

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 374



Opinions expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of the Club.

RECENT REPORTS MAY AND JUNE 2004

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records, and comments are made by Bruce Martin (Grebes to Wildfowl), Mark Hawkes (Raptors to Coot), Jonathan Taylor (Waders), Steve Cooper (Skuas to Near Passerines and Hybrids and Exotica), Stuart Elsom (Larks to Thrushes), Mike Foley (Warblers to Tits) and David Wege (Wood Nuthatch to Buntings). If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the relevant county recorder (addresses on back page).

MAY & JUNE

Strong wader passage in early May produced some excellent records including a Kentish Plover at the Cam Washes and exceptionally high counts of Bar-tailed Godwit and Dotterel. Cetti's Warbler bred in the county for the first time in 20 years and a remarkable 4 pairs of Pochard were found nesting at Kingfisher's Bridge. Observations of juvenile Little Egret suggest that this species may have bred in Cambridgeshire for the first time. Little Egret nesting in Buckinghamshire in 2003 were

thought to be one of the first pairs to breed inland, so Cambs may not be far behind!

BULLETIN by EMAIL

Would you like to receive your bulletin by email? If so please send your email address to the bulletin editor, Vicki Harley, (vicki.harley@care4free.net).

Grey Partridge by Graham Easy



Numbers in brackets indicate May and June maximums.

DIVERS TO HERONS

Little Grebe Recorded at 9 sites with the highest counts of 17 at Paxton Pits. Up to 16 pairs reported breeding or holding territories.

Great Crested Grebe At Fen Drayton GP (25, 32), Grafham Water (100, 65) and Roswell Pits (8, 12). Also reported from 10 other sites and breeding reported from 9.

Red-necked Grebe A male was reported at a private site in the county in May.

Black-necked Grebe Two birds in summer plumage were at Paxton Pits on May 30th.

Great Cormorant Noted at 9 sites.

Great Bittern Heard booming at 3 sites in the county, plus a boomer at a new site for 1 week in June.

Little Egret Reported from 7 sites during the period with a county record of 25 at the Ouse Washes on Jun 20th (including 2 juveniles, which are believed to have been born in the area). If this is confirmed, it will be the first breeding record in the county.

Grey Heron Birds reported from 16 sites.

White Stork One flew over Bassingbourn on May 30th.

Eurasian Spoonbill One flew over the Ouse Washes on May 31st.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Fen Drayton GP (52, 237), the latter figure mainly birds arriving for their annual moult. The only other double figure count was 60 at Grafham Water. Brood were reported from 12 sites.

Pink-footed Goose Six birds of unknown origin were seen at the Nene Washes on May 3rd. The lateness of the date suggesting they were feral.

Greylag Goose Counts in the hundreds were noted at Fen Drayton GP (327), Kingfisher's Bridge (175), Paxton Pits (305) and Somersham GP (250). As reported in the last bulletin, it has been another successful season with many immature birds seen.

Canada Goose Reported from 9 sites.

Barnacle Goose Feral birds reported from 7 sites, mostly singles but 3 flew north over Earith on Jun 6th.

Brent Goose One bird was seen briefly at St Ives GP on May 8th.

Egyptian Goose A pair with young again at Chippenham Park. Other pairs were seen again at Fen Drayton GP on Jun 28th and at the Ouse Washes in May. And the single bird continued to frequent the Cam Washes/Wicken Fen area.

Ruddy Shelduck One was at Wicken Fen on 3 dates in May.

Common Shelduck Double figure counts were 35 at Prior's Fen on May 6th, 30 at the Ouse Washes, Earith on May 18th and 25 at Grafham Water on Jun 2nd. Broods were seen at the Cam Washes Upware (2), Grafham Water (1), Kingfisher's Bridge (2) and Over Fen (2).

Mandarin Duck A male was on the River Lark at Isleham on May 31st.

Eurasian Wigeon Apart from 8 birds on the Ouse Washes on May 31st, 2 birds were at Paxton Pits during June, one being an injured male and singles were seen at Fen Drayton GP, Kingfisher's Bridge and Wicken Fen.

Gadwall At Fen Drayton GP (14, 33) and Kingfisher's Bridge (3, 28). The only other count in double figures was 58 at Grafham Water on Jun 2nd. Two broods were reported from Grafham Water and 4 at Kingfisher's Bridge.

Eurasian Teal Apart from 58 birds at Wicken Fen on May 2nd and 95 on the Ouse Washes on Jun 22nd, single figures were noted at 4 other sites.

Mallard At Fen Drayton GP (74, 154) and Kingfisher's Bridge (75, 64). The Cam Washes Upware had 153 on May 17th, this being the only other three-figure count. Broods were reported from 10 sites.

Northern Pintail A single bird was noted on the Ouse Washes between May 2nd and 14th.

Garganey Noted at 10 sites with a maximum of 6 at the Ouse Washes on May 14th. No breeding reports were received.

Northern Shoveler Single figures were reported from 8 sites and breeding from 2.

Red-crested Pochard A pair continued to be at Paxton Pits during the period.

Common Pochard Single figures were reported from 8 sites with 4 pairs breeding at Kingfisher's Bridge. As an uncommon breeding bird in the county, this is a remarkable record.

Tufted Duck At Fen Drayton GP (39, 35) and smaller numbers were noted at 11 other sites and breeding at 4.

Greater Scaup A female was present at the Ouse Washes on May 6th and 14th.

