



Cambridgeshire Bird Club

E-Bulletin April 2014(The

records in this bulletin are unchecked and may be revised at a later date)

Message from the Editors:

This bulletin is drawn from records that appear on the Cambridgeshire Bird Club website "What's about" section and from Cambirds. In addition there are records sent to the County Recorder. However, many observers send in their records bi-monthly to line up with the paper bulletin. Readers will note that at present there is a more extensive E- bulletin every other month as a result. Can we ask observers to send in records to the Recorder monthly (by the 10th of the following month if possible) as this would improve the balance of the E-bulletin.

HEADLINES

AMERICAN WIGEON* Ouse Washes (1st – 3rd).

GREEN-WINGED TEAL* Ouse Washes (male 10th – 13th).

RING-NECKED DUCK* Ouse Washes (the female first seen at the end of March was present until the 15th at least), Nene Washes (male on 11th – 25th).

CATTLE EGRET* Nene Washes (12th – 13th), Ouse Washes (16th - into May).

GREAT WHITE EGRET Nene Washes (1st – 12th), Ouse Washes (10th and 2 on 12th and into May), Ellington (flyover on 16th).

WHITE STORK* Fen Drayton Lakes (flyover going SE on 26th), most likely the same bird at Swaffham Prior (flyover going E on 26th).

GLOSSY IBIS* Ouse Washes (15th then 2 on 27th).

SPOONBILL Ouse Washes RSPB (5th- 6th).

BLACK KITE* Grafham Water (flyover on 26th).

SPOTTED CRAKE Wicken Fen (a bird calling on 9th – 10th), King's Dyke NR (12th), Ouse Washes (single on 20th and 3 on 23rd).

DOTTEREL Black Bush Whittlesey (3 on 25th – 27th).

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW Cam Washes (2 on 20th).

Other records

All records below refer to the month at the head of the E-bulletin and where no numbers are given the record relates to single birds.

Where there is an asterisk after the name of the species this indicates that it is necessary to send a description to the County Recorder before the record will be accepted.

Wildfowl

Whooper Swan Ouse Washes (maximum c120 on 1st, 52 on 5th), Nene Washes (3 still on 29th).

Pink-footed Goose Fen Drayton Lakes (a pair on 12th), Colne GP (29th).

White-fronted Goose Paxton Pits (an immature on 29th – 30th)

Greylag Goose Wicken Fen (40 on 20th).

Brent Goose Ferry Meadows CP (25th), Nene Washes (3 on 25th).

Egyptian Goose Maxey Pits (6th), Paxton Pits (maximum 9 on 24th), Fen Drayton Lakes (a pair with young on 8th), Buckden (2 on 5th), Earith GP (pair with young on 6th), Nene Washes (3 on 13th), Kingfishers Bridge (18th), Tanholt GP (23rd).

Shelduck Gedney Drove End (20 on 13th), Wicken Fen (pair on 6th and 5 on 13th), Paxton Pits (3 on 15th), Burwell Fen (16th), Nene Washes (37 on 24th).

Wigeon Ouse Washes/Chain Corner (c100 on 8th and a single bird on 12th), Paxton Pits (4 still on 22nd), Nene Washes (190 on 29th).

Teal Ouse Washes/Chain Corner (200-300 on 8th and 150 on 14th), Paxton Pits (4 still on 27th).

Pintail Ouse Washes (a surprising 80+ on 6th, 8 on 8th, 4 on 10th and 11 on 23rd).

Garganey *reported from* Berry Fen (maximum 2), Burwell Fen (maximum 4), Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 4), Maxey Pits (2), Ouse Washes (maximum 6 – all drakes on 26th), Wicken Fen (maximum 4), Paxton Pits (30th).

Red-crested Pochard Paxton Pits (a drake on 4th – 5th and on 21st and 2 drakes on 30th).

Pochard Wicken Fen (pair on 6th), Paxton Pits (male on 26th).

Tufted Duck Wicken Fen (9 on 6th and a pair on 23rd).

Scaup Paxton Pits (long stay female until 7th at least), Fen Drayton Lakes (male on 1st and 12th).

Long-tailed Duck* Grafham Water (long stay bird until 2nd at least).

Common Scoter Grafham Water (3 on 4th), Marsh Lane GP (16 on 22nd).

Goldeneye Grafham Water (maximum 23 on 1st), Ouse Washes RSPB (female on 1st and 5th), Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 25 on 1st), Paxton Pits (maximum 37 on 4th and 6 remaining on 15th).

Smew Fen Drayton Lakes (drake until 1st).

Goosander Paxton Pits (a female on 3rd – 4th), Maxey Pits (16th).

Ruddy Duck Ouse Washes (drake on 10th), Nene Washes (a female 11th – 12th), Burwell Fen (26th).

Gamebirds

Grey Partridge Haddenham (pair on 13th), Paxton Pits (2 on 16th and 24th), Cam Washes/Waterbeach (a pair on 21st), Holt Fen (pair on 25th).



Grey Partridge Fowlmere NR by Garth Peacock.

