

Winter 2017 No.191



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover photograph:

Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapilla*) by John Richardson

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Guest Editorial

Welcome to this edition of The Harrier, 191. I enjoyed putting the last Harrier together and as we're still looking for someone to take on the role, I'm remaining as guest editor for the time being. Many thanks to Alex for assisting in its production with the proof-reading again. I'd also like to thank Lester Bennett of Printing For Pleasure who, over recent years, has printed The Harrier for SOG. He does great work and members have really enjoyed the magazine since we've gone over to using colour photos, enabled by digital printing. In the last edition we promoted the Derek Moore Memorial Lecture and we're glad to say it was well attended, with nearly 150 present to hear Mark Avery talk about conservation issues, particularly driven grouse moors and raptor persecution. The evening also raised £480 towards The Suffolk Broads Appeal to increase the broads around Carlton and Oulton Marsh. There is an article on this super project in this edition.

We're also pleased to see an article on Swifts. But this time of a great project in Germany where a lot of studying has been undertaken to monitor breeding Swifts on a bridge. Monitoring of a different kind, this time by colour-marked birds, is the subject of another article and it

is fascinating to find out the life history and movements of some of the birds once details are relayed. We have another Cormorant article, following on from the one in the last edition plus information from volunteers, both from the pleasures of the role and some rewards afterwards. We had a nice selection of birds this autumn as detailed in the bird review along with a few accounts of some SOG field trips during this period. Last, but not least, another fascinating article on poetry and birds.

Please note that in 2018 SOG will be at a new venue for some of the indoor talks. We will still have two a year in Stowmarket but in Ipswich the talks will now be at the University of Suffolk. Details can be found on the events card. Well done to Adam for sourcing a new venue at such short notice!

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and good birding for 2018.

Gi Grieco



Photo: Ian Goodall

Barn Owl

A Big Thank You



It's been another great year for SOG; the Save our Suffolk Swift (SoSS) project continues to gain momentum and SCBOP continues

to flourish. There has been some great field trips and some super indoor meetings including having Mark Avery as the guest speaker for the first ever Derek Moore Memorial Lecture. The publications the group are involved in and help produce, The Harrier and Suffolk Bird Report, continue to be informative and of a high standard. The SOG council meets at least five times a year, with sub groups, particularly SoSS meeting up to plan and organise the public events during the Summer.

All these activities and events are down to a lot of people volunteering their time and support, from the leaders of trips, speakers at events, project support volunteers, the editors, writers and photographers for the publications, not forgetting the three county recorders and committee of SORC as well as SOG. Last but not least all the members who continue to be involved in the group so a big thank you to all.



Redwing

Photo: Gavin Durrant

The Garrod Award

A reminder that it is still possible to nominate as the closing date is January 15th 2018. This award was created to celebrate the warm welcome Ken & Jean gave to all – but especially younger – newcomers to SOG. In recognition of this support for younger people, the award is made annually and is open to all young Suffolk-based bird or wildlife enthusiast for their involvement or contribution, aged up to 25 years old. This is the third year of the award and previous recipients have been Ben Moyes and Ellie Zantboer.

A nomination form can be entered online on the SOG website - <http://www.sogonline.org.uk/the-garrod-award/> or a paper copy can be obtained by phoning Gi Grieco on 07951 482547. The winner will receive a certificate, a SOG T shirt and a year's membership of SOG. They'll also have the opportunity to have an article published in The Harrier about their wildlife experiences. The award will be presented at the SOG AGM in February.

Colour-marked Birds

More and more species of birds, from across a number of countries, are being colour-marked; traditionally legs held metal rings, but either one or both legs can now also have colour-rings and/or flags. Other forms of marking come in wing-tags, neck bands and bill saddles. The combination of different coloured marking markers, in addition to some having a sequence of letters and numbers, allows birds to be more easily tracked and logged. This unique 'code' allows individual birds to be sighted and monitored over numerous occasions and years.

Often on SOG field trips birds are encountered with these markings, as is detailed in some of the reports with this edition. A SOG member, Andrew Moon, recently sent in some photos of birds, along with details from ringing projects that he had found – listed below. We welcome any further records, preferably accompanied by photos, so please send in your findings for future publications. We know there are some dedicated birders who regularly look out for colour-marked birds – it can be a bit obsessive!

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) - yellow flag **ThU**

Thank you very much for taking the time to report to us details of the sighting of a flagged **Common Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius hiaticula*). Information about this bird and its movement is given below:

Ring no: **Stavanger 8B80285**

Yellow flag **ThU** (Left tarsus metal ring. Left tibia: red colour ring. Right tibia: yellow flag with three black letters ThU engraved).
:LAR:LBM:RAYN(ThU)F

Age/sex/biometric: **1K** (hatched 2016).
Wing 129 mm. Weight: 46,5 g.

Ringing date: **05.09.2016**, 12 hrs.

Ringing place: **Makkevika**
(62°30'N-006°02'E)
Giske, Giske, Møre & Romsdal, Norway.

Remarks: Caught in mist net, at our wader station (Giske Ornithological Station).

Ringer: **Sveinung Remøy/ Sunnmøre Ringing Group.**

Ringed Plover



Photo: Andrew Moon

Finding date: **25.08.2017**

Observed: **Minsmere**
(52°14'34''N-001°37'35''E) Suffolk,
ENGLAND.

Remarks: **Observed by Andrew Moon.**

Distance: **1171 km SSW.** Direction: 195 deg.
Time : **0-11-20** (11 months-20 days after ringing).

Details from The Norwegian Common Ringed Plover-project



Photo: Andrew Moon

Twite

Twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*) – various birds, only one of the seven Autumn birds seen at Dunwich before.

Ring number: S109687 **Left:** O/M **Right:** R/G **Date:** 29/01/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ring site: Booth Wood Res, W. Yorks, 28/08/2016 **Comment:** Ringed as adult

Ring number: S109815 **Left:** O/M **Right:** W/N **Date:** 29/01/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ring site: Booth Wood Res, W. Yorks, 09/09/2016; 31/03/2017 **Comment:** Ringed as juvenile

Ring number: S109611 **Left:** C/M **Right:** N/P **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ringed: Dove Holes, Derbyshire, 10/04/2016 **Comment:** Ringed as 2nd year male

Ring number: S109667 **Left:** C/M **Right:** P/O **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ringed: Dove Holes, Derbyshire, 06/07/2016 **Comment:** First year bird. Also at Dunwich 25/10/2017

Ring number: S109831 **Left:** C/M **Right:** C/N **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ringed: Dove Holes, Derbyshire, 13/09/2016 **Comment:** First year bird

Ring number: ? **Left:** N/M **Right:** O/Y **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ring number: Z380602 **Left:** B/M **Right:** O/G **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ringed: Booth Wood Res, W. Yorks, 10/10/2014; 02/05/2015 **Comment:** Ringed as adult

Ring number: Z380614 **Left:** B/M **Right:** N/W **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ringed: Booth Wood Res, W. Yorks, 10/10/2014; 27/06/2016 **Comment:** Ringed as adult

Ring number: S109804 **Left:** O/M **Right:** N/R **Date:** 02/11/2017 **Location:** Dunwich Pools, Suffolk

Ringed: Booth Wood Res, W. Yorks, 09/09/2016; 31/03/2017 **Comment:** Ringed as adult

Details from the Pennine Twite Project

Being a Barn Owl Monitor



About seven years ago whilst on a SOG field trip to Orfordness I was asked by Steve Piotrowski whether I was prepared to become an Area Co-ordinator for the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. Forgetting the golden rule that it is easier to say no and then change your mind I said yes! A decision I have never regretted.

I am responsible for overseeing the other local monitors in my area together with 184 boxes in the south-east of Suffolk. Of those, I monitor around 30 boxes and the remaining boxes I allocate to the other very keen monitors.

Once I had attended my day's training course including compulsory ladder training and I understood the legal obligations, off I set to do my monitoring. Alas disappointment, as I quickly learnt that not every box had a breeding pair of owls in it, in fact the majority didn't. In 2017, 33 of the 184 boxes had signs of Barn Owl activity in, so there is still potential for a lot of additional new Barn Owl chicks for the county of Suffolk.

This article is my brief account of the joys and disappointments I have experienced in being a monitor.

My first ever visit, box empty. The 2nd visit, a box full of sticks - Jackdaw presence. The 3rd visit, two white eggs - Stock Dove presence. Then on my 7th visit, "wow" four fluffy barn owl chicks staring back at me. Amazing - from that point forward I was hooked and this is why I am glad I said yes, those small heart-shaped faces were a sensational moment!