Long-tailed Duck A drake was present at Grafham Water from May 13th to 15th.

Black Scoter A female was on the Earith section on the Ouse Washes on May 2nd.

Goosander A male was flushed from the New Bedford River at the Ouse Washes near Chain Corner on May 12th.

Ruddy Duck Reports of 1–3 from 10 sites.

RAPTORS

European Honey-Buzzard A single flew over Orton Southgate on May 13th, and one that flew over Wicken Fen early on May 31st may have been the same as that over Stretham around midday (if so, where had it been in between?)

Red Kite Singles were seen at Dillington on May 2nd, Fowlmere on May 19th, Sawtry on May 19th, Hilton on May 20th, Orton Brimbles on May 29th, Eynesbury on May 31st, over the A1 (M) on Jun 3rd, Great Raveley on Jun 4th, Paxton Pits/Village on Jun 8th, Caxton Gibbet on Jun 12th and Wittering on Jun 13th.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier Recorded from 20 sites during the period. The main concentrations were at

the usual breeding areas, although presumed migrants/wanderers were seen at Paxton Pits on May 2nd, Chippenham Fen on May 4th, Carr Dyke (Werrington) on May 7th, Farcet Fen 2 on May 12th, Fowlmere on May 14th, Barleycraft GP on May 16th and Lode on Jun 24th.

Montagu's Harrier Single males were seen at Smithy Fen (Cottenham) on May 31st and Nene Washes on Jun 1st – despite the vast areas of potential breeding habitat available within the county, this species has not held territory in the county since 2000.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk Records from just 18 sites, all involving 1–2 birds.

Common Buzzard Recorded from 20 sites (being reported more frequently now than Eurasian Sparrowhawk!). Numbers ranged from 1–4 birds, with the spread of records coming from all areas of the county, apart from the fenland areas, where they remain scarce.

Osprey Singles over Paxton Pits on May 2nd and 23rd and Grafham Water on May 13th.

Common Kestrel Reported from 26 sites, all involving 1–2 birds. Thankfully this species remains common and widespread throughout all areas of the county.

Merlin Singles were seen at Chrishall Grange on May 2nd, Nene Washes on May 6th and Farcet Fen on May 12th – all presumably departing migrants.

Eurasian Hobby This charismatic little falcon remains the most reported raptor within the county, being seen at 32 sites during the period. Peak counts included 10 at Paxton Pits on May 17–18th, 9 at Fen Drayton on May 7th and 8 at Wicken Fen in early May, all other reports were of 1–4 birds.

Peregrine Falcon Reported from Ouse Washes on May 10th (2) and Jun 15th, and Wicken Fen on May 21st–22nd.

GAMEBIRDS TO COOT

Red-legged Partridge Recorded from 12 sites, with numbers ranging from 1–12 birds. Breeding of this species is probably under-reported.

Grey Partridge Recorded from 20 sites. Numbers ranging from 1–6 birds.

Common Quail Two were seen and heard at Waterbeach Fen from May 23rd–24th, with singles recorded at Woodwalton Fen on May 8th, Nene Washes on May 19th, Knapwell on May 25th, Malton Golf Course on May 31st, Sutton Gault on Jun 1st and Smithy Fen (Cottenham) on Jun 13th.

Water Rail Reported from just 5 sites, with numbers ranging from 1–19 birds.

Common Pheasant Reports of 1–19 birds from just 6 sites.

Spotted Crake A calling male was on Ouse Washes at Sutton Gault from May 2nd–6th, with probably the same bird at Earith on May 8th. On the Nene Washes up to 4 males were present from mid-May.

Corncrake Singles were heard at Comberton on May 3rd, Great Paxton on May 7th and Barrington

on May 23rd. At 2 other sites, birds were present in possible breeding habitat, 1 on May 18th, and the other for c.3 weeks in May–June.

Common Moorhen Reported from 11 sites, with no exceptional counts reported.

Common Coot Reported from 13 sites. Peak counts included 305 at Grafham Water on Jun 27th, 255 at Fen Drayton GP on Jun 20th and 145 at Kingfisher's Bridge on Jun 30th.

WADERS

Eurasian Oystercatcher Breeding reported from Nene Washes (4+), Paxton Pits (3), Over Fen (2) and Kingfisher's Bridge (1).

Pied Avocet Breeding at 5 localities, but mainly with little success. Largest non-breeding groups were 7 at Nene Washes on May 10th and Cam Washes on June 15th.

Little Plover Breeding reported from at least 5 localities, no particular passage; largest group was 12 at Cam Washes on June 29th.

Ringed Plover Breeding reported at 4 sites, main locality being Paxton Pits with several nests observed.

Tundra Ringed Plover Reported from May 16th to 29th from 4 sites with max. of 12 at Paxton Pits.

Kentish Plover A superb find at the Cam Washes (Upware) on May 1st was a female and the first county appearance since 1968 (part of a strong wader passage on that date).

Eurasian Dotterel At Foxton a memorable moment was had on May 3rd when 32 were heard then seen to drop in to a sugar-beet field (the largest flock in south Cambs for well over 100 years!), 26 still present next day and 9 on 5th.

European Golden Plover Single at Long Drove (Cottenham) on May 31st.

Grey Plover In May, 3 at Cam Washes, 2 at Wicken Fen and single at Paxton Pits on 1st, 2 at Nene Washes on 2nd, singles at Ouse Washes on 10th and 14th and 2 again at Wicken Fen on 23rd and single on 26th.

