding accomplishments and his unstinting submission of records.*

*John Grant (centre) in his moment of glory receiving the prestigious BINS award for his finding of the Red-flanked bluetail, being presented by Roy Marsh (left) and Lee Woods.*



*Presentation of the The Suffolk BINS Cup for the 2010 New Year's Day Bird Race – Pied Twitchers – Left to right, Roy Marsh presenting cup to Scott Mayson, Nick Andrews (captain) and Lee Woods. Craig Fulcher missing from team line-up!*



## ***The SOG Annual Accounts as presented at the AGM on 25th February 2010***

*Richard Rafe*

**T**he AGM saw the presentation of the audited accounts for the year ending 31st December 2009.

	Bank	Building Society
Income:–		
Opening balance	<b>1304.42</b>	<b>1871.56</b>
Interest		9.70
SOG subscriptions	5149.00	
SNS subscriptions	954.00	
Meetings	268.00	
NYD twitch sponsorship	53.05	
	<b>7728.47</b>	<b>1881.26</b>
Expenditure:–		
SNS subscriptions	910.00	
Liability insurance	110.00	
Meetings	820.74	
Fixture cards	373.00	
The Harrier	4191.80	
Contribution to Tree Sparrow project	241.50	
Administration	208.43	
Cash in hand	873.00	
	<b>7728.47</b>	

The AGM agreed that, should it prove prudent to do so, Council had the authority to raise subscriptions for 2011 by a maximum of £2 for each membership category.

## **Birds and Conservation**

### ***Peregrines in Suffolk 2010***

*Steve Piotrowski*

**A**fter the two previous successful years, it looks very much like our Peregrines will have another successful breeding season in the nest box under the decking of Orwell Bridge, so let's hope that they successfully rear chicks for a third year in succession.

There has also been much excitement along Ipswich Waterfront. Last summer Wharfside Properties Ltd gave the go ahead for a special compartment to be constructed in the parapet wall of The Mill to house an in-situ Peregrine nest box. Suffolk Ornithologists Group member and project leader David Lowe has kept a keen eye



on the comings and goings of the falcons throughout this winter and things began to look very promising in March when a pair of Peregrines was seen to enter the box. The falcons were frequently seen bringing large items of prey to The Mill, perching on the balconies of the apartments of floors 19, 20 and 21 where they plucked their meals and made them ready to consume. A search through the half-eaten carcasses on the balcony floors revealed 20 feral pigeons, five woodcocks, single lapwing and black-headed gull and five fieldfares.

The level of activity increased around The Mill and at one time three Peregrines were circling and calling loudly. Just when it was looking like Ipswich would have two pairs of Peregrines nesting within a mile of each other; an imposter arrived in the shape of a Gyr/Peregrine/Saker hybrid which chased the wild Peregrines away, this newcomer being much larger than the resident birds. Investigations have revealed the owner of the falcon which was lost whilst carrying out pest-control work on Foxhall Landfill Site; he is anxious to get his falcon back, but this may be more difficult than it would at first seem.

Other Peregrines have been seen prospecting sites elsewhere in Suffolk but so far as we are aware the Orwell Bridge birds remain our only breeding pair at the present time.



*Peregrine family under the Orwell Bridge  
(Inset) Peregrine at nest box at The Mill –  
Photos by David Hermon*

## The Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee

*Justin Zantboer*

**F**or a change, I can get straight down to the nitty gritty as I do not need to mention any committee staff changes!

You may recall that SORC raised some concerns over the categorisation of the species on the list printed annually within the Suffolk Bird Reports – there are currently a number of red and amber listed species for which at present the County

is not asking for all records. So, at our most recent meeting, we co-opted Philip Murphy and attempted to put this right. The result of this is that the following species which are currently red-listed have now been moved up from category four to category three (i.e. all records requested):

European Turtle Dove	Yellow Wagtail	Common Nightingale
Spotted Flycatcher	Marsh Tit	Corn Bunting

It was also felt that more emphasis on reporting breeding records should be placed on the following species which are currently amber-listed:

Common Kestrel	Northern Lapwing	Ringed Plover
Common Snipe	Eurasian Woodcock	Eurasian Curlew
Common Redshank	Common Gull	Great Black-backed Gull
Common Swift	Sand Martin	Barn Swallow
House Martin	Mistle Thrush	Willow Warbler
Reed Bunting		

There are other species, currently both red and amber-listed, that we have decided that for the time being at least, these should remain within category four as their Suffolk populations remain fairly healthy. However, we will be keeping a more focussed eye on these species so that we can react should the need arise. The effects of two consecutive cold winters for instance could spark the need for a really quick review as it is painfully apparent to me already this spring that, locally, species such as Stonechat and Treecreeper have vanished from many of their once regular haunts. Although at times, it can prove to be quite difficult to actually prove that a species is breeding, it would certainly be useful if even suspected breeding could be reported. Obviously we are not asking for anybody to go hunting for nests – far from it in fact! Look for tell-tale signs such as birds carrying nesting material, birds involved in courtship or territorial displays and then later in the season, birds carrying faecal sacs or food. We know that this may create a little extra work for you all, particularly when it comes to recording and then submitting the data to the County Recorders so it goes without saying that your assistance will as ever be greatly appreciated.