Some of my other memorable moments include:

- Inspecting a box in a churchyard with a ladder on my roof rack when suddenly the vicar arrived on the scene. Initially I think that she thought we were pinching the lead. Instead she was treated to the sight of four Barn Owls ready to fledge.
- The 'Krypton Factor' type challenge that ended in a field where unfriendly bulls were normally present. Ah ha they are not there. Oh no! Yes they are and sitting right under the box! Two Barn Owl chicks were present in that box.
- Being present when Barn Owl chicks were ringed in Levington to find one breeding the following year in Alderton and to learn that one of them was successfully breeding in Cornwall, amazing.
- Finding Barn Owls in a primary school box and being asked to dissect pellets for the school pupils.
- The excitement of box owners when you inform them that they have Barn Owl chicks in their box, priceless.
- The box owner who wasn't keen on me disturbing his box, so we sat in his hide for sometime and watched the male dropping voles into the box, four Barn Owl chicks fledged from this box.

Sadly not all fledged birds make it and some are found deceased within one kilometre of where they were fed and nurtured by their parents.

Other occupants that I have found in the boxes include Tawny and Little Owl, Kestrel, Stock Dove and Jackdaw. One of the less pleasant activities of being a monitor is

cleaning out old Jackdaw nest material, it is not pleasant! So what else have I come across in these boxes, a Hornets nest (dangerous), a Grey Squirrel dray and the time I almost fell off the ladder when a cat jumped out of the box.

But I love it! And so do the monitors who continually support me in the south-east area of Suffolk and my thanks do, of course, go out to each and every one of them.

It is a privilege to be part of the project, if you are interested in becoming a monitor please contact kpiotrowski@btinternet.com.

Photo: Dave Pearsons



Barn Owl chicks

Arndt H. J. Wellbrock & Klaudia Witte

Breeding in a bridge – insights into the life of a Swift colony in Germany

In 2007, we started the Common Swift Project at the Institute of Biology at the University of Siegen in Germany. We are investigating Common Swifts breeding inside a concrete road bridge about 60 kilometres east of Cologne. This bridge called “Talbrücke Ronnewinkel” is spanning the Bigge Reservoir near the city of Olpe (Sauerland, south-east North Rhine-Westphalia). It is 19 m in height and is 372 m long. Swifts

breed within hollow chambers beneath the carriageway which they enter by passing through ventilation holes in the floor (11 cm in diameter, 20 to 40 cm long). Each chamber is about 4.5 m wide, 2.5 m high and 45m long. There are eight chambers in line underneath both lanes with 271 ventilation holes in total. Nests are built on the bare concrete up to one metre distant from these holes. In the 2017 breeding season, 55 pairs nested in the bridge using natural or artificial nests made from cork. Utilising entrances for bridge maintenance work, the entire colony inside the chambers is easily accessible for researchers, and so the bridge provides a unique opportunity to study Swifts as, so to speak, ‘ground-nesting’ birds.

Within the Common Swift Project, we aim to identify factors influencing life-history strategies in Swifts. We focus mainly on three topics: 1) breeding success and chick development, 2) daily torpor in cold or rainy periods and 3) individual migration

Photo: Klaudia Witte



Bridge Ronnewinkel



Swift at nest with antenna

Photo: Arndt Wellbrock

routes and wintering areas. To record nest attendance, incubation behaviour and provisioning during the nestling phase, adults have a RFID tag glued on an aluminium ring. This tag is read every time when a bird passes a ring antenna, which is either at the ventilation hole or around the nest. We also use infrared cameras at nests which are occupied by untagged birds. Nests are monitored for clutch size and number of hatchlings and fledglings. We weigh each chick shortly after hatching and then at least weekly thereafter. Additionally, we measure wing length to document their development. Chicks and adults are sexed in our lab by using DNA isolated from buccal swabs.

Furthermore, we record nest temperature with iButtons™ fixed inside the nest. A longer lasting decrease in nest temperature during the night, although adults stay at

the nest to rest, gives an indication for the occurrence of daily torpor. Within this physiological state, the inner core body temperature is actively and reversibly downregulated below normal body temperature, and the metabolic rate is lowered. Additionally, we measure continuously the oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide production of resting birds using a respirometer. This shows us whether the metabolic rate is really downregulated during a decrease in nest temperature, and we can calculate how much energy a Swift can save during daily torpor compared to a 'normal' resting bird in the nest.

Direct tracking of Common Swifts during the non-breeding season is not easy as Swifts spend this time, up to ten months, non-stop on the wing. Since 2012, each year we fit ten adult Swifts with light-level geolocators

at the end of the breeding season. These devices record periodically ambient light level (solar irradiance) at each position of the bird. After the geolocator birds have returned to the colony in the subsequent year, the devices are removed from birds, and data can be downloaded. Using the length of light and dark periods, we can reconstruct the length of day and night and, thereby, the position of the bird throughout the non-breeding season (except for the period when the day is about the same length everywhere on earth, i.e. autumnal and vernal equinox). So far, we've analysed 20 light data sets from 15 individuals (nine females and six males) including five repeated tracks and tracks of a breeding pair.

Tracks of these individuals showed that both autumn and spring migrations were characterized by extensive detours through West Africa. Autumn migration lasted longer than spring migration due to more stationary periods. All birds used several wintering areas covering West, Central, South-east and/or South Africa, which was not known before from recoveries of identification rings of Swifts breeding in Germany. Breeding partners migrated separately and used different parts of Africa during overwintering. We found that repeatedly tracked Swifts showed consistent and individual-specific migration behaviour in successive years by using same migration routes and wintering areas. Different individuals, however, varied in migration routes, timing of

migration and wintering areas. This indicates that individuals seem to be faithful to migration routes and wintering areas but between-individual variation reveals a high degree of plasticity in migration pattern. These results were recently published as an Open Access article in the Journal of Avian Biology (Volume 48, June 2017, pages 897-903, doi 10.1111/jav.01251).

In 2016, we equipped adult Swifts with so-called multi-sensor loggers developed by the Swiss Ornithological Institute in Sempach. These loggers record not only light intensity but also air temperature, air pressure, earth's magnet field and acceleration. By these measurements, we can reconstruct for instance, flight height and flight activity of the birds during their journey through Africa. Together with environmental data, this will help to better understand the diverse migration pattern of our Swifts. Moreover, we will investigate the migration behaviour of five other breeding colonies all over Germany to see whether there are colony-specific wintering areas or migration routes.

Photo: Amdt Wellbrock



Swift with geolocator

The Boston Belle Boat-trip

As a way of saying thank you for volunteering, the RSPB East invites its helpers to attend a variety of events. I was delighted to hear that there was still space on their



Photo: Eddie Bathgate

Lincolnshire trip out into The Wash for an autumnal waderfest.

Four of us SOG Turtle Dove volunteers headed up early, stopping off initially on the way at SWT Micklemere for an hour to enjoy the Lapwing flock, then onto Gedney Drove End on the south side of The Wash. We set our scopes up on the sea wall and enjoyed the birds and the vista of mud flats, tidal channels and coastal lagoons. Unfortunately the tide was right out, so bird life was distant but we were soon to be on board the Boston Belle for the afternoon, surely one of the best ways of viewing the UK's most important wintering wader site. WeBS data shows that over 345,000 birds, mainly waders & wildfowl, overwinter on The Wash. This far outnumbers the 189,000 birds on the Ribble Estuary, the second most important area, with Morecambe Bay being the third most important site in Britain.

With a Buzzard and Peregrine flying overhead we met 30 other volunteers from a variety of RSPB projects on board the boat. I chatted to local RSPB group leaders and both Little Tern and Stone-curlew helpers. It was a fun crowd with plenty of room to both birdwatch and socialise. Wildlife sightings

were called out by all and the boats tannoy system announced the bird species, with directions to help everybody see everything. Heading down river Kingfishers and Grey Wagtails were seen and once we were past the old industrial wharf, with its ironic 'Boston-Gateway to Europe' sign, the mudflats opened up and the waderfest began. In all 65 species were sighted during the trip, not an enormous total but the numbers of birds seen were vast. We saw huge flocks of Dunlin, Oystercatchers and Black-tailed Godwits. Curlew Sandpipers and Bar-tailed Godwits were in amongst them for comparison. Distant clouds of Knot swirled like will o' the wisp over The Wash, Common Seals were on the mud banks and Little Egrets in the channels. Sparrowhawks were seen hunting along the sea wall and two Marsh Harriers flew in off the sea, while Buzzards were up displaying over the farmland too.

With hot drinks available, a superb buffet lunch and licensed bar, The Boston Belle was a superb venue and a wonderful way for the RSPB to show its thanks to those who help. I would highly recommend The Boston Belle as a day trip and Gedney too as a vantage point, especially if the tide is in.



Photo: Steve Aylward

Matt Gaw

Carlton Marshes

Carlton Marshes is at the heart of Suffolk Wildlife Trust's vision to create 1,000 acres of wildness at the southern gateway to the Broads National Park. Matt Gaw visits to learn about how the changes will benefit people and wildlife.