Northern Lapwing A good spread of breeding pairs reported from 16 sites including a number of arable breeders; the main locality, the Nene Washes, held 279 pairs – well down on 2003!

Red Knot Single at Cam Washes on May 1st–2nd and 2 Ouse Washes on May 3rd.

Sanderling Very good May passage as follows – 3 at Barleycraft GP on 1st, 1 on 16th, 3 at Paxton Pits on 8th, singles on 13th, 16th and 26th, 3 on 30th, Grafham Water 2 on 12th, singles on 18th and 21st, 5 on 25th and 1 on 26th, in June at Paxton Pits on 2nd (2) and 1 on 12th.

Little Stint Single at Paxton Pits on June 17th.

Temminck's Stint Exceptional passage in May as follows – Nene Washes 1 on 1st, Barleycraft GP singles on 2nd and 16th, Paxton Pits 3 on 14th and one on 20th and Wicken Fen 6 on 16–17th, one on 18th and 2 on 23rd.

Curlew Sandpiper One at Wicken Fen on May 16–17th and 2 at Paxton Pits on May 18th.

Dunlin Strong passage – largest groups 47 at Cam Washes on May 1st, 41 at Kingfisher's Bridge on 10th, 26 at Paxton Pits (2–23 through May), Wicken Fen up to 12 in May and Barleycraft GP 10 on 2nd. Latest at Paxton Pits and Over Fen on June 6th.

Ruff Very scarce, Cam Washes up to 4 in May and single in June, 1–3 at Nene and Ouse Washes and Wicken Fen and 2 at Paxton Pits including a displaying male.

Common Snipe Drumming at Nene Washes (150+) Chippenham Fen (3), Cam Washes (2–3), also recorded at Over Fen and Paxton Pits in May.

Eurasian Woodcock A survey at Chippenham Fen found a probable 11 pairs, 4+ roding at Wicken Fen and 2 at Woodwalton Fen and 1 at Chippenham Park.

Black-tailed Godwit Breeding population at Nene Washes reached 42 pairs (c30 juveniles fledged), a flooded Ouse Washes forced the few pairs to breed on outside arable. Non-breeding flocks at Ouse Washes (20, 65) Wicken Fen (46, 0), Kingfisher's Bridge (0, 32 – mostly *limosa*) Cam Washes (7, 30), Barleycraft GP (25, 0).

Bar-tailed Godwit Total of 119 in 4 groups (largest 87) at Cam Washes (Upware) on May 1st were a county record for birds 'on the deck' (record is 140 over Hilton Apr 1982). Others in May – Barleycraft GP, Nene Washes (3), Paxton Pits (4) on 1st, Paxton Pits 2 on 2nd and Wicken Fen on 14th and 20th.

Whimbrel Passage concentrated between May 1st and 15th with 1–3 birds over 8 sites, largest group was 12 over Cambourne on 10th.

Eurasian Curlew Two at Paxton Pits on June 27th, other singles in June at Fen Drayton GP, Fulbourn, Kingfisher's Bridge and Nene Washes.

Common Redshank Breeding pairs – Nene Washes 160, Kingfisher's Bridge 6, Over 2, Over Fen GP 1, Grafham Water 1, also present though not recorded as breeding at Wicken Fen (25), Cam Washes (Upware) (28), Paxton Pits GP (8), Fen Drayton GP (5).

Common Greenshank Largest groups were 15 over Chippenham Park on May 1st, 7 at Wicken Fen on 1st and 1–6 on many dates through May, in addition 1–3 at five sites in May and singles at Wicken Fen and Ouse Washes from June 14th.

Green Sandpiper In May, 1–2 at Wicken Fen, in June 3 at Maxey GP on 30th and 1–2 at 6 sites from 16th.

Wood Sandpiper Recorded at 6 sites from May 2nd to 23rd with maxima of 3 at Wicken Fen and 2's at Cam Washes (Upware) and Nene Washes.

Common Sandpiper In May, from 2nd to 26th, 1–3 at 13 sites; in June from 26th at 4 sites with max of 6 at Fen Drayton GP.

Ruddy Turnstone From May 3rd to 31st, 6 at Barleycraft GP on 16th, 5 at Paxton Pits GP on 21st (at least 7 other individuals on 12 dates), Over Fen GP 4 on 14th, Grafham Water, 1 on 3rd and 2 on 14th, Maxey on 18th and Ouse Washes on 31st.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull This species showed no sign of colonization again this year; the only record a 3cy came from Paxton Pits on May 5–8th.

Little Gull The second notable movement of the spring occurred on May 1st–4th with birds reported from Barleycraft GP (8), Block Fen (1), Grafham Water (4), Kingfisher's Bridge (25), Ouse Washes (2) and Paxton Pits (14+). In June a 2cy was at Paxton Pits on 5th with a 3cy there on 19th.

Black-headed Gull At Kingfisher's Bridge, 114 nests noted during the period a slight decrease on last year, 6 nests at Fen Drayton were washed out by the monsoon weather conditions. Breeding data has not yet been received for other known colonies within the county.

Mew Gull Single 2cy birds were noted at Barleycraft GP and Paxton Pits up to May 8th. In June a 2cy was again noted at Paxton Pits on 8th and a 3cy there on 19th. A 2cy was present at Grafham Water for most of the month.