Whilst on the subject of recording, our recorders have asked for all observers to take a little extra care when submitting the locations of their sightings. For instance, our biggest headache is Loompit Lake at Trimley St Martin. This location is given all sorts of names, most regularly Trimley Lake, Trimley Trout Lake and Levington Lake. For clarification on site names, there are many listed within *The Birds of Suffolk* as well as within the *Suffolk Bird Reports* but if these fail, please refer to Ordnance Survey Maps. I know it seems a relatively trivial issue in the grand scheme of things but determining and correcting such faults is all extra work for the County Recorders.

On the record assessment front, at the time of writing, 2009 is just about complete. Nearly all of the descriptions received have now been assessed so our decisions will be placed upon the SOG website. As ever though, there are still several records outstanding for 2009 so as per the norm, I have included a list of these below. If anyone can provide anything on these records, there is still a little time to get the records processed and into the *Bird Report* but that time is running out fast!

### Outstanding BBRC rarities descriptions for 2009

26/04/09	Serin	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
08/03/09	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere	M Currie
29/07/09	Pacific Golden Plover	Breydon Water South Wall	
30/10/09	Red-breasted Goose	Thorpeness	R Joliffe

### Outstanding SORC rarities descriptions for 2009

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	Lackford	H Vaughen
31/03/09	Purple Heron	Ipswich	
05/04/09	Goshawk	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
14/04/09	Goshawk	Felixstowe	P Oldfield
16/04/09	Great White Egret	Micklemere	
16/04/09	Purple Heron	Ipswich	
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
26/04/09	Serin	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
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
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	
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	

### Outstanding SORC rarities descriptions for 2009 *(continued)*

27/06/09	Bee-eater	Sutton	R Tomlinson + G Button
24/07/09	Black Kite	Woodbridge Airbase	
25/07/09	Cory's Shearwater	Kessingland	P Reid
08/08/09	Great White Egret	Nr Aldeburgh	
08/08/09	Honey Buzzard	Elveden	
11/08/09	Honey Buzzard	Martlesham	
05/09/09	Cory's Shearwater	Southwold	
09/09/09	Spotted Crake	Minsmere	
15/09/09	Sabine's Gull – Adult	Gorleston	
16/09/09	Sabine's Gull	Lowestoft	R Murray
18/09/09	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Minsmere	J Gibbs
19/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Corton	
19/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Hollesley	PJ Merchant
19/09/09	Red-necked Phalarope – Juv	East Lane	D Craven
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	B Mackie + PJ Merchant
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
17/10/09	Great White Egret	Shingle Street	S Babbs
18/10/09	Rough-legged Buzzard x 3	Mutford	
28/10/09	Great White Egret	Havergate Island	
29/10/09	Radde's Warbler	Lowestoft	R Wincup, JA Brown + R Wilton
29/10/09	Hooded Crow	North Warren	

## Short Notes

### *Artwork for The Bird Report*

*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 possibly 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.

Artwork can be sent to SOG or to myself, initially by email nick.mason4@bt internet.com or a phone call could make initial contact 01394 411150.

Having a photograph on the front has not been totally discounted. And, 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!

### **Re: Give us back our bird names**

Jeff Martin

I very much welcomed David Tomlinson's views upon the naming of birds. Judging by the number of papers etc. that I read where an author states, for example, 'Eurasian Robin, hereafter referred to as the Robin', I suspect that there are a number of people who are also uncomfortable with these cumbersome names.

Like David it is time, in my view, to discard these gimmicky names and return to simple, plain names backed up, when necessary, by scientific names. Instead of Eurasian Sparrowhawk, for example, why not just call it sparrowhawk, and then if it needs further identification refer to it as *Accipiter nisus*. I would also suggest that there should be a move away from using capital letters when naming a species. Thus sparrowhawk should be written so, and not Sparrowhawk. If a sparrowhawk has a name, however, such as Steve the sparrowhawk, that is different. However, it is correct to use capitals at the beginning of the scientific name.

Like David, I applaud the astuteness of the BTO by applying the former names of species. No cumbersome words here, just plain and simple names that do not hinder recording.

The fact that birdwatchers will readily take to identifying a different race by its scientific name is amply displayed by many birdwatchers when referring to the two races of barn owl that we have in northern Europe; *Tyto alba alba*, and *Tyto alba guttata*, and I suspect that there are young birdwatchers out there who get some 'kick' out of being able to refer to these two races by their scientific names. Let's encourage them, and indeed us all, to use those scientific names more freely when necessary, than we do at present.

If David Tomlinson is an unreformed old buffer, then he is not alone.

[Ed comment: *The Harrier* has for many years used initial capitals for bird names, so Sparrowhawk rather than sparrowhawk; Jeff is grammatically correct – nonetheless many notable texts, e.g. *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, use the convention of giving bird names initial capitals.]

### **Back to the future**

John Glazebrook

Well said David Tomlinson. I fully support his idea for *Suffolk Birds* to revert back to the long established bird names that we all use in daily practice. At the time *BB* decided on the changes I thought it a total nonsense to change the names of our birds to suit birders from other counties. If a German or Italian birder reads our reports do they expect to see familiar names – of course not – scientific names serve

the purpose of international conformity. As David says, no one 'on the outside' uses these ridiculous add-ons, chosen by the few against the wishes of, and not used by, the majority. So let's have a survey among Suffolk birders and see who is actually in favour of keeping these new names. I'll be surprised if it's more than a handful. Let's get back to sanity. Let the Suffolk Birders decide.