The truck pitches and rolls like a boat on high seas as Matt Gooch, Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Broads Warden, drives across sedge and tussocks of rough grass. He slows and points. More Snipe than I have ever seen bounce into the air with startled bleats: smudges of mottled brown against a gin-clear sky. Lapwing follow, wavering up before flopping down like helicoptering sycamore seeds.

Since this small, shallow pool at Carlton Marshes was clawed out of the mud a few years ago, 191 bird species have been spotted rootling in its murky waters. Purple

Heron, Black-tailed Godwit, Great White Egret, Avocet, Glossy Ibis, Shorelark, Red-throated Diver and Spoonbill, have all been recorded here. Just two miles from the heaving North Sea, the whole reserve is located on a natural flyway, a stopping point for the salt-soaked and the exhausted; the wing-sore and hungry.

For Matt this pool, or scrape, is a small example of how quick water is to rewind. He turns the truck's engine off and passes me binoculars. "Just imagine," he says, "what it's going to be like when this place is surrounded by even more wetland, when there are dozens of scrapes like this across 1,000 acres, rather than two or three across 400."

It's an inspiring thought. For the past 18 months Suffolk Wildlife Trust has been campaigning hard to buy a 186 acre parcel

of land on the western shoulder of Carlton Marshes and another 194 acres to the east and south. A public appeal, backed by Sir David Attenborough, has already raised more than £800,000 of the £1million needed towards the purchase, which will not only extend Carlton but link it to existing reserves at Castle Marshes and Oulton. It is an ambitious plan. The biggest land purchase attempted in the Trust's 55-year history: a vision to reconnect horizons but also to heal a landscape that has been fragmented by agriculture and fractured by the plough.

Within view of the pool where we are sitting is the looming flood defence that separates the reserve-proper from one of the new pieces of land known as Peto's Marsh. Last October I had stood on it, again with Matt,

trying to get a sense of how this rough field – still full of withered peas left to rot in the ground – could become a haven for wildlife. A year later and the land has changed almost beyond recognition.

The crops and tracks of agriculture have been smoothed away by natural forces. Reed and rough grassland are taking over and birds have already moved in.

Surveys carried out for the Heritage Lottery Fund, who are supporting the Trust's vision, have seen an increase in breeding birds on the land (including red list species) while the number of wintering birds has also gone up. During one count more than 150 Snipe were found, one of the highest recorded in East Anglia and a figure that Matt says has almost doubled in recent months.



Photo: John Ferguson

Matt Gooch

While the agricultural processes may currently have stopped and given nature a foothold, drainage still continues. But under the Trust's ownerships the water levels will be raised. Wet features – more scrapes – will be added, creating invertebrate-rich pools and muddy edges that prove so attractive to wading birds. A giant reedbed, potentially the biggest in the Broads, will also be nurtured, attracting species such as Common Crane. In fact, knowledge gained from sites such as RSPB Lakenheath, has allowed the reedbed to be almost tailor-made for this long-necked wader: the size of pool for landings, the level of reed cover, the depth of water have all been carefully measured. It is, as Matt says, "a mathematical formula for crane."

Yet perhaps we shouldn't get ahead of ourselves. After all, the work to restore marshes and dykes – if everything goes the Trust's way – won't be completed until 2022. The reedbed might not reach maturity for up to 10 years after that.

Matt grins at my caution and crunches the truck back into gear. He explains, the very process of restoring the new land (which hopefully will start early in 2019) will bring even more birds onto the reserve.

"I think the transition itself will prove to be attractive to wildlife. It's likely that the open water and mud will bring in big assemblages of wintering waders and wildfowl. I wouldn't be surprised if we see up to 2,000 and 3,000 Wigeon and Teal. It will be a multiplication

of what we have seen on the small scrape we just left. We'll probably see more birds like Spoonbills, Pink-footed Geese, Wigeon, Teal and Green Sandpiper. Other species like Black-winged Stilts could also move in, maybe they'll even breed."

There are other advantages to the Trust's vision. As Matt himself is quick to point out, this ambition for Carlton Marshes is not just for the benefit of flora and fauna. In a sense this is a rewilding for people too. He has grown up around here, has an almost tangible connection to the land, and knows the impact a 1,000 acre nature reserve could have on Lowestoft. It will be a soothing wedge of wildness for Suffolk's second biggest town.

"We want to improve access and make sure even more people can come and enjoy the reserve," Matt says. "We want to make sure that from the earliest stages; people feel involved and connected to the land. That's also one of the reasons we'll be putting in bird hides early on as it's likely there will be quite a lot of bird movement in and out; especially when the diggers aren't actually working on the site. Even in the development phase, there'll be lots to look at..."

Matt breaks off mid-sentence and puts his foot on the brake. We watch a marsh harrier drift past, wings held in a trembling V. He grins at me.

"And there's already quite a lot to look at now."

Following initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Suffolk Wildlife Trust now has the unprecedented opportunity to buy land flanking the existing nature reserve at Carlton and Oulton Marshes to form 1,000 acres of wildness in the Broads National Park. It is hoped the site will ultimately become the Suffolk Broads National Nature Reserve.

For details on how to donate to help create the Suffolk Broads nature reserve visit www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org



Licensed to kill or scare? Can anglers learn to live with cormorants?

Two subspecies of Great Cormorant occur in Europe: the 'Atlantic' subspecies *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo* and the 'Continental' subspecies *P.c. sinensis*. The Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo* is essentially a coastal and cliff dwelling species breeding around the North Atlantic coasts of northern France, Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Norway and the Kola peninsula in north west Russia across the Atlantic to Greenland and eastern North America while inland breeding populations are of the subspecies *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*.

In Britain and throughout Europe Cormorants are perceived as a threat to fish farms and recreational fisheries. Historically Cormorants in Britain were seen as a threat to fish ponds maintained by monasteries and other landowners. The effects of persecution were compounded by reduced breeding success (in the 1950-60s) as a result of pesticide pollution. The expansion of the range of the sub-species *P. c. sinensis* was low during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most likely a combination of habitat loss and continued persecution. France had fewer than 60 pairs at the turn of the nineteenth century (Marion 1991).

Increased protection

Growing concerns for these relatively small populations during the twentieth century led to protective legislation being introduced, first in the Netherlands (1965) and Denmark (1971), and then widely throughout Europe under Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive (1979). Cormorants were afforded protection in the UK by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA) and the EU Birds Directive, making it illegal to kill them or to take or

destroy their eggs and nests (when in use or being built).

With increased protection through legislation and cleaner fresh water habitats the numbers of inland breeding Cormorants in Europe has increased and allowed the continental subspecies *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* to extend its wintering range into Britain & Ireland prompting increasing claims of damage to fisheries. As will be discussed, claims that inland breeding Cormorants and large winter roosts are driven by an increase in populations of a 'non-native' invasive species must also be addressed before we can engage in productive discussions with angling clubs and fishery owners. The increased breeding success of the continental subspecies has led to claims by influential angling writers, with the enthusiastic support of the angling press, that Britain is being invaded by a non-native invader that threatens the ecology of our freshwater habitats. The colonisation of inland waters by both subspecies has undoubtedly been aided by the increase in well stocked fishing lakes and reservoirs, with illegal shooting fuelling the ongoing controversy until the government authorised the legal shooting of Cormorants with a nationally limited number of licences issued first by English Nature and now by its successor Natural England.

The inland Cormorant

Genetic markers of both subspecies are found in inland colonies in the UK (Winney, B, J et al. 2001) with further evidence of the two subspecies interbreeding (Goostrey et al.1998, Newson 2000), while birds of the *P. c. sinensis* type were first recorded at



Cormorant

Abberton in 1981, it is noteworthy that they were soon joined by resident *P. c. carbo*. While the expansion of inland breeding colonies in Britain is probably due in part to the spread of *P.c. sinensis*, proponents of scare stories about invasive continental Cormorants should note that *P.c. carbo* remains the predominant subspecies in England and Wales, although it is interesting to consider the extent to which our historic inland colonies may have included examples of the continental subspecies. Whatever their origins, inland colonies of breeding and wintering Cormorants have a long history in Britain.

An inland colony on Loch Moan in Ayrshire existed until the 1890s, until the colony was finally extirpated by intense persecution (approx. a thousand eggs were destroyed in 1867). In Suffolk, there was a famous colony in the heronry at Fritton Decoy near Herringfleet with 50-60 nests recorded in 1825 (Holloway, S. 1996). The inland colony at Bird Rock is more than 6km from the sea, near Towyn, Merioneth and has a long history and survives to this day. The historical records of inland breeding colonies in the nineteenth century (Holloway, S. 1996) suggest that in the absence of persecution inland Cormorant colonies are part of our wildlife heritage.

Shoot to kill or simply scare?