Lesser Black-backed Gull The county's own roof top colony in the Peterborough area was said to be into double figures this year. Again numbers reported did not reflect the passage that takes place through Cambs during May or the influx of non-breeding/immature birds including *intermedius* that annually starts to gain momentum during June, the 125 at Kingfisher's Bridge on June 1st was the highest count received. Several small flocks noted heading west/southwest showed that there were regular movements of this species throughout June.

Baltic Gull A 3cy bird showing good characteristics of nominate '*fuscus*' was photographed at Dogsthorpe Tip on May 19th it will have to run the gauntlet of BBRC however and also the debate on moult diagnostics.

Herring Gull A pair summered around the roof top gull colony in the Peterborough area raising the prospect that this species will soon be a county breeding species, who would have thought that! Otherwise scarce in the county during the period so away from landfill sites, 5 at Paxton Pits on June 13th were noteworthy. An adult bird on Swaffham Prior Fen on June 15th seemed a little out of place given the surroundings.

Western Yellow-legged Gull Poorly recorded for a change but a good series of records from Kingfisher's Bridge with singles noted throughout the period. On June 30th a 3cy and five 2cy birds noted at Long Drove Cottenham again goes to indicate the influx of non-breeding/immature gulls into Cambs during May/June.

Greater Black-backed Gull Up to 5 noted during June at Kingfisher's Bridge.

Black-legged Kittiwake An adult at Godmanchester GP on May 3rd must have surprised the observer.

Common Tern Ten pairs nested at Kingfisher's Bridge but no breeding reported from Fen Drayton GP despite up to 25 birds there at the end of May.

Early May saw gatherings of up to 30 and 35 at Ferry Meadows and Grafham Water respectively.

Arctic Tern The passage of this species noted at the end of April continued during the first half of May with up to 65 noted at Grafham Water on 3rd, 18 flying north at Earith on 8th and 14 northeast over the Birdlife offices at Girton on 12th, also 1–5 noted at 8 other sites up to May 13th. Exceptionally, a 2cy portlandica type bird was at Paxton Pits on June 17–20th proving once again that this age group does not stay exclusively on its wintering grounds and thus laying the myth to rest hopefully.

Little Tern A Paxton Pits exclusive this period with singles on May 2nd and 12th with 2 on 16th.

Black Tern Low numbers 1–4 reported from 7 sites up to May 29th when a bird was noted at Maxey GP. The sole June record came from Paxton Pits on 6th.

NEAR PASSERINES

Feral Pigeon Noted at Elizabeth Bridge, Cambridge (70) and 120+ regular in Wisbech town centre. Otherwise observer apathy prevails towards this species.

Stock Pigeon Surprisingly only 1 pair noted nesting at Paxton Pits, a site that holds good numbers in winter. A good indication of fenland breeding numbers comes from Over where this species was reported present at 10 sites in June.

Common Wood Pigeon How many people can answer the question 'how many pairs breed on your patch'? Well, Paxton Pits has 45 pairs can anyone match that?

Eurasian Collared Dove In Melbourn, a quick drive around the village produced 50+ pairs in June, again can anyone match that?

European Turtle Dove A pleasing 60 records from 38 predominately fenland sites, but a sobering reality check comes from Fowlmere NR where only 2 territories were noted this year compare that to the 11 territories there in 1995.

Common Cuckoo Reports received from 28 sites with good numbers noted at Fen Drayton GP (6), Paxton Pits (5) and Queen Adelaide (4) these however were totally eclipsed by the 15 noted along the River Lark at Isleham!

Barn Owl Records received so far indicate 40 pairs breeding with data to come from some strongholds of this species: an excellent result. A special mention should go to Jake Allsop for the data provided for 26 pairs including a brood of 6 noted at Earith.

Little Owl Encouragingly reported from 32 sites with breeding noted at many; fenland records though seemed a bit scarce. Hopefully a bout of crepuscular birding will account for many more records, particularly of noisy family groups.

Tawny Owl Records received from 16 with confirmed breeding at Eversden wood, Haddenham, Over and Wendy.

Long-eared Owl. Reported from only 6 sites, confirmed breeding noted at 3.

Short-eared Owl A single noted at Stretham on May 10th.

European Nightjar Reported from Verrall's fen at Wicken Fen on June 7th and 9th.

Common Swift The inclement weather resulted in large feeding concentrations in the first half of May, 200+ being noted at Sutton Gault on 4th and Cowley Rd, Cambridge on 11th. The weather also resulted in a delayed return to breeding sites; for example, birds didn't return to a site at Addenbrookes until May 19th.

Kingfisher Breeding reported from Bait's Bite Lock, Barleycraft GP, Kingfisher's Bridge, R. Lark Isleham and Paxton Pits where 3 pairs bred. Unfortunately, a bird at Bolton's Pit, Cambridge died after hitting a window.

Green Woodpecker Haddenham and Paxton Pits held 6 pairs during the period with 3 pairs noted at Kingfisher's Bridge and Over.

Greater Spotted Woodpecker Reported from 28 sites, 6 pairs noted breeding at Paxton Pits. Reported visiting garden feeders at Elm, Guilden Morden, Haddenham, Little Paxton, March and Newnham.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Elusive as ever, noted only from Monks Wood on June 3rd and a female at Priory Park St Neots, on June 27th were the only records.

PASSERINES

Sky Lark Reported from 15 sites with a maximum of 24 at Lark Rise Farm, Barton on May 25th.