Divers, shearwaters, gannet and cormorants

Great Northern Diver* Grafham Water (2 long-stay birds until 4th at least and a single into May)

Cormorant Holme Fen (19 nests on 17th).

Egrets and herons

Bittern *reported from* Ouse Fen (2), Ouse Washes, Wicken Fen (2).

Little Egret Paxton Pits (maximum 2 on 1st), Maxey Cut (4 on 15th), Wicken Fen (20th), Ouse Washes (maximum 10 on 23rd), Nene Washes (13 on 24th), Holt Fen (2 on 25th).

Grebes

Little Grebe *reported from* Burwell Fen (7 on 16th), Wicken Fen (2-3 pairs).

Great Crested Grebe *reported from* Nene Washes (2 pairs), Wicken Fen (pair).

Raptors

Red Kite *reported from* Castor Hanglands, Ferry Meadows CP, Grafham Water (2), Leighton Bromswold, Nene Washes, Paxton Pits (3), Peterborough, Sacrewell, Stibbington, Tanholt GP, Wicken Fen, Woodwalton Fen, Yaxley.

Marsh Harrier *reported from* Haddenham/Aldreth Fen (2), Kingfishers Bridge (2), Little Wilbraham Fen (4), Ouse Washes (2), Paxton Pits (2), Wicken Fen (6), Burwell Fen (a bird with green wing tags on 23rd),

Hen Harrier Stretham (ringtail on 12th – latest record received to date).

Montagu's Harrier* Wicken Fen (1st).

Sparrowhawk *reported from* Comberton, Histon, Kirtling, Little Wilbraham Fen, Paxton Pits (3), Wicken Fen.

Buzzard *reported from- numbers are birds seen together* Cambridge, Comberton, Elton, Grafham Water, Great Shelford (7), Haddenham/Aldreth Fen (3), Hemingford (6-7), Maxey Pits, Ouse Washes (2), Paxton Pits (14), Tanholt GP, Wicken Fen (2), Wood Ditton, Yaxley.

Osprey Whittlesford (10th), Holme Fen (2 on 17th), Paxton Pits (21st).

Rails and crane

Water Rail *reported from* Little Wilbraham Fen, Nene Washes, Ouse Washes RSPB, Wicken Fen (2).

Crane Ouse Washes RSPB (2 on 1st), Stutney (2 flyovers on 5th), Wicken Fen (2 on 26th), Nene Washes (maximum 7 on 18th).

Waders

Avocet Paxton Pits (2 on 5th and 27th), Ouse Washes/Chain Corner (2 on 8th), Cam Washes (4 on 12th), Ouse Washes RSPB (14 on 12th and 35 on 17th), Wicken Fen (2 on 12th and 2 flyovers on 20th and 2 on 23rd), Tubney Fen (2 on 16th), Burwell Fen (16th and 4 on 23rd), Grafham Water (2 on 27th), Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 5 on 30th), Nene Washes (30th).

Oystercatcher Ferry Meadows CP (1st), Paxton Pits (maximum 6 on 1st), Maxey Pits (3rd, 6th and 2 on 16th), Grafham Water (2 on 2nd), Earith GP (6th), Wicken Fen (10th), Holme Fen (2 on 17th), Burwell Fen (3 on 23rd), Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 5 on 30th).

Golden Plover Sutton Gault (58 in summer plumage on 6th), Whittlesey (18 summer plumage on 25th and 9 on 27th).

Lapwing Fulbourn (9 adults and 3 chicks on 23rd).

Little Ringed Plover Fen Drayton Lakes (1st, 26th and 4 on 27th single on 30th), Ouse Washes (5th and 12th), Tanholt GP (15th and 23rd), Burwell Fen (16th), Maxey Pits (21st), Paxton Pits (24th).

Ringed Plover Colne GP (2 on 18th), Maxey Pits (19th), Etton Pit (22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 26th).

Whimbrel Grafham Water (14th), Paxton Pits (single on 16th, 2 on 20th and 12 on 26th), Fowlmere NR (19th), Grafham Water (22nd and 2 on 26th), Nene Washes (2 on 23rd and 25th and a single on 27th, 29th and 30th), Fowlmere (36 flyovers on 24th), Maxey Pits (27th), Berry Fen (2 on 30th), Ouse Washes (2 on 30th), Alconbury Airfield (30th).

Curlew Ouse Washes RSPB (3 flyovers on 1st, 2 on 5th a single on 12th), Paxton Pits (5th), Buckden (2 flyovers on 5th), Diddington Pit (flyover on 7th).

Black-tailed Godwit Ouse Washes (600+ on 5th and 12th), Fen Drayton Lakes (240 on 12th, 650+ on 14th and 50 on 26th), Nene Washes (maximum c1000 'Icelandic' on 12th several other large counts), Paxton Pits (2 on 15th and a single on 26th), Burwell Fen (2 on 16th), Colne GP (33 on 16th), Kingfishers Bridge (100+ on 18th), Berry Fen (100 on 21st), Cam Washes (25th).