Each year, Natural England currently set a maximum upper limit on the number of birds that may be killed under licence. A modelling approach is used to predict the impact of different licensed shooting levels and this (along with other factors) informs Natural England's decision. Part of the decision-making process has involved setting a baseline reference level for the Cormorant population around which NE aim to manage the population. For this purpose, NE currently uses a national reference level set at the average English winter Cormorant population size. They then aim to adjust the level of annual licensing so that the population maintains a five-year average equal to or greater than this reference level. In addition to the national reference level, NE also take account of local sources of information on bird populations (e.g. at a catchment or county level) in reaching licensing decisions. In this way, NE can guard against the risk of particularly high levels of shooting in particular regions.

Serious damage is most likely to occur at still waters with high densities of fish. However, advice provided by conservation and angling interests (2006) acknowledges that while Cormorants can cause serious economic damage to a fishery they are more likely to respond to fish numbers than to actually limit them! So, what can be done to reduce those impacts?

Natural England's stated position is that the aim of the majority of licences is to reinforce scaring, and, hence, to provide part of a suite of measures that will effectively deter Cormorants. There will be variations in the effectiveness depending upon site specifics, and the other measures that are being used in conjunction with licensed shooting. It is a requirement of any licence application that the applicant should demonstrate that a range of alternative methods to reduce

the impacts of predation have been trialled, including in addition to scaring, fish refuges and stocking with larger fish.

It remains a requirement under the existing legislation that fisheries have to demonstrate that serious damage is occurring (or there is a reasonable expectation that this will occur) before a licence can be issued to kill protected birds. However, simply shooting to kill, removing Cormorants without reducing the attractiveness of a water body to the birds is a never-ending task. Shooting a few Cormorants will create a 'vacuum' for other birds to move into, killing Cormorants on a large scale, even if it were possible, does not necessarily reduce predation. During the winter 1996/97, over 6,000 birds were shot in Bavaria, but the average winter population was not reduced; culling the birds simply created a space that others moved into (Keller, T., et al 1998).

A study undertaken by CSL involved a large-scale field experiment at 13 sites across England and Wales to assess if shooting could be used to reduce numbers of Cormorants present at sites and, in particular, if shooting to kill enhanced the scaring effect of shooting with blanks. The study demonstrated that both shooting to scare and shooting to kill (as an aid to scaring) could reduce the number of birds visiting a fishery for a 'post-treatment' period with an observed 50% mean reduction in the number of birds. The reduction was more pronounced at smaller sites. The results did not, however, show a statistically significant difference between the effects of lethal and non-lethal shooting. It was therefore not possible to prove or disprove the hypothesis that killing enhances the scaring effect of shooting e.g. blank cartridges.

In practice, shooting (and other deterrents) are likely to need repeating over longer

time periods to provide fisheries with adequate protection. As part of the earlier Defra-funded R&D on management measures (McKay et al., 1999) a separate questionnaire survey was also conducted with relevant experts in a number of European countries. This confirmed that efforts to control Cormorant predation at fisheries by shooting had been attempted in most countries. However, the effectiveness of shooting in reducing the number of fish-eating birds was reported to be equivocal for a range of fishery types. In some countries using a shotgun to scare Cormorants was believed to be ineffective without killing some birds, while in others no difference between lethal and non-lethal shooting was reportedly apparent. It is notable that responses also indicated that human disturbance appeared to be the most consistently effective deterrent. Preliminary results on the use of fish refuges (McKay et al 1999 -2003) were encouraging with research providing evidence that refuges can protect fish and reduce the foraging efficiency of Cormorants. It is suggested that refuges may be particularly suitable for smaller still-water fisheries (Russell, et al. 2003).

An article in BBC Wildlife magazine (Niemann, D., April 2017) reports that the Angling Trust have engaged positively with angling clubs to demonstrate that 'manikins' that looked like angry bailiffs and laser pens that scare Cormorants but not harm them can be a successful alternative to killing the birds. However, identifying the most appropriate deterrents or other mitigation techniques will likely require careful consideration on a site-by-site basis (DEFRA 2013). Some techniques, such as fish refuges, seek to make predation more difficult, while others (scaring) work by persuading fish-eating birds to leave a particular feeding site and move elsewhere.

The birds' 'willingness' to move will depend on how effective mitigation measures are at reducing predation, or in persuading the birds to leave a site and, also, on the relative attractiveness of alternative feeding/breeding sites in the area. Early morning bird counts at Landguard Bird Observatory suggest that the majority of birds venture well beyond the well-stocked fishery at Loompit Lake to feed on the Orwell and Stour estuaries or out to sea and the Cork Sands where if tides are low, birds can be counted sitting on the exposed sandbanks. (Odin, N 2017).

Summary

The UK holds internationally important numbers of wintering Cormorant and 13 per cent of the world population. This means that anglers have a significant responsibility to ensure that any response is measured and well informed. It is important to note at this point that coastal Cormorants have always ventured inland but with the increased interest in recreational angling the number of artificially stocked 'closed' waters have increased dramatically and not surprisingly Cormorants have taken advantage of this artificially maintained resource. It is reasonable to speculate that this has enabled the extension of inland breeding continental Cormorants but it must be remembered that inland colonies also include winter roosts made up of both inland and coastal breeders and that the UK holds internationally important numbers of wintering Cormorant.

Anglers have traditionally promoted their sport as environment focused and anglers as sympathetic observers of wildlife. However, with the development of commercially motivated fisheries angler's expectations may now depend more on guaranteed catches of stocked specimen fish than to compete with predators and outwit a truly wild fish. Some fishery owners report that

their customers fish for much shorter periods – reflecting wider changes in society – hence immediate success is the prime objective of today’s contemplative angler. Is the patient angler becoming increasingly impatient and only too willing to believe the protests of the anti-predator lobby rather than consider the possibility that the presence of inland Cormorants might be a response to healthy fish stocks?

Historical records suggest that inland Cormorant colonies are a part of our

countryside. Are anglers willing to accept a wilder environment in which to indulge their sport? If this article achieves anything it is hoped that it will help to develop a dialogue between anglers and other groups with an interest in protecting and enjoying our countryside and its wildlife.



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Autumn Bird Review

September 2017

Weather:-

September was a mixed month where 22 days had some rain; of which eight days had 3mm or more and the highest was 5mm on the 8th, 12th, 13th & 16th. The month's high temperature was seasonal average of 18C the highest day's temperature was 21C on the 28th. The average low was 14C and lowest night temperature for the month was 4C on the 15th & 16th.

Birds:-

The two **Garganey** still continued to be seen into September; reported on the 1st and 4th at Hollesley RSPB, a single reported from Carlton Marshes on the 3rd and another from Minsmere on the 19th.

A single **Great Northern Diver** off Slaughden on the 28th. **Spoonbills** highest count on Havergate was 28 on the 2nd & 3rd and were regularly reported from Hazelwood with 20 on the 1st, 7 on the 3rd, 13 on the 9th, 8 on the 11th, with smaller counts reported during the month. A few **Great White Egrets** reported during September.



Great White Egret

Photo: Andrew Moon

A few **Osprey** sightings at the start of the month from Hazelwood Marsh, Havergate Island, The Alde 2 on the 3rd, at Lakenheath RSPB and at Shingle Street. On the Stour

Estuary around the Stutton Ness area two on the 5th and up to 3 from the 6th to 10th with one on the Blyth from the 7th to 9th.

Several **Bonxies** still being reported from the Suffolk Coast during September including one over Hollesley RSPB on the 23rd, one north at Minsmere on the 27th and 28th, one south off Covehithe on the 29th and one past Southwold on the 30th. The highest count of **Arctic Skuas** was at Slaughden on the 3rd. Big gulls started to re-appear again this month, with **Caspian Gull** and **Yellow-legged Gulls** at their usual hot spots. Still good numbers of **Little Gulls** still being reported in the county all month; mostly reported from Sizewell and Minsmere area. A few **Arctic Terns** seen going south and a little **Black Tern** flurry; sightings from Sizewell on the 3rd, five at Minsmere on the 4th and seven past LBO on the 4th, one at Stutton Ness on the 25th and one at Lackford on the 25th & 26th.

Some good passerine migrants during the month, with far too many to list all the dates and sites so here is a taste: - **Tree Pipits, Ring Ouzels, Wheatears Redstarts, Whinchats, Firecrests, Snow Bunting and Bramblings**. Also a few **Short-eared Owls** along the coast, with three at Shingle Street on the 24th.

Scarcer September Sightings:-

A couple of early **Pink-footed Geese** records, with six at Trimley on the 12th and 11 at Hazelwood on the 16th. At Hollesley on the 1st, 5 cracking **Ruddy Shelducks** turned up on the scrape and remained till the 4th. Although these are not countable on the British List they are great to see when they appear occasionally.

At Slaughden on the 18th a **Black-throated Diver** was sighted. On the 12th a **Sooty Shearwater** past Corton, Lowestoft. From Dunwich on the 5th looking north from cliffs

a **Storm Petrel** was observed at 10.20hrs. For a few days mid-month there was a nice bit of **Long-tailed Skua** movement; at LBO one loafing at sea on the 13th, one at Benacre on the 14th, five at Southwold on the 14th, three at Slaughden on the 14th, one Southwold on the 17th and one at Thorpeness on the 18th. An **Iceland Gull** in off at Shingle Street on the 14th and one south at Bawdsey Manor on the 17th.