Sand Martin Noted throughout the period with maximum of 400 birds noted at Block Fen on Jun 28th.

Barn Swallow Noted from at least 14 sites with a maximum of 100 recorded at Cam Washes and Barleycraft in early May.

Red-rumped Swallow One was seen briefly at Ouse Washes on May 6th. If accepted, this will represent the second county record following a recent review of the species. The first was at the same site in 2002 so surely it has to be worth checking this site in May 2005?

House Martin Good numbers noted at several sites with the maximum count of 47 active nests at a site in Cambridge in mid-June.

Meadow Pipit Records were received from 6 sites. Breeding confirmed at 2 sites.

Yellow Wagtail Recorded at 15 sites with a maximum of 31 at Barleycraft on May 1st. Individuals of the 'Blue-headed' subspecies were noted in May at Farcet Fen, Kneesworth, Sutton Gault and Swaffham Prior Fen.

Grey Wagtail Reports received from at least 7 sites with most records concerning breeding birds.

Pied Wagtail The records received so far seem to indicate a good breeding season

Nightingale Noted at 12 sites. The maximum was 26 singing males at Paxton Pits.

Black Redstart Recorded at 1 site during the period.

Common Redstart A single was at Paxton Pits on May 2nd.

Whinchat Singles noted in May at Brampton on 6th, Werrington on 7th, Wicken Fen on 11th, Farcet Fen on 12th with 2 present next day, Nene Washes on 13th and Werrington on 18th.

Northern Wheatear Recorded in May at 8 sites with a minimum of 30 individuals involved. The highest count received was from Sutton North Fen with 5 present on May 4th.

Ring Ouzel An excellent record concerned a flock of 5 moving through Shelford on May 8th.

Common Blackbird Records were received from 15 sites. A noteworthy record was from Priory Park, St. Neots with 50 fledged juveniles noted on Jun 9th.

Song Thrush At least 20 breeding records received so far.

Mistle Thrush Reports were received from 12 sites with 1–2 being the norm. Only record of note was from Coton with 25 on Jun 8th.

Cetti's Warbler One breeding pair in the Fens (site withheld, last record was 1984). Also an individual at another site (withheld).

Common Grasshopper Warbler Reported from 9 sites (Bainton GP, Fen Drayton GP, Little Wilbraham Fen, Nene Washes (Eldernell), Ouse Washes, Paxton Pits, Stretham, Wicken Fen, Woodwalton Fen).

Sedge Warbler Reported from 17 sites, with maximum of 86 singing males at Paxton Pits on June 30th.

Eurasian Reed Warbler About 20 singing males were recorded at Earith GP on May 9th, 10 at Mere farm (Ramsey Mere) on May 28th, and 37 along the Lark river, Isleham on May 31st. Also from 18 other sites in low numbers.

Lesser Whitethroat Generally, individuals were encountered (15 sites). Two singing males were noted at Fen Drayton GPs, 2 and 3 males at two Haddenham sites. Paxton Pits boasted 6 birds on May 11th, with 10 breeding pairs on June 30th.

Common Whitethroat Noted commonly throughout, higher numbers were 24 at River Lark (Isleham), c. 20 males at Haddenham Fen, and 14 at Farcet Fen.

Garden Warbler Recorded at Fen Drayton GP (16 territorial males), Ferry Meadows CP (6 birds), Gault Hole (Mepal), Grafham Water, Haddenham, Kingfisher's Bridge, Landbeach GP (4 singing), Lark Rise Farm (Barton), Marsh Lane GP (6), Ouse Washes (Fortrey's Hall), Paxton Pits (42 breeding pairs, June 30th), and at Wicken Fen.

Blackcap Recorded by 17 observers, including 11 males noted at Fen Drayton GP, 8 males at Kingfisher's Bridge, 10 singing males at Chippenham Park (May 1st), and 8 at River Lark (Isleham).

Common Chiffchaff Undoubtedly under-recorded, this was reported from 16 sites, with 6 territorial males at Fen Drayton GP on May 25th.

Willow Warbler Reported from Comberton, Fen Drayton GP, Grafham Water, Haddenham, Kingfisher's Bridge, Landbeach GP, Monks Hardwick (St. Neots), Lark Rise Farm (Barton), Paxton Pits, and Wisbech. Forty pairs at Paxton Pits in June, and 8 territorial males at Fen Drayton GP (May 25th) were the highest counts.

Goldcrest At 8 sites, with a maximum of 3 singling males at Chippenham Park (May 1st).

Spotted Flycatcher This sought-after bird was noted at Cam Washes (Upware), Chippenham Park, Farcet Fen, Madingley, Nene Washes (Eldernell), Nene Washes (March Farmers), Newnham (Cambridge), Over Paxton Pits, Priory Park (St. Neots), Stretham, Sutton Gault, Toft, Wandlebury and Wisbech.

Bearded Tit One at Wicken Fen on May 16th.

Long-tailed Tit Records from 6 sites, including 8 River Lark, Isleham.

Marsh Tit Hardwick Wood (1+ adults with young). Hayley Wood (2), Paxton Pits (2 adults + 2 young) The Gloucesters (Wimpole) (2), and Woodwalton Fen (2).

Willow Tit A single record at the Ouse Washes on May 3rd (RSPB).

Coal Tit One or two birds were reported from 5 sites.

Blue Tit Reported from 7 locations, Newnham (Cambridge) held c. 12 birds including juveniles.