## Local Patch and Garden Birds

### *Aliens among us*

*David Tomlinson*

Some years ago I was discussing my life list with Derek Moore. The subject broadened to include my British list. "Yours isn't worth adding up, is it?" remarked Derek. He was, of course, dead right, and I've never bothered to work out how many species I've seen in the British Isles. However, in its defence I can assure you that my list, if totalled, would include all the species you can expect to see in a lifetime's birdwatching in these isles, but with hardly a twitched bird included. I have come across a good number of rarities, from Forster's Tern in Somerset to Wilson's Phalarope in Suffolk, while, because I've travelled a lot, I've seen such delights as Red-necked Phalaropes and Snowy Owls in Shetland, and Corncrakes and Sea Eagles in the Western Isles. However, all the Red-flanked Bluetails I've seen have been in Finland and Siberia, while I've seen plenty of American warblers and sparrows in America, but none in this country other than the famous Golden-winged Warbler in Kent. I happened to be driving past the housing estate it frequented some weeks after it was found, so called in to see it, which I duly did. The date was 12 April, and it was never seen again, so perhaps I frightened it off.

All this preamble brings me to the one list that I do keep with great enthusiasm: my garden list. To be honest, it's not a garden list at all, but includes the birds I see around my house in West Suffolk, on the edge of the Brecks. I call it my Bowbeck list, as I live in a hamlet called Bowbeck. My recording area includes the fields surrounding the property, but stops short of Great Grove, a large deciduous wood visible from my house. There are breeding Treecreepers and Nuthatches in Great Grove, but I've yet to record either on my patch. However, Nuthatch did creep onto the list earlier this year. My next-door neighbour photographed one on his feeder, conclusive evidence I had to accept.

I keep detailed records, both monthly and annual, so I can tell you that most years I record well over 80 species here, while the accumulative total has now reached 110, thanks to the latest addition, a Snow Goose that flew low over the house this very morning, in company with a pair of Greylags. OK, if I was a purist I probably wouldn't count such an obvious feral bird, but it's interesting, even so, and I'm the one who makes up the rules.

There's a strong showing of non-native species on my list. Not long after we moved here, over five years ago, I recorded a Ruddy Shelduck feeding within my recording area (in sight of the house) in company with a couple of Egyptian Geese. I've subsequently seen another Ruddy Shelduck, or possibly the same bird, at Great



Livermere. Egyptian Geese nest close by, so are seen and heard regularly. I rather like hearing them, as their nasal honking reminds me of being in Africa. Canada Geese are, of course, also on the list, while the Greylags that frequently fly over also have a feral history.

I live on a shooting estate, so the abundance of two other non-native species, Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge, I take for granted. However, last year I was intrigued to record a totally unexpected species of gamebird here: Bobwhite Quail. My wife, Jan, photographed the Bobwhite on his first appearance in early June, when I was away birding in Greece. He subsequently put in one more appearance when I also managed to grab a not-very-good photograph of him (it was 6 am). If you've ever wondered why a Bobwhite is called such, it's an onomatopoeic name, and he repeats it frequently. I duly recorded the Bobwhite's presence for the BTO Atlas, and Dawn Balmer confirmed that it was the first record for the project. Those with long memories will know that it was once a Suffolk breeding bird. [Ed – I am informed some persisted until 1973 following releases at Sizewell in 1956].



*Bobwhite – David Tomlinson*

The last of my feral/alien species is the Little Owl, a bird I hear regularly, but see rather less often. However, my most recent record was of one hovering over our paddock in the manner of a Kestrel, which at first glance I thought it was. My only other record of an alien bird was an unidentified parrot, but I'm still waiting for the first Ring-necked Parakeet. A friend in west Kent gets up to a dozen in his garden at one time, not something I'm looking forward to.

## Book & CD Review

***Collins Bird Guide. 2nd edition. By Lars Svensson, with illustrations by Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterström (Collins, £25 hardback)***

David Tomlinson

I met Lars Svensson, author of *The Collins Bird Guide*, for the first time more than 20 years ago. “Hello”, I said, “aren’t you the chap working on the new Collins guide with Peter Grant?” “No” said Lars. “Peter Grant is working on the guide with me.” Lars is a very precise person who likes to get everything right, so I wonder whether he’s 100% happy with this, the latest version of the best guide available for European birds, and arguably the best field guide for any group of birds anywhere in the world. Making what is already an outstanding guide into an even better one is a tricky business.

If you are a member of SOG, then it’s almost a foregone conclusion that you own a first edition of the *Collins Bird Guide*. Whether you will think it worth splashing out a further 25 quid for the latest copy is another matter. The good news is that the cover price has only risen by precisely 1p since the first edition was published 11 years ago, and that you can save money, and weight, by buying the paperback version. Talking of weight, the new edition has an extra 50 pages, so the weight of the hardback has risen by 100gm.