A juvenile **Honey Buzzard** over Oulton Marshes at 07.17hrs and 08.25hrs on the 12th, one south-west over Dales Road, Ipswich on the 14th, two south at Aldeburgh on the 24th.

At Trimley Marshes on the 2nd a **Pectoral Sandpiper** was seen on the winter flood and it remained faithful to the site until the 12th. On the 25th a juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** was seen on the Konik Field and then flew towards the scrape. Presumably the same bird re-appeared on the 27th and 28th. At Felixstowe Ferry a juvenile **Dotterel** was found in fields just past the first stile at 13:00hrs along with **Golden Plovers** - unfortunately in got flushed at 13:15hrs. It was a fantastic September for **Little Stints**; they showed up and down the coast all month, the highest count being eight at Minsmere on the 27th. At Covehithe from the 20th to the 23rd between two and three **Little Stints** were showing on occasions down to



Little Stint

Photo: Eddie Marsh

three feet!! They were amazing; I had never experienced them performing that well in the UK. At the same site a **Red-necked Phalarope** was equally as obliging.

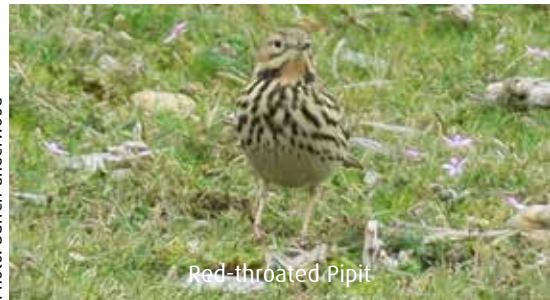
Photo: Andrew Moon



Red-necked Phalarope

The first real twitchable **Red-throated Pipit** for Suffolk was found on Landguard Common at 09.45hrs on the 27th by Will Brame, Steve Piotrowski, Nigel Odin and Ernie Lucking, what a find boys!! The majority of Suffolk's

Photo: Darren Underwood



Red-throated Pipit

birders needed this for their county list; I think there has only been three accepted records for Suffolk - 15th May 1982 Loompit Lake, 11th October 1992 Bawdsey/Shingle St and 30th September 2000 Bawdsey/Shingle St which was trapped & ringed. This latest individual was a real stayer and a smart bird, it was still showing some brick red in the throat and a good set of braces. It entertained birders and photographers till the 30th, showing very well every day throughout its stay. I must say I was very lucky to see it in my dinner break, thanks to Stuart Read for letting me view it twice through his scope, I was flying to USA

next day, phew, a close call! On the 28th a **Richard's Pipit** was found on Orfordness.

A great bird was found at Minsmere on the 9th in the form of a first-winter **Citrine Wagtail**. It remained till the 16th, but could be very elusive and mobile, but if lucky, often showed very well at some point during its stay. A **Wryneck** was found at Aldeburgh Town Marshes on the 4th. On the 9th another confiding bird at Benacre until the 12th. Also on the 12th one found at Shingle Street and remained till the 18th, this bird was really elusive and only gave good views when sitting on the concrete posts protruding from reeds.



Wryneck

A number of **Yellow-browed Warblers** from a number of sites including LBO, Felixstowe Manor Road car park, Sparrows Nest, Corton disused railway, Sizewell "A", Thorpeness Common, Orfordness, Thorpeness Common and allotments and Minsmere Sluice Bushes.

A **Radde's Warbler** was trapped on Orfordness on the 27th and another seen in sea buckthorn at East Lane on the 29th.

On Orfordness on the 19th a nice first-winter **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was trapped and ringed. At Felixstowe Ferry a first-winter male **Red backed Shrike** was found along the river wall mid-afternoon on the 27th.

At Long Melford on the 15th two **Ravens** were seen, this species is becoming a regular sighting throughout Suffolk. At

LBO on the 2nd an **Ortolan Bunting** was seen to fly from within the Observatory at 09:30hrs before alighting briefly on the common near the sea-watching hide, it then moved on with a Linnet flock and was not seen again. Then on the 5th another or the same bird was flushed from behind the Obs at 07:20hrs, it appeared to fly over the museum, but despite lots of searching the bird was not relocated. One or Two Bird Theory!!!

October 2017

Weather:-

October was an exceptionally dry month with 22 days with no rainfall; the highest rainfall was on the 20th with 6mm. The temperature high average was 16C with the highest day temperature being 22C on the 16th. The average low was 9C with lowest night temperature for the month being 3C on the 31st. Therefore October was a very pleasant month.

Birds:-

The first two **Whooper Swans** of the winter were seen flying south past the LBO Observatory on the 4th, then two south off Southwold on the 24th and nine in off then flew on to Island Mere, Minsmere on the 29th. At LBO, five **Goosander** north on the 16th. A single **Great Northern Diver** off Slaughden on the 28th, one past Gunton on the 30th and one past Southwold. **Red-necked Grebes** seen at Dunwich on the 15th and Southwold on the 19th while a

Photo: John Richardson

Photo: John Richardson



Red-backed Shrike

Slavonian Grebe was at Trimley SWT on the 21st, 22nd, 28th & 29th.

More **Great White Egret** being reported throughout the County during October. Only a couple of **Merlin** sightings this month, these raptors have become scarce in recent years. Still lots of **Bonxies** being reported from the Suffolk coast during October with 76+ reported; the highest count was 60 off Minsmere on the 28th. Noted from Southwold on the 24th were two **Arctic Skuas**. At Slaughden on the 1st five **Black Terns** were noted heading south early morning.

Two **Long-eared Owl** were seen at Shed 70 in the Felixstowe Dock complex on the 8th and another on the Icky Ridge at LBO on the 10th. Up to 12+ Short-eared Owls reported during the month. Of interest, on the 26th October 36,765 **Wood Pigeons** were counted off LBO hope they still had some note paper left!!

Around the County over 34 **Ring Ouzel** sightings through the month and still good numbers of **Whinchats** passing through the County this month. It was also a very good month for **Firecrest** with over 30+ sightings with Bawdsey and Felixstowe being the hotspots, LBO had five on the 18th and Bawdsey had five on the 19th with another five on the 23rd. An unusual sighting at LBO on the 10th was a **Dartford Warbler** seen on the butts.

Scarcer October Sightings:-

At Thorpeness ten **Pink-footed Geese** north off on the 3rd. A **White-billed Diver** was seen south off Corton on a SOG field trip and also sat on the sea for a short time and what was presumed the same bird was then seen south off Ness Point and then Kessingland and finally Covehithe. On the 1st a **Sooty Shearwater** south past Slaughden and one past Southwold on the 18th & 19th. At Southwold the 29th a **Manx Shearwater** south, and another observed from the

shelter on the 30th. Sea watching from Southwold produced a **Leach's Petrel** north offshore on the 18th. From Corton on the 29th a **Storm Petrel** was observed late morning. A **ring-tail Hen Harrier** seen in fields by Henstead Church on the 19th.

Late afternoon on the 4th a **Pectoral Sandpiper** was found at Micklemere where it remained until the 8th. The **Little Stints** continued into October with two at Hollesley on the 2nd, eight still at Minsmere on the 3rd, nine on the 4th, then singles on the 9th, 10th, 18th, 24th & 31st. A **Grey Phalarope** was found on the Southwold Flash on the 8th and showed well up to the 12th, two were seen at Minsmere on 19th, with another offshore on the 20th and also one at Slaughden the 20th, one again on the Minsmere Scrape on the 30th and one on the sea from the shelter at Southwold on the 30th.

A few **Pomarine Skuas** made an appearance in October, at Ness Point, Minsmere, Southwold, three at Sizewell 3 and one at Bawdsey. At Bawdsey an adult **Long-tailed Skua** offshore then drifted north late morning on the 21st. A **Glaucous Gull** was seen offshore from LBO on the 20th. At East Lane, Bawdsey on the 29th two juvenile **Sabine's Gulls** going north. Late in the month we had some good northerly winds which produced some nice **Little Auks** with two north at Southwold on the 29th & 30th, one at Felixstowe on the 29th and while at Ness Point, Dunwich, Thorpeness all had one past on the 30th. In Shottisham on the 31st a **Little Auk** was picked up and taken into care.

Photo: Andrew Moon



Little Auk

There was an 'eastern type' **Lesser Whitethroat** near Kessingland on the 22nd. A **Radde's Warbler** was trapped at Dunwich on the 10th, another was found early evening in the sluice bushes Minsmere on the 14th and a third Radde's was found in Southwold Churchyard on the 19th. At Thorpeness on the 19th a **Dusky Warbler** seen at the Northern end of the caravan park.

The whole of October was a mega month for **Yellow-browed Warblers** from Corton to LBO there were at least 70+ individuals reported throughout Suffolk and must be one of the best years ever.