Great Tit Paxton Pits held 38 breeding pairs on June 30th. Twenty+ birds including young were seen at Hayley Wood on June 20th.

Wood Nuthatch Records received from Chippenham Park, where a pair was noted as breeding on May 1st, and from The Gloucesters (Wimpole) where one was seen on Jun 27th.

Eurasian Treecreeper Seemingly elusive during this period, recorded only from Paxton Pits, where 3 pairs were noted as breeding, Cam Washes (Upware) where a bird was singing on May 7th, and Overcote where 2 birds were seen on May 15th.

Golden Oriole One lucky observer watched a male for 5 minutes in a garden in the centre of Cambridge on May 2nd. Another bird was at Ramsey Heights May 4–6th.

Eurasian Jay Recorded at 15 sites with no counts of more than 4 birds.

Black-billed Magpie Records come from 4 sites, with Paxton Pits notching up 12 breeding pairs.

Eurasian Jackdaw Records received from just 3 sites. A pre-roost gathering of 420 at Chrishall Grange during June is notable.

Rook Records received from just 4 sites. A pre-roost gathering of 490 (including 140 juveniles) at Chrishall Grange during June is notable.

Carrion Crow Records received from just 7 sites.

Common Raven A bird reported in the visitor book at Wicken Fen on May 23rd remains unverified until further details are supplied.

Common Starling Highest count received was of 2,000 in a roosting flock at Paxton Pits on Jun 24th.

House Sparrow Highest counts received were of

50+ at Ickleton Grange on Jun 14th and 45+ at Elm during May.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow Recorded from 11 sites. Maximum counts were of 7–8 pairs at Chatteris on Jun 13th.

Chaffinch Highest count was of 63 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits.

European Greenfinch Highest count was of 22 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits.

European Goldfinch Highest count was of 10+ at Elm in May.

Common Linnet Records were received from over 10 sites. Peak counts included 60+ at Over Fen GP in May, and 30+ at Elm, also in May.

Lesser Redpoll A single bird was recorded at the Cam Washes (Upware) on May 3rd.

Common Crossbill Two birds were recorded flying over Peterborough city centre on May 21st.

Common Bullfinch Reported from over 10 sites, with 4 pairs at Fen Drayton GP on May 25th the highest count.

Yellowhammer Recorded at 15 sites. Highest count was of 12–13 birds at Monks Hardwick (St Neots) throughout the period.

Reed Bunting Recorded at 18 sites. Highest counts were of 35 breeding pairs at Paxton Pits, 21 birds at Fen Drayton GP on May 25th, and 13–14 birds at Lark Rise Farm (Barton) throughout the period.

Corn Bunting Records were received from 24 sites. Thirty birds in a feeding flock at Barleycraft GP on May 13th; this was a late date for such a flock. Otherwise, highest counts were of 25 at Haydon Grange on May 4th, and 22 at Chatteris on 25th May.

Contributors: Richard Allison, Jake Allsop, Robert Arbon, Paul Atkinson, Louise Bacon, Ian Barton, Matt Best, Peter Bircham, James Cadbury, Robert Coleman, Ade Cooper, Steve Cooper, Ian Delgado, Pat Doody, Steve Dudley, Ian Ellis, Stuart Elsom, Dr Mike Foley, Don Gardener, Will George, David Griffiths, Kevin Harris, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Peter Herkenrath, Jem Holding, Pete Holt, David Hopkins, Julian Hughes, Michael Jennings, Charlie Kitchin, Jim Lawrence, John Le Gassick, Vince Lea, Jono Leadley, George Lendrum, Stuart & Rita Lingard, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Bruce & Gwen Martin, Paul Mason, David McKee, Will Miles, Mark Missin, Dick Newell, John Oates, John Parslow, Rob Partridge, Richard Patient, Mark Peck, Michael Price, Graeme Reed, Dr Gareth Rees Tony Roberts, Kathleen Rosewarne, Paul Rule, Bob & Ann Scott, Clive Sinclair, Brian Stone, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne, George Walthew, Mark Ward, P. M. Warrington

Apologies to anyone whose name has been omitted. Any records received after the deadline date may not appear in the Bulletin though the observers may be acknowledged. They will be entered on the Clubs database for the Annual Report.



Bulletin bird: Kentish Plover on the Cam Washes

John Oates

It was a case of third time lucky for me at the Cam Washes on May 1st 2004. My first visit was shortly after dawn and produced a nice selection of waders, including 8 Bar-tailed Godwits and a Grey Plover. I had been hoping for an early Temminck's Stint, which would have been a new local patch bird for me. My next visit was mid-morning following a call from Chris Martin. He had seen a large flock of Bar-tailed Godwits and a summer plumaged Knot. All were still there when I arrived. The Bar-tailed Godwits were fabulous – many were summer plumaged males and it was easily my biggest inland flock, numbering 87. Something out of the ordinary was happening. I had to drag myself away, but managed to get back for an hour or so during the afternoon. I joined Bruce and Gwen Martin, and a few other birders who were enjoying the Barwit bonanza. At about 2pm I saw an unusual looking 'ringed' plover dart between two clumps of rush. It was small, very pale and seemed to lack any black in the head pattern. I blurted out "What's this plover?" but it had gone. It had to be a Kentish Plover. A quick change of my position and I got onto it again. "It's a female Kentish!" This was very good indeed! The black legs, fine black bill and stumpy rear end all helped confirm the identification. There was no breast band as such, but two brown patches restricted to the sides and these clearly did not meet in the middle. It was far too small to worry about it being a Sand Plover!