Mark Eaton discovered considerable information about an individual he saw at Berry Fen:

“Ringed as an adult on the Tagus Estuary in Portugal in 2007, it has returned to winter there every year since, has spent considerable time in Norfolk (mainly Cley) every autumn, and most springs has been recorded passing through Cambs, including Fen Drayton, Berry Fen and Welches Dam. It has also livened up its CV with appearances in Belgium, southern Ireland and western Scotland, and has been seen on the Icelandic breeding grounds once.”



Black-tailed Godwits at Fen Drayton Lakes by Nigel Spowell

Bar-tailed Godwit Grafham Water (a flyover on 20th), Paxton Pits (5 on 20th and 13 on 26th), Nene Washes (22nd and 3 on 29th), Ouse Washes (2 on 26th).

Turnstone Paxton Pits (2 on 21st – first record of the year).

Ruff Ouse Washes (50+ on 5th, c40 on 10th and 152 on 12th), Paxton Pits (20th), Berry Fen (40 on 21st), Nene Washes/March Farmers (6 on 18th and 13 on 25th).

Sanderling Diddington Pits (7th – first record for the year)

Dunlin Paxton Pits (maximum 9 on 12th), Ouse Washes (7 on 12th), Grafham Water (4 on 14th), Burwell Fen (16th and 6 on 23rd), Maxey Pit (2 on 21st), Etton Pit (2 on 22nd).

Common Sandpiper Paxton Pits (14th - first of the year, and on several dates thereafter throughout the month), Fen Drayton Lakes (3 on 20th - 21st and 2 on 22nd), Cam Washes/Waterbeach (21st), Ferry Meadows CP (22nd), Eye Green (23rd), Berry Fen (30th).

Green Sandpiper Maxey Pits (1st and 6th), Ferry Meadows CP (10th), Tanholt GP (3 on 13th), Maxey Cut (3 on 13th), Colne GP (3 on 16th), Paxton Pits (20th – 22nd), Nene Washes (22nd), Yaxley (23rd).

Spotted Redshank Ouse Washes (10th - 12th, 17th, 26th and 30th), Nene Washes (29th – 30th).

Greenshank Wicken Fen (3rd – first of the year and 23rd), Nene Washes (2 on 22nd and 28th - 30th), Fen Drayton Lakes (22nd), Burwell Fen (23rd and 2 on 26th), Ouse Washes (1-2 on 26th).

Wood Sandpiper Nene Washes (23rd – first record for the year and 25th).

Redshank Paxton Pits (maximum 11 on 1st), Grafham Water (maximum 6 on 2nd and 22nd), Burwell Fen (4 on 16th), Wicken Fen (maximum 7 on 20th), 1-2 elsewhere.

Woodcock Cambridge/Milton Road (flyover 3rd), Wicken Fen (maximum 4 on 23rd).

Snipe Paxton Pits (maximum 4 on 1st), Ferry Meadows (10 on 4th), Wicken Fen (15 on 20th and 3 drumming on 23rd), Paxton Pits (20th), Nene Washes (15 on 24th).

Terns and gulls

Little Tern Ferry Meadows CP (24th and 26th), Paxton Pits (2 on 26th).

Black Tern First of the year on the 16th at Burwell Fen (2) and Grafham Water (3). Thereafter: Fen Drayton Lakes (6 on 21st and 4 still on 22nd), Ferry Meadows CP (26th), Paxton Pits (2 on 26th and 27th).

Sandwich Tern Paxton Pits (2 on 7th and a single on 17th), Marsh Lane GP (2 on 17th).

Common Tern Ferry Meadows (1st – earliest record this year), Paxton Pits (4th), Grafham Water (5th), Ouse Washes (2 on 12th), Maxey Cut (15th) thereafter at several sites.

Arctic Tern Ferry Meadows (17th - first of the year, 8 on 18th, 20th, 5 on 22nd a single on 23rd and 15 on 24th-25th, 27th and 30th), Paxton Pits (6 on 20th, 3 on 26th and 15 flyovers on 27th), Fen Drayton Lakes (22nd and 2 on 26th – 27th), Grafham Water (3 on 27th), Nene Washes (27th).

Little Gull Fen Drayton Lakes (2 adults and a third later on 1st), Ouse Washes (3rd), Ferry Meadows CP (4th), Paxton Pits (2 on 4th), Grafham Water (2 on 5th), Paxton Pits (7 on 16th and a single on 17th), Fen Drayton Lakes

(2 on 21st – 23rd), Grafham Water (3 on 20th – 21st and a single on 22nd), Kingfishers Bridge (10+ on 21st), Ouse Washes RSPB (22nd).

Mediterranean Gull Grafham Water (an adult on 1st).

Yellow-legged Gull Milton Tip (3 on 17th).

Caspian Gull Milton Tip (17th), Grafham Water (29th).

Glaucous Gull Fen Drayton Lakes (1st winter in the roost on 7th and a 2nd winter bird on 12th – 21st), Milton Tip (2nd winter on 17th), Grafham Water (2nd winter on 18th and on 22nd).

Great Black-backed Gull Grafham Water (85 on 22nd).