The first edition’s front cover Barn Owl has been replaced by an Arctic Tern, and Peter Grant’s name has been dropped (though his contribution is acknowledged on the title page). These changes are of little significance, so the first thing you notice when you open the latest version is that the wildfowl have been promoted to the front, followed by the game birds and then the divers and grebes. There have been a few minor changes to the plates, but the most noticeable difference is in the reproduction: my first edition is generally (but not consistently) brighter and livelier than the second edition, which won’t have pleased the illustrators, Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterström, or Mr Svensson, for that matter. Look carefully at each plate and you can see the initials of who painted it. Killian is also responsible for the new North American passerine plates, replacing the less than satisfactory work in the first edition.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this guide is how well the work of the two artists blends together, for their styles are so similar and their standard so high that you invariably have to check who was the artist responsible. Though there are relatively few obvious changes to the plates, there have been numerous alterations and improvement. The Atlantic island pigeons, for example, now look sufficiently interesting that you might be tempted to take a trip to the Canaries to see them. Gull taxonomy has moved on a lot in the last decade, and this is reflected in new plates, with Caspian Gull getting the full treatment it deserves. Pallas’s Gull (or what I still call Great Black-headed) has also been repainted, and the adult summer bird portrayed now has the butch look that is so characteristic of this species.

One retrograde step is the removal of alien birds – “introduced breeding species and species recorded only as escapes” – to the back of the volume. This isn’t consistent, as both Bar-headed and Egyptian Geese remain in the main body of

the book, but Mandarin and Ring-necked Parakeet are both relegated. I would have welcomed a whole plate devoted to parrots and parakeets, as this is one group of birds I struggle to identify when travelling in Spain, where several species are now breeding in the wild. Frustratingly, not all Europe's introduced species are covered. For example, there's not a mention of the Ashy-throated Parrotbill, now firmly established in Italy. For many of us, it's the aliens we struggle to identify as they are often unexpected and come from families of which we have no experience.

However, such minor criticisms apart, the revisions ensure that this second edition of the birder's bible remains far and away the best European field guide there is, and one that would be very hard to better. I was delighted to see that a sentence from my review of the first edition for *New Scientist* is reproduced on the dust wrapper: "As essential as binoculars for those who take their birdwatching seriously." My opinion hasn't changed. Buy the 2nd edition if you haven't already. You won't regret it.

***"Secret Songs of Birds – the hidden beauty of birdsong revealed" – British Library 2010. Obtainable online from: [www.bl.uk/shop](http://www.bl.uk/shop) £9.95***  
*Clive Collins*

**W**e know that the purpose of birdsong is to advertise possession of a territory and to attract a mate, but have you ever wondered what it sounds like to another bird? A new CD produced by the British Library may help to answer the question, for each of the 24 tracks has an example of a song firstly played at normal speed, and then played again at anything down to a quarter of the original speed, which allows human ears to appreciate the amazing complexity and variety of the sounds and the intricacy of the sequences delivered by the songbird. Research recently has demonstrated that birds possess the ability to judge the quality of the notes, the degree of improvisation and the rhythms in birdsong, and that this may be critical in determining mate-selection: the better singers attract more potential mates. Well, it works for humans! The 24 songs on the CD are selected from the vast collection of over 150,000 recordings of birds and other wildlife in the British Library archives, and feature examples from all over the world; amongst the British birds included are the Wren, Skylark, Redstart, Goldcrest, Grasshopper Warbler, Blackcap and Reed Warbler (although I would hesitate to count the Grasshopper Warbler as a "songster"). I found particularly revealing, on the slowed-down sections of each track, that what sounds like a single note when played at normal speed is sometimes actually "bent", the way a blues-man bends the string on the frets of his guitar; and I could also pick out clearly the faint "sub-notes" at the start of a song sequence and in the middle of the song, so that at times it is almost as if the bird is singing its own counterpoint. If I have a favourite track on the CD it is probably the Skylark – beautiful enough when heard drifting down from high above on a summer's day, but absolutely mind-blowing when listened to at a third-speed. That such a tiny creature can produce the incredible range of sounds from pure, fluting cadences to harsh, strident, churrs in an impetuous, non-stop outpouring leaves me full of wonder.

## Recent Reports for January to March 2010

*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 Recordors so please ensure that if any of you as individuals saw any of the following mentioned birds, please submit them ASAP. Although many of the following records were received from the Rare Bird Alert information service, others were received straight from Suffolk birders so on this note I would like to thank Will Brame, Nathaniel Cant, Andrew Curtis, Richard Drew, Robert Duncan, David Fairhurst, George Gregory, Terry Holland, Paul Holmes, Mike James, Gerald Jobson, Dave Langlois, Ernie Lucking, Peter Kennerley, Mike Marsh, Peter Merchant, Nigel Odin, Paul Oldfield, David Pearsons, Collin Ruffles, Ollie Slessor and Mick Wright for their numerous updates during this period.

### January 2010

Considering the cold weather, I personally would have expected to see some large arrivals of winter birds on the move looking for food. This seemed to be the case for Fieldfares with a flock of over 5000 visiting an Orchard in Newton, near Sudbury from 8-15th at least. According to the RSPB, this is the largest single flock recorded in Suffolk, beating a flock of 4000 which was at Westleton a decade ago! Fieldfares aside though, the month remained fairly static with many of the birds noted being lingerers from December.

The highlight of the month was a drake Green-winged Teal at Minsmere from 2nd-4th and presumably the same bird again on 29th. Reports of a Cattle Egret over the A14 at Haughley on 24th and a Rose-coloured Starling at Lowestoft on 27th were unfortunately not substantiated. Rough-legged Buzzards were noted over Fritton Marshes on 15th and over Breydon Water South Wall on 31st while others were reported at Uggleshall on 4th and Aldringham on 26th. Up to three birds which were present during the month just north of our border in Norfolk were seen coming into roost within the Waveney Forest.