I got the other birders onto it and we enjoyed some good, but rather distant, views. Bruce and I made lots of phone calls and sent many text messages to get the news out. Though not officially considered

to be a national rarity, Kentish Plover is extremely scarce these days, so it was twitched by a number of birders, including plenty of Cambs listers. It was last seen at about 5.30pm, when Richard Patient watched it fly off with a number of other small waders. There were plenty of observers looking the following day, but sadly in vain. This illustrates nicely how easily rare birds like this can slip through the net and the huge amount of luck needed to find them. Most sites in Cambs can go many hours or sometimes even days between visits by birders.

This was the tenth record of Kentish Plover in Cambridgeshire and the first since 1968. The majority have been single birds, though there were two together at Cambridge Sewage Farm in April 1950.

Birding Grafham Water

Mark Hawkes

Grafham Water is the third largest area of inland water in England, surpassed only by Kielder Reservoir, Northumberland and Rutland Water, Leicestershire. It was created as recently as 1962, when construction of the dam began, but the reservoir was not filled to its current level until 1966. The reservoir has about 9 miles of shoreline; however, most of it is viewable using the cycle-path that encircles it. Located just west of the A1 between Huntingdon and St. Neots, it's best accessed via the B661 at Buckden. There are four main car parks around the reservoir, but by far the most useful is Mander car park (TL143672), located just west of Perry village. This car park is closest to the Wildlife Trust Centre and the adjoining nature reserve. It is also here that the new fishing centre can be found, with a café (open 7 days a week, with good food), toilets (including disabled) and an outdoor clothing/fishing tackle shop. From here, it is possible to walk around the nature reserve trail to Dudney hide (TL137677), and into Dudney and Littless Wood (an SSSI status ancient woodland). On the south shore, between Perry and the A1 is Plummer car park (TL163666) and on the east shore between Grafham village and the A1 is Marlow car park (TL167681), both of which give access to the dam. The north shore is best accessed from Hill Farm car park (TL148694); however, this is now a restricted parking area. Another area worth checking is the lagoons; however, access is, by rights, restricted due to work by Anglian Water. All the above areas are worth checking during a visit; however, this can be time consuming, so a visit to Mander car park/Dudney Hide and the dam are certainly the most productive, and will give a good over-view of what's around.

To date 249 species have been recorded at the site, and I personally have seen 191 of them between 1999 and 2004. During the late-1960s to 80s Grafham Water was *the* prime site in the county and consistently produced an array of rare and scarce birds, including Ring-necked and Ferruginous Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Surf Scoter, Spotted Crake, Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Marsh, Least and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Wilson's Phalarope, Roseate, Caspian and Whiskered Terns, Shore Lark, Richard's Pipit, Bluethroat, Wryneck and Red-backed Shrike as well as impressive numbers of wildfowl during the winter. However, in recent times its track record has dipped slightly; the milder winters, wetter summers and increased disturbance have all had an impact, and the numbers of wintering wildfowl have decreased dramatically.

The scrubby areas around the trail have a small population of Nightingales, and the woodlands hold all the regular species, with occasional Redstarts, Firecrests, breeding owls and a Great Grey Shrike in 2003. However, the main attraction at Grafham Water, is the water. The reservoir is good during the winter for wildfowl: Goosander are regular and Smew are occasional visitors; scarce grebes are annual, especially Red-necked and divers very occasionally turn-up; Red-breasted Merganser and Velvet Scoter occur rarely during passage periods; and Garganey are usually present during spring and summer. Wader numbers vary from year to year, and are usually best in autumn when the water level drops, although many find the dam good for feeding when the water level is high, including Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Sanderling and Turnstone, and the site is also *the* prime Purple Sandpiper hot-spot in Cambs (11 records). Phalaropes are occasional visitors, with recent records of both Red-necked and Grey. The dam is also attractive to regular passage Rock Pipits and very

occasionally a Snow Bunting. Ospreys and Red Kites are also annual, although most are only seen as they pass through on passage.

Grafham Water is also a good site for particular groups of birds. Firstly it is probably best known for its inland seabird records, including a Sooty Shearwater in 1988 (only British inland record), Leach's Petrel (1979, '83, '85, '91) a probable Long-tailed Skua in 2002, Pomarine Skua (1976, '85, '87, '91) and Little Auk (1988). Also, one of the highlights of my time at Grafham Water, was a Storm Petrel in 2002. During the 1987 October gales, it produced impressive numbers of seabirds, including 8+ Sabine's Gulls and over 15 Grey Phalaropes. It also has a good reputation for Manx Shearwater, Fulmar, Gannet, Arctic and Great Skua, Brent Goose and all the sea-ducks, including Eider (1987, '88, '89, '93). Furthermore it is one of the best sites in England to see inland Common Scoters. They are annual and occur throughout the year, with some making protracted stays, and sometimes occurring in small groups (peak count of 64 in November 1988). I have seen around 100 here between 1999 and 2004.

Secondly, terns are another feature of the reservoir, with Commons present in large numbers, and up to 200 Arctic Terns have been recorded together during spring. Black Terns are regular in both spring and autumn, including 440 in September 1992, 270 in September 1994 and 240 in May 1997, but much smaller numbers are more usual, and its rarer cousin, White-winged Black Tern, has been recorded in 1976, '81, '91, '93 and two in 2000. Both Little and Sandwich Terns are almost annual, however other terns remain extreme rarities with just singles Roseates in 1976 and 1977, Caspian in 1982 and 1991, and Whiskered in 1977 and 1979.