Cuckoo, owls, kingfisher and woodpeckers

Cuckoo Wicken Fen (19th – first record of the year), Paxton Pits (20th), Fen Drayton Lakes (21st), Woodwalton Fen (21st), Little Wilbraham Fen (2 on 21st), Soham (22nd). Several records in the days following from the usual places.

Barn Owl *reported from* Cam Washes.

Little Owl *reported from* Ferry Meadows CP, Nene Washes.

Tawny Owl *reported from* March (breeding pair with young being ringed seen on local television), Wicken Fen.

Short-eared Owl Wicken Fen (2 on 5th).

Swift Buckden (14th – first record this year), Orton BP (20th), Cambridge/Barnwell LNR (22nd), Cam Washes (3 on 26th) thereafter at several locations.

Kingfisher *reported from* Cam Washes, Comberton, Earith GP, Kingfishers Bridge, Nene Washes, Ouse Washes (2), Paxton Pits, Peterborough, Teversham Fen (3).

Green Woodpecker Barton CRT [Countryside Restoration Trust] (6 on 12th)

Falcons

Hobby Wicken Fen (13th – first of the year and 25th), Ferry Meadows CP (20th), Woodwalton Fen (2 on 24th), Nene Washes (24th), Fen Drayton Lakes (26th), Ouse Washes (26th).

Peregrine Cambridge (pair around the University Library), Ouse Washes (5th, 12th and 23rd), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (12th), Ouse Washes (23rd), Berry Fen (23rd and 25th).

Shrikes and corvids

Great Grey Shrike* Great Fen (the over-wintering bird was last reported on 6th)

Rook

Louise Bacon writes:

In all the recent winters out and about, in South West Cambridgeshire, I have noticed no loss of rook nests to bad weather (over about an 8 year period)... but this last winter, many local nests were simply blown away. About a month ago, rooks began milling around, and have now rebuilt. Here the interesting bit. At those sites where ALL nests were blown away, the rooks have moved. These were often small colonies of up to 6 nests. They have mostly not gone far - 100m or so. At those colonies where at least some nests survived, the colony has stayed put, but moved trees, often to something a bit lower, but close by. Some of the small colonies which have gone seem to have teamed up with other nearby groups to enlarge or start a new, bigger group - this is especially true in Comberton. The most intriguing is a group now near the B1046 on the way to Bourn - I do not know where they have come from - presumably the middle of the village, so a movement of a kilometre at least.

Carrion Crow Barton CRT (25 on 12th)

Raven Castor Hanglands (2 on 15th).

Crests, tits and larks

Coal Tit *reported from* Chippenham Fen, Great Shelford, Wicken Fen,

Marsh Tit Richard Broughton reports 55 territories in three woods in old Hunts. *Elsewhere reported from* Lucy Wood, Ditton Park Wood, Ten Wood.

Bearded Tit *reported from* Wicken Fen (4 pairs on 30th).

Skylark Comberton/Westfield Farm (39 on 15th).

Hirundines and warblers

Sand Martin 50+ *reported from* Cam Washes (60 on 12th), Ouse Washes RSPB (200+ on 12th), Orton BP (100+ on 20th).

Swallow Paxton Pits (5th), Ouse Washes (5th), Sutton Gault (6th), Ouse Washes RSPB (20+ on 12th).

House Martin Papworth (4th – earliest record this year), Sutton Gault (6th), thereafter recorded in several places.

Cetti's Warbler *reported from* Barton, Cambridge/Barnwell Pit, Crown Lakes, Eye Green, Fen Drayton Lakes, Little Wilbraham Fen (2), Maxey Cut and GP, Nene Washes (2), Paxton Pits (maximum 4 on 5th), Peterborough/Millennium Bridge, Tanholt GP (2), Wicken Fen (8) and Woodwalton Fen.

Records from south of the county suggest that the mild winter has encouraged dispersal with an enhanced population colonising new sites.

Wood Warbler Abbot's Ripton (24th), Ely (30th).

'Siberian' Chiffchaff* subspecies *phylloscopus collybita tristis* Grafham Water (6th).

Willow Warbler Paxton Pits (3 singing on 3rd), Wicken Fen (3rd), Bretton (4th), Elton (4th), Monk's Wood (4th), Fleam Dyke (5th), thereafter at several sites.

Garden Warbler Great Wilbraham (11th – first of the year), Kirtling (15th), Grantchester (18th), Paxton Pits (22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 22nd), Ferry Meadows CP (22nd).

Lesser Whitethroat Paxton Pits (5th – earliest record this year). Only 5 days later than the earliest ever, Cambridge (12th), several records thereafter.

Whitethroat Ferry Meadows CP, (3rd – first reported returning migrant not counting the overwintering bird at Ouse Fen), several records thereafter. Comberton/Westfield Farm (17 on 27th).

Grasshopper Warbler Little Wilbraham Fen (11th) and Wicken Fen (11th - first of the year). *Thereafter reported from:* Castor Hanglands, Dogsthorpe Pit, Fen Drayton Lakes (2+), Fowlmere NR, Little Wilbraham Fen (4+), Ouse Washes, Paxton Pits (2), Wicken Fen (maximum 7), and Woodwalton Fen (3).