A scarce sighting on the 26th at North Marsh, Minsmere were **2 Penduline Tits**. At Bawdsey Hall a **Northern Treecreeper** was trapped and ringed on the 19th and also another found at Bawdsey Picnic Site on the 23rd. A nice juvenile **Red-backed Shrike** was found along the coastal path opposite Boyton Hall Farm on the 8th, where it remained until the 12th. At LBO on the 30th a **Great Grey Shrike** was trapped and ringed. **Northern Bullfinch** were reported from Thorpeness, with two on the 20th and two at Southwold on the 26th. Britain has been having a bit of **Hawfinch** invasion but Suffolk seemed to have missed the big numbers, although a few sightings being reported; one south at Corton Cliff on the 16th, one Bawdsey Hall on the 19th, two at Thorpeness also on the 19th, another one at Bawdsey on 23rd and one at Stonham on the 23rd, two at Bawdsey Picnic Site on the 25th then flew north and three in off at Bawdsey on the 30th. A **Lapland Bunting** at Corton Old Sewage Works on the 8th with two at Kessingland Beach from the 20th to 22nd.

November 2017

Weather:-

November was a fairly dry month with 13 days with no rainfall; the highest rainfall was on the 27th with 7mm. The high average

of the month was 10C with the highest day's temperature being 15C on the 3rd, 22nd and 23rd. The average low was 6C with lowest night temperature for the month being -3C on the 25th.

Birds:-

Whooper Swans continued into November with one South over Southwold Town Marsh on the 5th, at Bawdsey East Lane two seen to come in/off on the 12th, a massive count of 230 at Lakenheath Fen RSPB on the 15th and at Minsmere nine on the 25th. At Minsmere, **Bewick's Swans** on East scrape with three on the 12th and 16th, with eight birds seen on the 20th and only three again on the 25th. Let's hope the winter swans build up into better numbers than in recent years. On the 4th, at North Warren south marsh, four **White-fronted Geese** on the 22nd. Gedgrave Marshes had two **Pink-footed Geese** over on the 14th. At Covehithe, on the 5th, an immature **Long-tailed Duck** on the Broad, then again on the 10th with other sightings on the 14th, 16th and 17th. Also two **Long-tailed Duck** seen just offshore at Benacre by the Broad before flying off south on the 10th, one drifting offshore at Lowestoft the same day and two off Minsmere on the 12th and 13th. The only sightings of **Goosander** came out of Minsmere with five on the 2nd, two on the 16th and eight on the 25th. A nice first winter drake **Greater Scaup** showed well on the lagoons at East Lane on the 11th and remained until the 13th. On the 4th two **Velvet Scoter** seen off Sizewell at 09.27hrs, then Minsmere at 09.35hrs, Benacre at



Photo: David Borderick

Lapland Bunting

09.47hrs and finally last sighted going north off Corton at 10:10hrs. There was also one south off Southwold on the 5th and also two offshore at Minsmere on the 25th. Single **Great Northern Divers** were seen at Bawdsey on the 12th, East Lane on the 14th, the Stour Estuary also 14th, Shingle Street on the 18th and south at LBO on the 20th. The **Slavonian Grebe** continued into November at Trimley SWT but was not reported after the 2nd, with one on the Stour noted on the 15th, there was one at Alton Water on the 16th. Still lots of **Great White Egret** sightings being reported throughout the County during November; two being seen at Dunwich on and off all month. A couple of sightings of **Hen Harrier** being reported this month, a nice male from Boyton Marshes on the 13th with another male at North Warren on the 22nd. **Merlin** was seen at Dingle Marshes on the 3rd, at Shingle Street on the 10th and at Gedgrave on the 14th. A late **Manx Shearwater** north offshore on the 18th. The Bonxie numbers dropped off this month with only eight sightings reported, LBO had one to two birds lingering for several days during the month. With some northerly blow during the month winds produced a movement of **Little Auks**, seen at a number of locations along the coast including seven at East Lane. Reports of single **Shorelark** came from Dunwich on the 9th, Minsmere on the 14th, Covehithe on the 16th and Lowestoft on the 17th. At Boyton Marshes 2 **House Martins** on the 9th, then on the 22nd a very late single bird seen over the car park at Minsmere. Still some **Ring Ouzel** sightings in the month; one at Pakefield Cliffs on the 4th, one between Alderton and Bawdsey also the 4th and one at Bawdsey Cliff on the 12th. There were two **Black Redstarts** on the Prison Cafe roof at Hollesley on the 4th and a good inland record at Stoke-by-Nayland church on the 17th. A **Dartford Warbler** seen at Bawdsey clifftop fields on the 19th, one seen on the Tomline Wall, Old Felixstowe on

the 23rd and 24th. During November a couple of **Yellow-browed Warblers** were reported from Arnolds Park, Lowestoft on the 1st and Flycatcher Alley, Lowestoft on the 5th. There were **Pallas's Warblers** early in the month; Orfordness producing one on the 4th and another on the 5th, another one was found on the 5th along Bawdsey cliffs behind the MOD site and another on the Tomline Wall opposite the Felixstowe Ferry Golf Club. There was an increase in numbers of **Snow Buntings** being reported this month, the highest two counts were 30 from Dunwich on the 26th and 24 at Thorpeness on the same day. A single bird remained at LBO all month. There were singles of Lapland Bunting at Southwold and LBO on the 5th, Bawdsey East Lane on the 16th and north Felixstowe on the 18th.

Scarcer November Sightings:-

On Boyton Marshes, in an area with no general access, two **Quail** were flushed from a weedy field during the afternoon of the 21st by David Fairhurst who was working on the reserve. There was a very late record of a **Long-tailed Skua** offshore at Shingle Street on the 2nd. An **Iceland Gull** was on Benacre Broad on the 16th then flew north, and there was a very nice immature bird around Landguard on the 19th although it could be very elusive as it was roaming from the Point all the way to the Felixstowe Ferry Area. Patience along the beach at Landguard afforded great views of the bird, and it was present from the 19th to end of the month.

Photo: Eddie Marsh

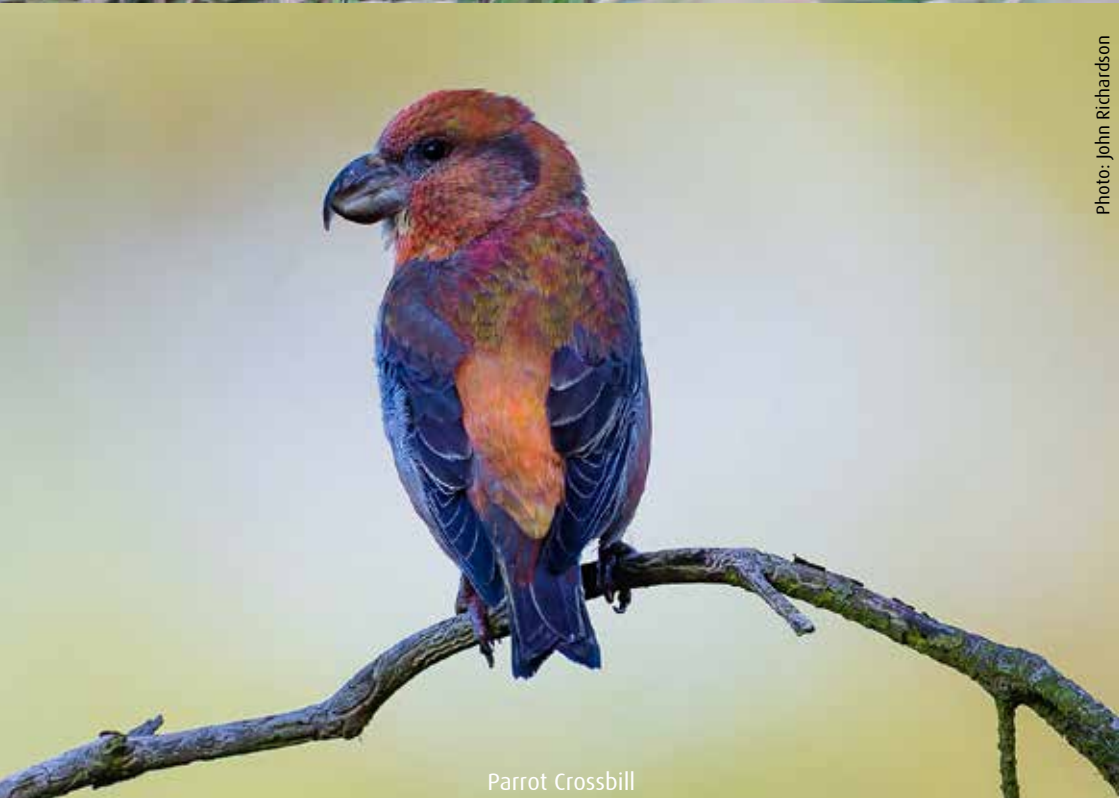


Iceland Gull



Richard's Pipit

Photo: Darren Underwood



Parrot Crossbill

Photo: John Richardson

A late **Puffin** was seen offshore at Felixstowe on the 20th. A late surprise on the 25th was a **Richard's Pipit** along Wades Lane, east of Pin Mill it remained till the 28th at least. An almost annual migrant in the shape of a **Red-flanked Bluetail** arrived at Mariners Score, Lowestoft on the 7th and was seen again on the 8th. A very late surprise was a **Barred Warbler** that was trapped at LBO on the 4th and re-trapped on the 6th, then mid-morning on the 9th another new bird was trapped and ringed. On the 11th at LBO a **Siberian Chiffchaff** was photographed and was also heard to call.