Scarcer species included single Whooper Swans at Dingle Marshes from 1st-23rd and Kirton Creek from 17th-31st; two Tundra Bean Geese at Slaughden on 3rd with possibly the same two on Boyton Marshes on 23rd before a flock of 11 were opposite Kirton Creek on 30th and inland, six were at Lackford on 31st. The long-staying drake Red-crested Pochard alternated between Alton Water and the River Orwell from 1st-17th while a female was on Thorington Street Reservoir from 3rd-11th. Up to seven Great Northern Divers and a Red-necked Grebe continued to commute between the River Orwell and River Stour although the Grebe was only seen off Levington on 9th, 10th, 14th and 21st. A very confident Black-necked Grebe in Levington Marina from 10th-31st was probably the star of the month as it was seen by numerous observers during its stay. Others were in Lowestoft Harbour on 13th and off Fox's Marina, Ipswich from 17-26th. Single Red Kites were over Lowestoft and Carlton Colville on 11th and Kirton Marshes and Kessingland on 30th. A first year Glaucous Gull was first seen at North Warren on 2nd then off Landguard on 3rd before finally settling between Aldeburgh and Slaughden from 9-17th. The long-

staying Shore Lark remained on the beach at Kessingland all month and single Lapland Buntings flew over Dingle Marshes on 1st and Breydon Water South Wall on 31st.

Other notable birds included a flock of 22 Pink-footed Geese over Falkenham Marshes on 24th, over Slaugden on 26th and then over Kirton Marshes on 30th where a further ten were also noted accompanying the Tundra Bean Geese. A peak of 440 White-fronted Geese was on North Warren on 30th and up to six Pale-bellied Brent Geese were on and around the River Deben from 23rd. Smew numbers at Minsmere went from one drake from 1st-16th to two drakes and three redheads from 17-29th then up to three drakes and six redheads on 30th. Elsewhere, a redhead was on Alton Water from 19-26th where it was joined by a second redhead on 26th; a redhead was on Benacre Broad on 27th and another was on Havergate Island on 29th and finally two were at Lackford on 31st. A Black-throated Diver remained in Lowestoft throughout the month while Shag numbers were impressive with up to seven on the River Orwell and up to four in Lowestoft Harbour. Five Common Cranes were reported from Lakenheath Fen on 17th where three were present throughout the month. The wintering Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper were both seen at Melton from 20-25th while a Little Stint was also seen in Seafield Bay on 3rd and two were at Minsmere on 22nd. A peak count of 17 Water Pipits on Southwold Town Marshes on 29th was notable as they remained scarce elsewhere while just one Black Redstart was noted, this being at Bawdsey on 11th. Good numbers of Tree Sparrows were present in West Suffolk with flocks of up to 70 at a time being commonplace with total numbers probably exceeding 300. The Twite flock frequenting the Dingle/Dunwich Beach started off at 41 on 1st but was reduced to 34 by 31st while two were at Falkenham Creek on 30th. The only Snow Bunting flock was on Kessingland beach, starting at 70 on 1st, peaking at 90 on 8th and slipping back down to 71 on 31st while disappointingly, the only sizeable Corn Bunting flock was at Levington, with a peak of 27 on 11th. The turnover of birds within all of these flocks of passerines may have been much higher.

The supporting cast of scarcer species included two Scaups, two Velvet Scoters, eight Goosanders, five Slavonian Grebes, up to seven Hen Harriers, seven Purple Sandpipers, four Spotted Redshanks, two Greenshanks, two Green Sandpipers, up to six Short-eared Owls and at least 13 Firecrests.

## **February 2010**

As always, not the most exciting of months with most of the quality birds being January's leftovers. That said, the cold weather/lack of food on the continent finally moved a few Waxwings which started to arrive in small numbers from 8th. I estimated that approximately 50 birds were noted with the biggest flock being around Ipswich on 27-28th, consisting of 15 birds. Of particular interest, a flock of nine visiting a garden in Hollesley on 15th produced a Norwegian ringed bird. The only County rarities noted were a Rough-legged Buzzard which was reported from Hen Reedbeds on 6th and a Great White Egret at North Warren on 23rd and 24th. Again, up to three Rough-legged Buzzards which were present during the month just north of our border in Norfolk were seen coming into roost within the Waveney Forest.

Scarcer species included an impressive number of Tundra Bean Geese on the Felixstowe Peninsula with presumably the eleven seen last month being at Falkenham on 2nd then Trimley Marshes on 3rd. The number at Trimley then increased to 14 from 5-12th and then to 19 from 13-17th. The last sighting was of 16 on 19th. Elsewhere, the flock of six remained at Lackford from 1st-5th and four were in the Gedgrave/Sudbourne area from 10th-23rd while singles were noted at Benacre Broad from 14-17th and at Lackford from 16th-23rd; the latter associating with a flock of Pink-footed Geese.

The juvenile Whooper Swan was seen on and off at Kirton Creek from 1st-13th incorporating a visit to Loompit Lake on 7th and an adult (presumably the bird from Dingle?) was at Minsmere on 3rd. The Black-necked Grebe remained as confiding as ever in Levington Marina, being last seen on 10th and the Shore Lark was seen on most days through the month at Kessingland. Other lingering birds included both the Little Stint and the Curlew Sandpiper at Melton up to 7th, the Twite flock at Dingle which numbered approximately 40 birds throughout the month and the Snow Bunting flock at Kessingland which had reduced to 50 by 14th and then down to 19 on 27th. A Little Stint was on Havergate Island on 12th and another flock of 16 Snow Buntings were seen at Landguard on 12th. Other species of note included a Ruddy Shelduck at Carlton Colville on 21st, a Spoonbill commuting between North Warren and Hazelwood Marshes from 23rd-27th and a Ring-necked Parakeet which was ringed at Carlton Marshes on 14th.