Sedge Warbler Fen Drayton Lakes (1st – earliest record this year).

Reed Warbler Wicken Fen (10th), Ouse Fen (10th – first of the year), thereafter at several sites.



Reed Warbler at Fowlmere NR photo by Matt Mellor

Nuthatch, wren, and thrushes

Nuthatch Chippenham Fen (a pair caught and ringed on 2nd).

Wren Richard Broughton reports 50 singing in three woods in old Hunts.

Ring Ouzel Knapwell/Hope Farm (female on 1st), Wicken Fen (10th - 12th), Paxton Pits (10th), Castor-Marham road (13th), Cam Washes (20th), Fen Drayton Lakes (male on 22nd).

Fieldfare Maxey Pits (200 on 1st - 3rd, 80 still on 4th), Ouse Washes (3 on 23rd - ? latest record of the winter).

Nightingale Paxton Pits (6th, 2 singing by the 11th and then maximum 6 on 22nd), Marsh Lane GP (14th), Fen Drayton Lakes (17th and 22nd), Castor Hanglands (maximum 21 singing on 30th), Wicken Fen (12th - 30th).

Starts and chats

Black Redstart Ferry Meadows (9th), Ouse Washes/Oxlode (female type on 23rd), Fowlmere village (26th), Great Shelford (female type on 27th).

Redstart Paxton Pits (10th), Nene Washes (12th), Marsh Lane GP (a male on 17th), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (a female on 21st).

Whinchat Paxton Pits (male on 23rd – first of the year), Wicken Fen (30th).

Wheatear Foxton (2 on 9th), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (total of 6 on 9th), Buckden (14th), Paxton Pits (a pair on 16th and a single on 17th, 20th, 22nd and 2 on 24th and a single on 29th), Fen Drayton Lakes (3 on 17th), Maxey GP (21st), Devil's Dyke (2 on 21st), Tiptree Marina Upware (22nd – 23rd), Burwell Fen (3 on 23rd), Nene Washes (4 on 23rd), Holme Fen (25th), Cam Washes (26th), Ouse Washes (26th), Whittlesey (4 on 26th), Nene Washes (4 on 25th, 7 on 28th 5 on 29th and a single on 30th), Deeping High Bank (3 on 27th), Ferry Meadows CP (30th).

Pied Flycatcher Paxton Pits (a male on 10th). *Spring records are less common in Cambs than autumn ones and this is the earliest ever recorded in the county but only by a single day, the previous record was at Morborne in 2011 and that beat a record of April 20th 1981.*

Sparrows, wagtails and pipits

Tree Sparrow Haddenham (a female ? paired with a House Sparrow on 13th).

Yellow Wagtail Paxton Pits (1st and 13 on 12th), Ouse Washes RSPB (1st and 2 on 5th) *thereafter counts of 20+* Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (22 on 12th), Nene Washes (30+ on 18th).

'Blue-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava flava the nominate form(see below)* Nene Washes (21st).

Grey Wagtail Bottisham Lock (a pair on 25th).

Pied Wagtail Grafham Water (20 on 9th).

White Wagtail Haddenham/Aldreth Fen (2 on 2nd), Paxton Pits (6th, 2 on 7th, 4 on 9th and 2 on 17th and 24th), Grafham Water (4 on 9th and 2 on 22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (12th), Ouse Washes (2 on 22nd), Whittlesey (25th), Cam Washes (26th).

Just a note of explanation for the uninitiated: 'White' Wagtail is the nominate form – the species if you like - (Motacilla alba alba), the 'Pied' Wagtail is a subspecies (Motacilla alba yarellii). The White Wagtail is found on most of Continental Europe whereas the Pied is a breeding bird of Britain and Ireland. This applies also to the 'Blue-headed' Wagtail (nominate form) and what we call the Yellow Wagtail – which is a subspecies.

Tree Pipit Castor Hanglands (13th).

Rock Pipit Grafham Water (4th).

Water Pipit Ouse Washes/Sutton Gault roost (maximum 15 on 1st).

Finches and buntings

Brambling Paxton Pits (9th), Ferry Meadows CP (2-3 from 14th- 22nd possibly the latest date this year)

Linnet counts of 20+ Maxey Cut (30 on 15th).

Bullfinch Dogsthorpe Tip (18 on 18th).

Corn Bunting Ouse Washes/Chain Corner (12 on 10th).

Exotica

Ross's Goose Wicken Fen (several dates).

Ruddy Shelduck Nene Washes (one paired with a hybrid Ruddy Shelduck on 22nd).

Baikal Teal a drake first at Fen Drayton Lakes (1st – 2nd) then Ouse Washes/Sutton Gault (5th – end of the month).

The County Recorder writes: The Baikal Teal is being considered by national BBRC as they asked for it to be circulated - it seems to be free-flying, unringed and not tame, hence the decision to consider it a true vagrant - a decision will take several months.

Hooded Merganser Hinxton – reported on 30th and said to have been present last year as an immature bird – likely an escape.

Contributors:

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Apologies for any names omitted in error.