Sotterley Park has been the best place to see **Hawfinch** in Suffolk for many years and from one to five birds ranged from the area from the Dell to around the Church all month. Some cracking **Parrot Crossbills** were found at two locations late into November with 16 at St Helen's Picnic Site at Santon Downham on the 25th, 28 present on the 26th, 36 on the 27th and 30 on the 28th and at Upper Hollesley Common five on the 25th and six on the 26th. On the 28th a **Coue's Arctic Redpoll** with a **Mealy Redpoll** were found close to the car park at Hazelwood near Aldeburgh and were present to the end of the month.

Coue's Arctic Redpoll



Photo: John Richardson

Field Trip Reports

Val Lockwood

Fingringhoe Wick

Saturday September 3rd

Leader: Ashley Gooding

Ten members crossed the border into Essex where we met up with the trip leader Ashley, who ran through his plans for the morning and for the possibility of moving on elsewhere after lunch. As we began making our way towards the inter-tidal area of the reserve a Green Woodpecker was flushed and called as it flew away. This area of the reserve was chosen as our first port of call to take optimum advantage of the 11 a.m. high tide which would bring waders in close to the hide. Large numbers of Black-tailed Godwits could be seen alongside Ringed Plovers and from the path a Red Admiral butterfly took flight, a good indication that the temperature was rising, in spite of the chilly breeze. We stopped to check the hedgerow before turning off towards the hide and picked up Common and Lesser Whitethroat as well as a mixed tit flock in the hawthorn hedges. We pressed on to the hide and were immediately struck by the number of waders visible, the variety of species was not significant but there were excellent numbers of waders which was appreciated by all. There were good numbers of Grey Plover (some still looking very distinguished retaining their summer plumage), Lapwings and Black-tailed Godwits and a few Golden Plover. It was good to see 13 Avocets and 6 Bar-tailed Godwits and several other species including Turnstone, Ruff, Greenshank, Little Grebes and a Knot. It was amazing watching the godwits and plovers fly in and joust for space, they appeared to cover almost every inch of the tiny islets and were very

protective of their own space. A Kingfisher, which at first had been seen by just a small number of the group and had been difficult to observe due to it being on a fairly distant island partly obscured by vegetation, flew much closer to the hide and was seen well by all members of the group. Now the Kingfisher could be viewed in all its splendour perched on the top of the open branches of a willow and was joined briefly by a second Kingfisher before they flew out of sight on the high tide. We decided to move on as several of the smaller islands had been covered by the rising tidal flow so that the species count for that area appeared to have been reached.

We made a detour to an old quarry which had areas of low scrub, grass and nettles and partial shelter provided by a very high concrete wall. This sheltered area can be good for observing snakes. Unfortunately on this occasion we did not see any snakes but we enjoyed watching solitary bees visiting their small sandy burrows and also saw our first Small Heath butterfly of the day. We carried on to Crawshaws' Hide picking up Reed Bunting just as we left the sheltered area. At the hide we were amazed to count 48 Greenshank, a record number for all present and we also saw 2 Marsh Harriers and 2 Spotted Redshanks. On our way back to the car park we stopped off by a large pool of water where we saw a pair of Willow Emerald damselflies, a Migrant Hawker dragonfly and numerous Common and Ruddy Darters.

The mission after lunch was to stop off at Abberton reservoir to see if we could see the two Red-necked Phalaropes which had been reported as still being present earlier that day. We looked from the viewing platforms and over the fence and at first we thought we might be disappointed. Thankfully our patience was rewarded as eventually the two Phalaropes were visible. It wasn't easy birding as the fence and overhanging trees blocked our views to the pool but we persevered and all present had reasonably good views.

Our next stop was Abberton visitor centre and then on to Gwen's hide, observing Speckled Wood butterflies and a single Meadow Brown butterfly en route. We hoped to see the White-winged Black Tern which had been seen from the hide earlier that morning. We were to be disappointed as, try as we might, the only terns we saw from the hide were Common Terns; however we added several other species to our list, of note, a Peregrine, six Stock Doves,

two Common Sandpipers and two Green Sandpipers.

We decided to call it a day and made our way back to our cars. A birder said that the White-winged Black Tern had been seen on the opposite bank from the car park an hour or so before, so again we tried in vain to find the bird. Time went on and we decided that this was one bird we would have to put down to experience. We thanked Ashley, and people moved off towards their cars. But never say never when birding! A few of us observed some tangible excitement amongst other birders who we had spoken to earlier that afternoon and they gestured to us to come over and said that the bird had just been seen again. We didn't even have to move from the car park, the White-winged Black Tern was seen by us all. What a splendid end to the day, everything comes to he or she who waits..... Thanks to Ashley for a great trip with an excellent, exciting finale.

Steve Fryett

Shingle Street

Saturday September 16th

Leader: Steve Fryett

There was a cool autumnal feel to the start of this field trip at Shingle Street and with overnight rain conditions looked favourable. So, as the assembled 15 members prepared to head south a Short-eared Owl emerged close by from Oxley Marsh and provided exceptional views. Approaching the tennis courts we were given a fly past by a Wryneck, the bird had been present for several days but often elusive, which all managed to see. The bird then landed in grass behind a large bramble on Oxley Marsh and failed to emerge again. Around the tennis courts migration was evident with a good number of Meadow



Photo: Gi Grieco

Short-eared Owl

Pipits present, in fact they could be found throughout Shingle Street today. Hirundines were also well represented with Swallows and House Martins heading south, the latter seen in 100's throughout the morning. A Common Whitethroat was also noted here. Strangely there were no birds to be seen in the allotments but we did note two Whinchat and a family of Stonechats behind on the marsh along with two Reed Buntings. As we passed the Martello, 50 Goldfinch could be seen feeding on the thistles along with three Redshank present on the flash. From the beach, a brief sea watch yielded just a single Gannet. The shingle grasses provide a good habitat for the Meadow Pipits with a flock of 70 Linnets also finding this to their liking. Heading back to the car park we again noted the family of Stonechats near the tennis courts. Leaving

Shingle Street we headed for Hollesley Marsh where unfortunately the water levels were so low that it was bereft of waders, just a distant Ruff, Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit. We did note Whinchat, Chiffchaff and Common Buzzard with about two hundred House Martins feeding around the trees before leaving. Next place was East Lane and here we decided to go south to the Martello. Conditions looked perfect but lacked any migrants although we did note at least seven Common Buzzards close by. Heading back down the lane towards the lagoons we finally got to see two Willow Warblers. Once again a large number of Hirundines were present over the lagoons but little else of note. Finally, we checked the seaward facing rocks finding a Yellow Wagtail and female Northern Wheatear to end the meeting.

Gi Grieco

Corton

Saturday September 14th

Leader: Gi Grieco

Just a few members on this trip, but with the constant westerlies throughout the autumn maybe the thought of few expected migrant birds and an early start made the idea of a lie-in a better prospect! As it turned out, a surprise was in store for those that did attend and just goes to show that despite weather conditions it's always worth getting out and birding.

Around Corton churchyard a few Blue Tits moving through the hedgerow and a smart Jay greeted us before we headed towards the old sewage works. Here was a lovely sight of good numbers of finches, probably the largest group of Greenfinch any of the members had seen all year along with

Chaffinch, Goldfinch and at least two flocks of Siskin overhead, some of which alighted in trees. Around the area were also several thrushes, particularly Blackbird. Over the fallow fields were Skylark and groups of Meadow Pipits moving south. At least the medium-light south-west winds were allowing some migration and we bumped in to local patch birder, James Brown, who was in the area for 'vis-mig', counting the birds moving through. We headed to the cliffs for some sea-watching seeing quite a few Gannets moving both south and north, a couple of Red-throated Divers and lots of Cormorants, attracted by the tide going out to feed near the sandbanks exposed. We headed towards the old radar lodge again

noting several finches around there and a smart Whinchat within while a late Swallow flew south along the cliff.