Numbers of Pink-footed Geese in south and west Suffolk were unusually high with 57 present at Trimley Marshes on 12th then 50 from 13-28th and 57 at Lackford from 16th-23rd. Smaller numbers were dotted around with two at Kirton Creek on 1st with one remaining there up to 5th, ten at Falkenham on 2nd, seven at Trimley Marshes from 3rd-6th (both the Trimley and Falkenham flocks seemed likely to be part of the 50 later seen at Trimley Marshes), nine at Southwold from 9-14th, two at Micklemere on 10th then ten there on 24th and three at Sudbourne on 23rd. White-fronted Geese numbers at North Warren went from 265 on 6th down to 216 on 26th while up to ten Pale-bellied Brent Geese remained within the Rivers Deben and Orwell area up to 15th. Four were also seen on Havergate Island on 15th. Smew numbers increased to up to 16 birds with Minsmere accounting for at least seven from 10-26th.

The supporting cast of more interesting species included one Scaup, seven Goosanders, four Great Northern and three Black-throated Divers, two Slavonian Grebes, three Hen Harriers, 11 Purple Sandpipers, five Spotted Redshanks, two Greenshanks, two Short-eared Owls, 11 Firecrests and five Mealy Redpolls.

## **March 2010**

What a month! Without doubt, probably what will be the bird of the year as well as a first for Suffolk was an absolutely stunning adult male Lesser Kestrel. Initially found at Minsmere during the late afternoon of 28th, it then moved inland and was relocated again an hour later on Westleton Heath where it then remained until 31st, drawing thousands of admirers from across the country. As if that wasn't enough, Suffolk's first spring Pallid Swift had been found a few miles up the coast at Kessingland on 26th where it remained into April – a mighty bird in its own right!



Prior to this extravaganza, Minsmere had already played host to at least three Penduline Tits from 16th with at least four there from 17-19th before incredibly, seven birds were counted on 21st. This number is the highest ever recorded in a single flock within the UK, beating the previous record of six at Rainham Marshes, London in 2005. Two birds were then noted there again on 30th begging the question of how many birds actually passed through Minsmere and other coastal reedbeds during the month? Also of interest, a drake Canvasback or hybrid was on Cavenham Pits from 25-26th.

County rarities were well represented with the highlight being the unprecedented numbers of Alpine Swift sightings. Singles were at Lowestoft and Lakenheath Fen on 23rd before two took up residence at Lowestoft from 27-30th where they were often seen roosting together. Another was at Kessingland from 27-28th and could have been the same bird seen heading south over Lowestoft on 29th and then possibly the same seen at Southwold the same day, remaining until 30th. Only one remained at Lowestoft on 31st before it departed during the morning before presumably being the bird seen over Kessingland later on that day. Singles were also seen over Minsmere on 28th and Woodbridge on 30th. With so many sightings, it's obviously difficult to calculate the exact number of birds involved but I think you can say without doubt that there were a minimum of three birds in Suffolk during the period.

Other County Rarities noted were an adult Black Brant at Slaughden from 27-28th, a Rough-legged Buzzard flying south over Aldeburgh on 21st and single Hooded Crows over Blythburgh on 21st and Lowestoft and Bawdsey on 28th.

Scarcer species noted included a Long-tailed Duck past Landguard on 6th; two Great White Egrets on Orfordness on 14th; three Common Cranes south over Minsmere and Aldeburgh on 27th, two more over Beccles on 1st and Benacre Broad on 2nd and singles over Landguard on 15th and at Campsea Ash on 28th then Butley on 29th; a second calendar Glaucous Gull at Sizewell on 21st, Orfordness on 22nd and Havergate Island on 25th; Waxwings in Gunton, Ipswich and Lowestoft up to 22nd with 20 in Ipswich on 1st and 14 in Lowestoft on 2nd being the highest counts while six remained at Bentley until 31st; the long staying Shore Lark at Kessingland up to 27th when two were reportedly present and a Great Grey Shrike on Westleton Heath from 30th-31st.

Over-wintering birds still present included 49 Pink-footed Geese at Trimley Marshes until 10th then 40+ at North Warren on 11th where 168 White-fronted Geese were still present on 20th but only 64 on 23rd; the Little Stint at Melton up to 7th and 40+ Twite at Dingle/Dunwich on 11th down to 28 on 21st.

As you would hope of March, summer migrants started to appear, including Little Ringed Plover on 10th; Garganey and Black Redstart on 17th; Sand Martin, Wheatear and Chiffchaff on 18th; Swallow on 22nd; Willow Warbler on 24th; Sandwich Tern and House Martin on 27th; Osprey on 28th and Sedge Warbler on 30th.

Finally, other unusual birds included two Smews, one Ruddy Duck, four Great Northern Divers, two Black-throated Divers, seven Slavonian Grebes, five Spoonbills, eight Red Kites, two more Ospreys, five Hen Harriers, four Short-eared Owls and seven Mealy Redpolls.