Rare breeding birds, disturbance and information

Vince Lea

It's that time of the year when birds are breeding, and so far, 2014 is looking like a very good breeding season after a couple of really challenging springs. From my nest recording activities, it is clear that lots of birds are nesting much earlier this year, and many nests are proving to be successful. Some early attempts have been in sites that were too exposed – Song Thrushes and Blackbirds nesting in sites with limited leaf cover have been predated at early stages in some locations that we study, but there is still a lot of spring and summer left for them to try again. Our regular monitoring of the open nesting species at Cambourne has revealed Skylarks fledging by dates when no eggs had been laid last year, raising the prospect of third broods if the conditions remain favourable through till July. Owls are also having a good start to the season.

One of the issues that breeding birds raises is the question of disturbance and publicity, particularly for rarer species. Revealing the site of nesting birds raises the risk of intentional disturbance – there are still a few egg-collectors at large, and with some birds of prey there is a market for young birds for falconry collections; some individuals persecute raptors that are seen as a threat to their interests, be that game birds, racing pigeons or even in the name of conservation. Secondly, there is the risk of unintentional disturbance, from people interested in seeing the rare birds going about their business. In some situations, and with some species, setting up a watch point can be organised and can be extremely effective at raising awareness and funds for conservation; this is most easily done on established nature reserves of course. Birds nesting on private land require much more sensitivity.

We've had two great examples of these complex situations already this year; on April 12, Tony Juniper announced to the Cambridge Evening News that he had seen Peregrines nesting on the University library <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-26990632>. The club had already been aware of this pair and were working with various volunteers in the area to try and discover the actual nest location. Eventually, one of our members saw the female sitting on the window ledge while he was using the library! Quick discussions with the staff got a window blackout in place, so the birds will not be disturbed by readers coming and going. Once the chicks are hatched, we will hopefully get a little watchpoint, and maybe a webcam set up and will be able to show the birds to the public. This pair is clearly accepting of human passers-by at ground level and is in a safe location where interference would be extremely unlikely, and given that it has been in the local paper and varsity magazine, there is little point trying to maintain confidentiality! Once the chicks start to grow, there will be no way of hiding their presence anyway, as the noise and debris from the nest will become extremely obvious. By contrast, another member noted a sitting Stone Curlew on farmland visible from a public footpath. Again, we were quickly able to contact the landowner (who had already noted the birds) and an RSPB Stone Curlew expert who visited the nest to ascertain hatching date. We have thus removed any risk of accidental damage by the farming operations, and can maintain a low-key monitoring operation on the nest. But if it were made public, and regular visitors used the footpath and kept stopping to watch the birds, there is a high risk of disturbance and desertion.

So the message is, do not broadcast the discovery of a rare breeding bird but send in details to our country recorder promptly. We can then take the appropriate decisions based on the sensitivity of the site, the wishes of the landowner, and the particular behavioural characteristics of the species concerned. There is a national monitoring programme run by the Rare Breeding Bird Panel, who are able to advise on these matters if needed. They have lots of information on their website, <http://www.rbbp.org.uk/>, so even if you don't subscribe to British Birds (who have an excellent feature each year on this topic), you can see which species are involved and how to record information. The RBBP are very keen to compile data on all such species, and with some the data collection is rather limited. Very rare species generally get fully documented if they are discovered, as the high rarity status and interest ensures that much information is collected. Good examples would include our latest addition, Common Cranes. This is not the case for many of the less rare species. Some of these species are extremely secretive, however, and very little can be determined from the observations that can be made – Spotted Crake, Black-necked Grebe and Hawfinch (locally very rare, but nationally on the RBBP list despite some reasonable populations), for example. Nonetheless, any such species records are highly valued by the club.

Some 'rare breeders' are relatively common species but have only a small breeding population in the UK – particularly some of the wildfowl that winter here in large numbers but only a few remain to breed. Wigeon, Pintail, Shoveler and Pochard are good examples – most of us would instinctively know that Garganey are rare breeders, but perhaps not think twice about seeing one of the other species in summer. As many of these duck species are quite secretive when breeding, even just seeing a glimpse of one could be very important information – you may see a male Shoveler and not consider sending in the record, while another birder may see a female at the same site the following week and take the same attitude. If both records had been submitted, that would constitute a 'Probable' breeding attempt; just one of the records would constitute a 'Possible' breeding attempt; if neither observer submits their record, we simply would not know about them. Furthermore, if it is a significant record, it may be possible for us to respond to the information and organise a watch to see if the breeding attempt had any success, demonstrated by the presence of ducklings or distinctive behaviour by the adults, even if a nest cannot be seen. You may not be able to go back to the site, but if it is important we can probably find someone who can!