As we headed back, Dave received a call from Justin at the other end of the county at LBO. This was to inform us that, via twitter, a White-billed Diver had been south past Hemsby and that we should keep an eye out. We started scanning the sea and amazingly within a couple of minutes we picked up a diver flying fairly close, the large size, bill shape, flight pattern immediately gave it away as the White-billed Diver. We managed to all get on it as it disappeared into the glare of the sun. Expecting it to emerge the other side, it did not and Ivan called to say he had it swimming on the sea. We got views of its bill shape and posture but as it was still partly in the sunny glare the decision was made to spread out further south to get better views for a photo; not really a sensible idea to start running after a heavy cold and an ankle injury! Unfortunately no further views and when Ivan reached us he said it had gone after he'd looked to see where we were but not before he'd had better views as it drifted along. We then bumped in to James again who had seen it fly past him – he was the one who had re-tweeted the Hemsby sighting that was then picked up Justin so we were grateful to both. It was also tracked south past Gunton, Lowestoft, Kessingland and Covehithe. Elated by our find we headed back to the car park for a celebratory cup of tea!

We next headed on to the old railway and on to Corton new sewage works, managing to see three more Jays on the way. Along the track it was very quiet, only two Chiffchaff and the odd one or two Goldcrest. A Buzzard was being mobbed in the distance by some Crows and two Kestrels flew over. In the sunny, sheltered areas we saw Comma, Speckled Wood and a number

of Common Darter. We heard at least two Bullfinches in the trees.

Our next stop was Links Road car park, having lunch while sea-watching with more Gannets and Cormorants seen plus some Brent Geese moving south. As is usual at the car park a number of gulls present with Common, Black-headed, Herring and three Mediterranean Gulls, one which had a darvic ring AKNC – details show this was ringed in Germany.

Metal Ring: 5412118
Colour ring: green ANCK
Age at ringing: 1 Pullus
Ringing date: 23.06.2014
Ringing place: Fiege Logistics,
Flat Roof, Colony, Moorfleet, Hamburg

Latitude/Longitude: 53° 30' 16" N 100° 5' 11" E
Ringer: Matthias Haupt
Comments: First sighting in UK
Details from the MedGullGermany

We walked up through to Gunton Warren; several more Jays were vocal and were seen to be carrying acorns to stash for the winter. We did manage to see a couple of Chiffchaff and Goldcrest but as expected was very quiet migrant-wise. We decided to have a final stop at Hamilton Docks where the male Eider showed well. Up to the sea wall and a scan out to sea revealed more Gannets, a Pomarine Skua, Red-throated Diver, two Mediterranean Gulls and some Turnstone that landed on the rocks. Some small birds were seen to be flying low south across the water but were too far out to determine identification but others came in off near us including Chaffinch and Meadow Pipit. Overall an enjoyable day with good company and even though, as expected, few migrants around, it was great to see, with the wonders of modern technology and good communication, a superb bird that on reading Suffolk Birds later turns out to be only the fourth Suffolk record.

Landguard Bird Observatory

Saturday October 21st

Leader: Nigel Odin

We always hope that our annual visit to LBO coincides with decent winds; unfortunately the westerlies that have blighted our autumn birding did not relent. However a very enjoyable meeting was had. Highlights included Ring Ouzel, Firecrest, Brambling and Great Skua.

Matt Spraggs, the warden, gave an excellent demonstration whilst ringing a Firecrest. He weighed a 20p coin and it weighed 5 grams, he then weighed the Firecrest and that was 5.4 grams. Just take a 20p coin out of your pocket and you can only marvel at how such a small bird migrates in most conditions.

Visible migration was interesting and included 411 Goldfinch, 11 House Martin, 11 Skylark, 8 Siskin, 6 Rock Pipit all going south. Goldcrest, Wheatear, Sparrowhawk and Redwing were also seen.

Field trips are not only about birds, members were enthralled when young Dan Zantboer pointed out a Wood Mouse that was busy storing its winter supply of acorns. There is always something special that happens on these trips and the Wood Mouse was one of those moments.



Wood Mouse

Ornithological Petrarchan

It is difficult to portray bird voices in writing, because birds rarely make 'human' sounds, and our interpretations vary: one person hears a call-note as 'teu', another as 'chew' or 'sioo'.

Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (Collins)

Calidris maritima pipes 'weak wit',
Gypaetus barbatus thinly cries 'queer',
the Pheasant's 'cork cork' oft' delights the ear,
the Little Stint, when flushed, has a sharp 'tit',
Calidris alba calls on us to 'quit',
the Reed Bunting's alarm call 'shit' rings clear.

Is this *Calidris canutus* we hear?

Hark! a low 'nut', in flight, a whistling 'twit'.

But what is this deep sighing 'oo-oo-oo'
more moaning than *Strix aluco*? 'Quick quick!'

Tumix sylvatica's 'croo croo croo CROO'
(from *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) sends
exciting vibes to sensitive nerve-ends.

Peter Reading

Most will know 'take two cows, Taffy' and 'a little bit of bread and no cheese' as the way to introduce identification of Woodpigeons and Yellowhammers to people learning to identify species through sound. I loved the idea of learning these phrases and felt pleased that I could identify two birds..... but it does not take long to realise that one knows nothing. Simon Barnes in his most enjoyable text, 'How to be a bad birdwatcher' offers reassurance: 'Let's keep things simple and talk about different kinds of birds. A swan is a different kind of bird from a robin, and if you can tell the difference between one kind of bird and another, you have already established your birdwatching credentials.' Yeah - he's right. We all gotta start somewhere. Colour, shape size, habitat, behaviour can all be gleaned from bird guides but sound? It's sooooo difficult.

Which is one reason why this poem is fun. And complex.

Before we even get to the poem, Reading's title is worth a moment or three's thought. Basically the title means 'Bird Poem' but Petrarchan is a specialist literary term and ornithological is a specialist term, too. He's not messing about here or rather he is. He is telling the reader a great deal before we even get to the first line. What's he saying? I can use big words? Possibly. Or possibly it's more subtle than that. Ornithological - adjective from ornithology - the study of birds. This poem is a considered study of a particular aspect of birds. Petrarchan? I'll cut to the most important aspect - it refers to the poem's form (what kind of rhyming structure the poem uses). It's a particular kind of sonnet. A sonnet is a poem with a very precise rhyming pattern and subject. They often contain an argument and are love poems. The poet writes about someone or something he or she loves. Reading knows and loves birds and uses his knowledge to create this amusing

exploration of how impossibly difficult it is to convey the different calls of birds. It is also impossibly difficult to use such a precise rhyme form. Just bear with me. Look at the word at the end of each line: 'wit', 'queer', 'ear', 'tit', 'quit', 'clear', 'hear', 'twit' in the first section (technical stuff: it's called a stanza) followed by 'oo-oo-oo', 'quick', 'croo', 'prik', 'sends' and 'ends' in the second stanza. In the literary world this rhyme scheme is recorded like this ABBAABBA then CDCDEE all of which goes to show he knows his Petrarchan sonnet structure. It also goes to show that he is being subversive as he has introduced a wide range of language which may be considered to be pushing the boundaries - which is why I think it is funny. Here he is listening to birds, trying to convey the sounds they make but what he hears is 'queer', 'tit' and 'prik'. This may say more about the way he perceives the world than he wanted to reveal to his readers.

But simply using rude words does not necessarily create humour or impress the reader or convey something about birds.

So what else does he do that moves this poem beyond schoolboy or schoolgirl giggles?

Something else is going on here. He uses the Latin names for some of the birds. Is he showing off? Maybe or maybe he is saying I am a serious student of birds. I do love them but that does not stop me finding aspects of their behaviour amusing or prevent me from laughing at their absurdity. He uses descriptive language quite precisely but he wants us to smile. The purple sandpiper 'pipes' (ref: bird's name - oh what a surprise). The bearded vulture 'thinly cries' i.e. great big bird, little weedy voice and, in all honesty, does the 'cork cock' of the Pheasant really delight the ear? Not mine. It usually gives me an approximation of a heart attack. So not a range of musical delights here.

He doesn't just ridicule the birds. He's laughing at pomposity all round. He's poking fun at people who take birds too seriously and he's laughing at people who take high flown poetry too seriously as well. That use of 'oft' and ' Hark!' need consideration. He's mocking the language associated with those who take the art form of poetry to a sanctified level. These are old fashioned forms often found in high flown poems. He's kind of saying I can do the poetic form, I can use poetic language but sometimes these techniques don't really show how people feel about their subject. They are artificial and superficial.

So how does he really view these birds or any bird? A sonnet usually contains an argument or a point of view. The poet sets up one view in the first section and the answers it in the second. He doesn't really do this in the conventional way but I think he does reveal his real feelings about birds in the final lines. For all that he has laughed at their more ridiculous sounds, his last line describes how bird calls send 'exciting vibes to sensitive nerve-ends' indicating that hearing any bird in the wild and being able to identify it never fails to work its magic.



Photo: Bill Baston

Yellowhammer

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Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Who we are

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

What we do

Networking

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

Media

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

Trips and talks

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



Protecting birds

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



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

For birds & for birders

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