## Looking Back – April to June 1960 and 1985

*Philip Murphy*

**S**lected highlights from the 1960 and 1985 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period April to June.

### 50 years ago

There were two outstanding rarities in Suffolk during this period. These were a European Roller in Tunstall Forest between Snape and Sudbourne during 6th to 18th June, and a Little Bustard on Orfordness, 20th June. The latter bird was located by Major Bill Payn (Suffolk Bird Report Editor 1961 – 1977) who flushed it at a range of 50 metres; it flew off inland and alighted in a field at Boyton.

Minsmere hosted two “firsts” for Suffolk: a White-spotted Bluethroat, 7th April was our first record of this race, and the county’s first spring Barred Warbler involved a singing individual on 22nd May.

Additional rarities were an Alpine Swift over Breydon, 12th May and a Rose-coloured Starling at Lowestoft 13th to 20th May; this latter bird, an adult, is accepted as being wild but there were some questions as to its ‘credibility’ given its tameness and worn state of plumage. Suffolk birders would have to wait 33 years before the next record of Rose-coloured Starling in the county (Landguard, September 1993).

Notable migrants on Havergate Island in April involved a Kentish Plover, 17th, and Suffolk’s earliest-ever Roseate Tern, 14th. South-easterly winds and overcast skies at night resulted in four Firecrests and four Black Redstarts being located at Minsmere’s sluice bushes, 2nd April.

Scarce migrants in May included the year’s only Hoopoe, at Westleton, 11th, and Eurasian Golden Oriole at Nacton, 21st and 25th. An unexpected record was that of a Great Grey Shrike in the Breck at Tuddenham Heath, 8th May to 6th June; close observation revealed that this bird had a damaged wing so it was presumably unable to emigrate. The total of six Pied Flycatchers on the coast during the period 4th to 14th May induced the comment that these constituted “an exceptional number of records of a species rarely recorded in this county in spring.”

Particularly noteworthy breeding season reports from Minsmere involved five pairs of Whinchats and ten pairs of Red-backed Shrikes. The report says of these shrikes that “prey in one larder included adult and juvenile Blue Tits and Marsh Tits, young Meadow Pipits and a Wren; nestling Stonechats, Whinchats and Whitethroats were also known to have been taken.”

Elsewhere in the breeding season, Havergate Island remained as the only British breeding site of the Pied Avocet with 67 pairs which raised 35 juveniles; this site also held 350 pairs of Sandwich Terns and three pairs of Short-eared Owls. Eurasian Collared Doves bred in the coastal region of Suffolk for the first time in 1960 with three pairs at Felixstowe and at least one Eurasian Wryneck was present at Snape between 7th May and 23rd July but breeding was not proven.

Greater Canada Geese and Grey Wagtails were decidedly scarce in Suffolk in 1960; the only breeding records in the coastal region of the former species were from Lound and Herringfleet, and only three pairs of Grey Wagtails were located in the county.

## 25 years ago

The spring of 1985 witnessed the arrival of some superb rarities in Suffolk. Additions to the county list came in the form of a male Collared Flycatcher at Sparrow's Nest gardens, Lowestoft, 13th & 14th May, and a male Black-headed Wagtail at Landguard, 30th June. Rare waders involved Suffolk's second Stilt Sandpiper at Minsmere, 4th to 10th May, and 11th Broad-billed Sandpiper at Walberswick, 24th May. Equally noteworthy was a European Roller at Westwood Marshes, Walberswick NNR, 28th May. Minsmere hosted two rare terns – a Caspian, 8th June, and a White-winged Black, 31st May to 4th June.

Scarce spring migrants also featured well. The six records of Eurasian Wryneck included early arrivals in April at Walberswick, 5th, and Gunton, 12th. Also early was a male Grey-headed Wagtail with 30 Yellow Wagtails at Alton Water, 7th April. The excellent spring total of 17 Pied Flycatchers during the period 26th April to 18th May included eight at Landguard. Other scarce passerines in May included four Red-spotted Bluethroats, breeding plumage male Lapland Longspurs (Buntings) at Felixstowe Ferry, 10th, and Sizewell, 17th, and male Ortolan Buntings at Sizewell, 5th, and Landguard, 11th & 12th.

The Little Egret was still classified as a national rarity back in 1985, so the presence of a displaying pair on the Scrape at Minsmere, 28th May, was noteworthy. Additional scarce non-passerines included Kentish Plovers at Havergate, 13th May, and Minsmere, 14th June, a Eurasian Dotterel at Southwold, 11th May, a female Red-necked Phalarope at Minsmere, 28th June onwards into July, and an adult Pomarine Skua at Minsmere, 14th May – the latter species is now regularly noted off Suffolk in spring, so it is surprising to read that this bird constitutes only the fifth-ever Suffolk spring record of Pomerine Skua.

Although 1985 was to be a vintage year for breeding birds in Suffolk, the harsh weather of January and February decimated the breeding populations of some resident species. The two species affected most dramatically were Stonechat, with only ten breeding pairs recorded on the coast, and Cetti's Warbler of which only three singing males were located – in the preceding year of 1984 at least 31 singing males had been present in the county.

Particularly noteworthy amongst the rarer species was the pair of Parrot Crossbills present with two juveniles at the 1984 site between the 4th and 21st April; the adult male was still present on 12th May and it seems likely that breeding again took place in this area. There were two successful pairs of Red-backed Shrikes and birds were present at three additional sites. Lakenheath Fen hosted eight pairs of Eurasian Golden Orioles and a pair was present at an additional site in June.