Some of the other rare breeders are relatively common in our area, but are nationally rare, so we may take them for granted but in fact should pay them more attention – good examples of this group would include Marsh Harriers, Water Rail and some of the non-native species such as Muscovy Duck. Although the first two may largely breed on well-monitored nature reserves, where formal monitoring can largely be relied on to determine their breeding status, there are a few records from other sites; I know of a pair of Marsh Harriers at an unlikely location that are now into their eighth breeding season despite nesting right next to a public footpath. As far as we can tell this pair has been kept confidential and has not suffered from any significant disturbance despite the high risk of their location. The records have been maintained by the club and contributed to the RBBP for the national database. This is an important point to

emphasise – the club keeps such records confidential where necessary, either on the insistence of the observer, the landowner or our considered opinion. The non-native species are often overlooked but keeping a watch on them is important from a conservation monitoring perspective. And do not think that just because it is a nature reserve the observations you make aren't important additions to our knowledge – you may still be the only person to see something! We can easily ignore surplus information, but cannot do anything if we don't have the information in the first place. This might particularly apply to the chicks of waders such as Avocet, Little Ringed Plover and Black-tailed Godwit. Chicks are rarely seen, and these species can suffer high levels of predation so may not be around for long. Such a sighting could be the only proof of confirmed breeding.

A final category of rare breeders are those that occur across the countryside, not particularly confined to nature reserves or other birding hotspots. These are particularly under-recorded and we need of all records of these if possible. Good examples would include Hobby, Quail, Firecrest and Black Redstart. Although Hobbies will feed in numbers over good wetland sites with lots of insects and *hirundines* in the spring, by the time they start breeding in the later part of summer they often move out to isolated clumps of trees on farmland and the like. They can be quite secretive during the main nesting period, but the initial display activity and the eventual noisy chicks are relatively easy opportunities to obtain evidence of breeding, without requiring unnecessarily close observation.

One area in which we could do a bit more as a club is to monitor the progress of our rare breeders better, to produce more accurate information in the annual report and to supply to the RBBP. If anyone feels that they could be on a list of contacts available to undertake careful watches of such species, please get in touch. We would want assurances (e.g. a recommendation from a known responsible person) that the site would remain confidential if necessary, and that no approach would be made to the nest without approved consent from Natural England via the BTO licencing system and the landowner – in other words, it's likely to be quite tedious and distant watching. If you've got the time and inclination for such, it would be highly valuable.

***Next indoor meetings:* Friday 12th September, Cottenham Village College**



Facing Extinction: the World's Rarest Birds and the Race to Save Them by Paul Donald

Dr Paul Donald is Principal Conservation Scientist in the RSPB's international research team and is the Editor-in-Chief of the international ornithological journal Ibis. Among his many research interests is the conservation ecology of critically endangered species, and he is the lead author of a recent book on the subject. In this talk he will discuss the causes of rarity in birds and will outline the measures that are being used to prevent their extinction.

Wicken Fen Group ringing

There were netting sessions at the Fen on 15 different days in April. The month's ringing total was 165; further 117 different birds were retrapped, so the overall total for the month was 280. Individual species totals (the first figure new birds, the second retraps) were:

Cuckoo	4, 0	Chiffchaff	13, 5
Great spotted Woodpecker	0, 3	Willow Warbler	3, 0
Pied Wagtail	4, 0	Bearded Tit	1, 0
Wren	6, 6	Long-tailed Tit	1, 12
Duncock	1, 10	Blue Tit	1, 11
Robin	2, 4	Great Tit	1, 19
Whinchat	1, 0	Treecreeper	0, 4
Blackbird	4, 3	House Sparrow	1, 0
Song Thrush	1, 0	Chaffinch	14, 9
Cetti's Warbler	1, 7	Greenfinch	45, 4
Grasshopper Warbler	3, 0	Goldfinch	11, 1
Sedge Warbler	5, 2	Lesser Redpoll	3, 2
Reed Warbler	3, 0	Bullfinch	2, 1
Lesser Whitethroat	2, 0	Reed Bunting	7, 4
Blackcap	23, 9		

East of England Ringers Conference, March 2014

Saturday 29 March saw a hundred or so ringers convene at Huntsman Advanced Materials in Duxford for the first East of England Ringer's Conference since the one organised by the Wicken Fen Group almost exactly ten years ago. This time the hosts were the Upper Cam Ringing Group who organised a splendid programme and provided an excellent home-prepared buffet lunch. A number of people had brought poster displays, and the BTO ran a sales counter for ringing supplies.

There was a good spread of attendees from each of the seven counties which border Cambridgeshire, and a good turnout of local RSPB and BTO professionals. Morning

coffee and afternoon tea breaks, together with a full hour for lunch, provided lots of opportunities for catching up and networking. Tony Yeats introduced the day as a tribute to Roger Isted of the UCRG who so tragically died in a road traffic accident last year; lunchtime wine sales were to be donated to the East Anglian Air Ambulance in memory of Roger.

The sessions themselves were nothing if not content-rich and the morning was mainly about technology. Chris Hewson opened with an information-packed round-up of insights from tracking African migrants, managing to cover Cuckoos, Nightingales and Swifts in some depth in his forty minutes. Then to Ken Smith trying to puzzle out the goings-on with his relict PIT-tagged feeder Tree Sparrow in Hertfordshire. Viola Ross-Smith was also satellite-tracking, this time Lesser Black-backs, including a female on a daily feeding run along the A14 from Landguard to the tip at Milton. Rosemary Setchfield described her RSPB research on Corn Buntings. After lunch the theme switched to BTO surveys and a series of undisguised commercials for greater participation in more focussed ringing and recording. Carl Barimore talked of his own conversion to the rewards of nest-finding at Wicken; Jeff Kew brought new meaning to urban garden ringing with his hundreds of RAS Blackbirds and thousands of Siskins; and Chris Hughes enthused over his satisfaction at twenty-plus years of Constant Effort ringing at Bainton.