The county's reedbeds supported nine booming male Great Bitterns, one calling Spotted Crake and three singing Savi's Warblers. Of the European Marsh Harrier the report states that it was the "most successful year in modern times for this species" – 44 juveniles fledged from 13 nests, and the outcome of two additional nests not known.

Northern Fulmars bred for the third successive year at Bawdsey Cliffs – five pairs attempted to breed, and four juveniles fledged. Also in the coastal region, about 100 churring Nightjars were located; the report states that "two or three churring males were still present on the Ipswich fringe heaths despite looming development."

The remarkable total of 32 Black Redstarts was located of which ten were at Felixstowe, eight at Ipswich, and seven at Lowestoft. Equally impressive by 21st century standards is the figure of 21 pairs of Whinchats, of which 20 were at Breckland sites, and six pairs were found of our smallest rare breeding species, the Firecrest, at a newly discovered breeding site.

There were some totally unexpected sightings in this period. A Northern Fulmar flew north over Holywells Park, Ipswich, 23rd May, and another headed inland over Oulton Broad, 16th May. At the latter site an immature Long-tailed Duck lingered from 9th January onwards into June by which time it had become quite tame – it would take food from the hand and chase away Mallards!

Inland in early April, single Common Kestrels were observed pursuing and catching bats at West Stow and Timworth – at the latter site the bat was probably a Noctule. At Lackford Lakes on 30th April a Common Sandpiper was watched as it attempted to land on the back of a resting Greater Canada Goose!

## 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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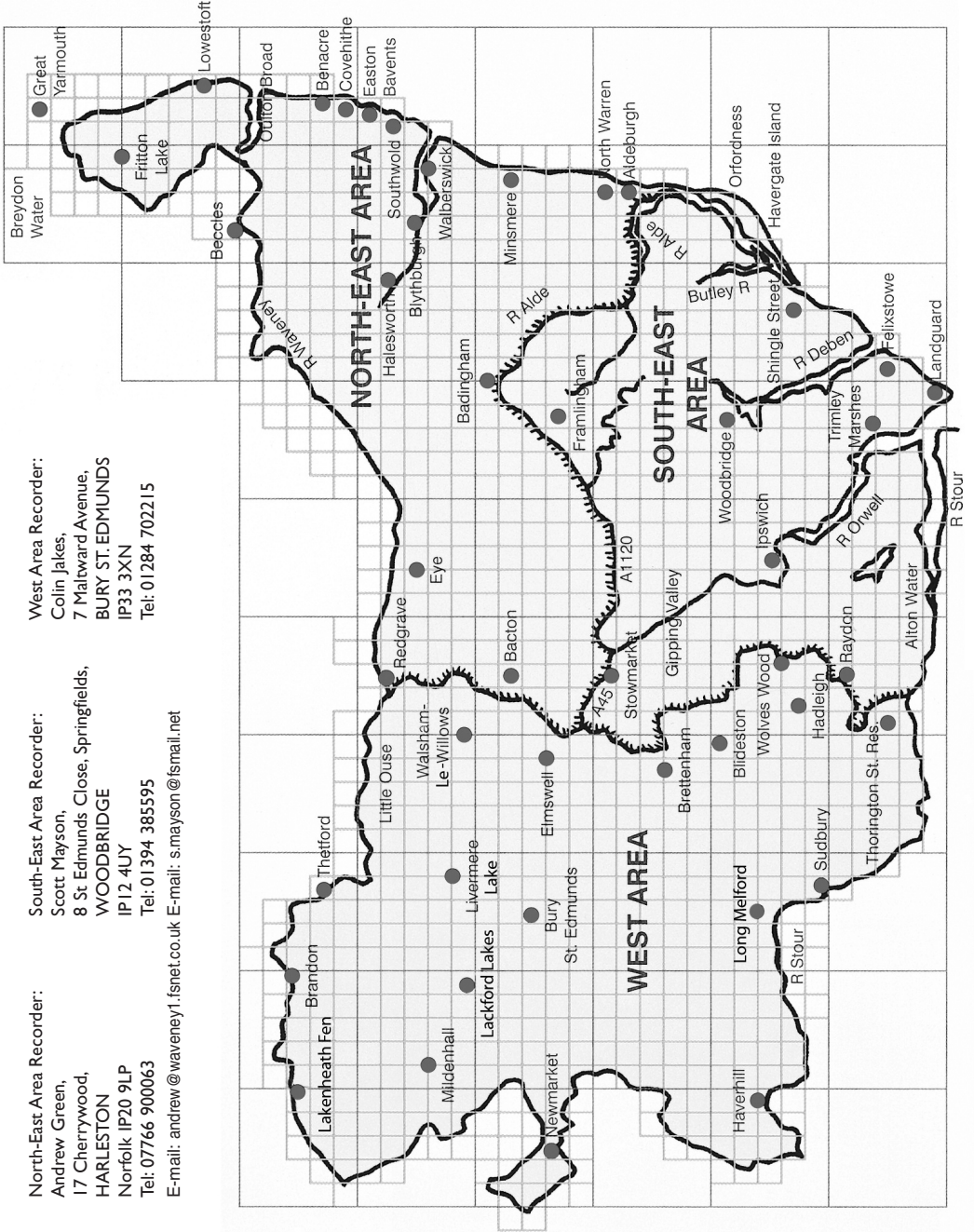
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