The day finished with the customary no-holds-barred ringer Q&A fielded by Jacquie Clark, masterfully chaired by Ringing Committee chairman Ken Smith.

Michael Holdsworth

Corn Bunting Survey

This year, Cambridgeshire birders are joining forces with like-minded folk in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in a novel three-county survey of breeding corn buntings during June and July 2014. The survey website can be accessed at (<http://cornbunting.birdsurvey.org.uk/>) You'll see that this excellent user-friendly site contains field maps / recording forms, survey methodology and health and safety guidance. Please choose only from among those tetrad squares selected for survey - coloured green-brown. contact Andrew Tongue for more info on andrew.tongue@gmail.com

Cambridge International Swift Conference

Following two successful conferences in Berlin in 2010 and 2012, the local Action for Swifts group hosted the 2014 Conference in Cambridge, from 8-10 April, with support from Swift Conservation, the RSPB and South Cambs District Council. There were about 140 participants from 23 countries, from as far afield as

Canada, the USA and Brazil, to Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, as well as representatives from many European countries.

The programme covered a range of topics, including Life Cycle and Migration Studies, Conservation Projects of particular interest to architects and planners, Nest-boxing, Population Monitoring, and a half-day devoted to Swifts in the Arts and to Swift Welfare.

The talks ranged from the scientific, for example, research into the flight mechanism of Swifts as revealed by wind tunnel studies, and fascinating accounts of migration tracking using geo-locators, to the personal and anecdotal, such as an amazing presentation of artwork by the wildlife artist, Jonathan Pomroy, and an erudite investigation of the Swift as a literary icon by Charles Foster.

Presentations were augmented by a wide range of posters describing everything from experimental nest-boxes to Swift rescue initiatives in Tashkent.

The Cambridge Conference also broke new ground. Whereas the Berlin conferences had confined themselves to the Common Swift, we also had presentations dealing with other Palearctic species such as Alpine and Pallid Swifts. And we were intrigued and entertained by our speakers from the New World, who gave us fascinating insights into the lives of Nearctic species like Chimney Swift, Vaux Swift and the relatively uncommon Northern Black Swift.

In this context, everyone was stunned by the presentation of the Brazilian speaker, Renata Biancalana, who described the nineteen swift species to be found in Brazil, only a few of which are properly researched and described; and the incredibly difficult circumstances in which she carries out her research, having to contend with hostile terrain, stultifying bureaucracy, corruption and even danger to life and limb from unsavoury people.

The Conference dinner, in the Old Court dining hall of Caius College, was an experience few will forget, with speakers Andy Clements (BTO director) and Mike McCarthy, environmental journalist of the year from the Independent Newspaper.

The final presentation was by Amnon Hahn about the ceremony that takes place each spring to welcome the Swifts back to their breeding places in the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The film he showed us was so moving that very few people in the audience could avoid a tear or two. The Conference concluded with a stimulating panel discussion.

What was most extraordinary was the passion that the attendees have for the Swift. It is truly an iconic bird, and we should thank our lucky stars that we still have breeding colonies in our area. Now that so many people are becoming aware of the plight of Swifts there is reason for optimism that their decline

might be reversed.

Jake Allsop & Dick Newell

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Dick Newell also writes on Citizen Action for Swifts in the current edition of British Birds, May 2014.

Bulletins - Do we have your email address?

Club members receive a paper-bulletin six times a year, with articles and a summary of records for each two-month period. In addition, a new e-bulletin, with more detailed information, is now published monthly by delivered by email, and the first six editions are openly available [here](#). If members would also like to receive their paper-Bulletin by email please contact the Bulletin editors [Peter Bircham and Chris Brown](#). Please also contact them to discuss articles and news items for the bulletins, but continue to submit any bird records for bulletins to the County Recorder. Next e-bulletin on June 15th.

Cambirds and Peterbirder

[Cambirds](#) is an unmoderated discussion group on Cambridgeshire birds and birding which is independent of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club. You do not need to be a member of the Club to participate in this forum, but you will need a Google account.

[Peterbirder](#) is a Yahoo-based discussion group for birdwatching, bird sightings and ornithology in Peterborough and the surrounding area. The group also welcomes discussion of all other wildlife in the Peterborough area. Peterbirder is not a part of Peterborough Bird Club.

RSPB Centre for Conservation Science

Launched in February 2014, the RSPB's new online hub will direct you to a wealth of projects carried out by RSPB scientists, often in partnership with other research organisations and volunteer field-workers. The RSPB team aims to discover practical solutions to 21st century conservation problems. They do this by identifying the most important problems, discovering their causes, testing potential solutions and ensuring they work when implemented. A search starts by using the drop-down menus based on Themes, Species and Habitats.