Lastly, the reservoir can be good for gull-watching, usually from Mander car park, the lagoons, or Plummer car park, but they can be distant, and a telescope is required. In mid-winter it is likely that 25,000+ gulls roost here, but increased coverage has uncovered regular Mediterranean, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls. Little Gulls occur throughout the year, and the site is also good for Yellow-legged Gulls during autumn and winter, with Caspian Gulls now being found annually. Sabine's Gull was also recorded during the autumn of 2000 (as well as 1987). Grafham Water also lays claim to the first Ring-billed Gull in Cambridgeshire in 1991.

I have had many personal highlights over the 5 years it has been my 'patch'. Some are of rare birds that I have found, including Great White Egret in 2002, 2 Grey Phalaropes, Gannet, 2 Velvet Scoters, 5 Fulmars, 2 Great Skuas and an Arctic Skua, although there have been the frustrations too, including that probable Long-tailed Skua which flew straight through before the identification could be confirmed. Others include being one of only 3 county birders to have seen Storm Petrel within the county, getting up early on a frosty morning in the winter to carry out monthly WeBS counts, or sifting through thousands of gulls looking for something rare. Even now, I still get a little 'kick' when I find a group of Common Scoters. Grafham Water has a habit of producing surprises, and can produce a few hours of good birding, although, there are always many hours of hard work in between the highlights, and it can be a hard 'patch' to watch. Some locals don't enjoy the place, I personally, wouldn't swap it.

BAPs (part 2) – Grey Partridge

Vince Lea¹ and Catherine Weightman²
1CBC member. 2Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Action Plan Co-ordinator

Continuing the series of articles on Cambridgeshire's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) process, this article will describe some of the measures in place for Grey Partridge.

The Grey Partridge is closely associated with agricultural land, particularly arable land, reflected in its UK distribution, which is biased towards the eastern side of the country, where arable farming is most commonly practiced. The changes in arable farming techniques, however, have led to recent steep declines in the population. The decline in the last 25 years has been estimated at 82 %; much greater

than the 50% required to put this species on the Red List of species of high conservation concern. The UK population is estimated at 150,000 pairs. It has maintained populations in some northern areas with mixed farming but has declined even more steeply in areas of intensive grazing in the west. Considering the high level of arable agriculture in Cambs, we should have reasonable conditions for Grey Partridge but according to the figures provided in the BAP for this species, it is only found in 20% of 2km tetrads. This compares rather poorly with neighbouring counties of Bedfordshire and Norfolk with 40 and 30 % of tetrads occupied. The main populations are found on the chalk areas to the south of the county, with pockets around the large Washes reserves.

The Grey Partridge tends to utilise field margins and hedgerows, where it finds a varied diet of weed and crop seeds and other vegetable matter as well as invertebrates, in particular medium sized insects such as sawfly larvae and ground beetles. Its requirements and the causes of its decline have been well studied by the Game Conservancy Trust (GCT). They have shown that sympathetic management can rapidly increase the population. The main factors identified as causing the decline are listed in the BAP, and include the loss of the quantity and quality of hedgerows which provide shelter, breeding sites and food resources, reduced food supplies in field margins due to pesticide and herbicide use affecting natural food and the loss of stubbles reducing availability of spilt grain during the winter. The switch from hay meadows to silage in mixed farming systems has led to the destruction of nests in grassland due to the earlier harvest of the grass. The species can utilise set aside effectively but this is also in decline under new subsidy systems.

The Cambridgeshire County Council's BAP for this species is therefore linked to plans for cereal field margins and hedgerows, which have been given their own specific measures due to the range of wildlife that depends on them, from arable weeds to small mammals. New subsidies targeting field margins and hedgerows in the Entry Level Scheme should benefit this species. The BAP considers the possibility that without these measures the Grey Partridge could follow the Corncrake's path of decline from arable land in the face of agricultural intensification.

Targets are again a feature of this BAP, giving the possibility of measuring the success of measures put in place. The short term target is to halt the decline of Grey Partridge by 2005, which fits in with the national BAP target of a population growth to over 150,000 pairs by 2010. A county population of 10,000 pairs is the target for 2010. The aim is to maintain and, where possible, enhance the range of this species, particularly focusing on the chalk districts. Working in partnership with FWAG, Defra and the GCT among others, the Grey Partridge is a flagship species for many of the farmland birds of conservation concern.

Monitoring the population is essential to determine the success of strategies put in place, and one of the main means of surveying the Grey Partridge has been designed by the GCT, involving autumn counts. This is an annual method whereby coveys are counted in late summer / early autumn during the evenings, as they venture out into the open stubble fields or autumn sown crops; the lack of cover providing an excellent opportunity to count birds and thus estimate the success of the breeding season. This is something any bird club members could undertake, scanning farmland from suitable vantage points (if public access is allowed, of course). Count details submitted to the county recorder will be very useful information.



THE FUTURE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT & PEOPLE

Thursday 18th November 2004 7.30 p.m. Wood Green Animal Shelter, Godmanchester

Your club has been instrumental in bringing together all the bird and wildlife groups in the county for a special environmental lecture and forum, we need you to be there. The programme planned is a talk by Jeremy Greenwood, a 45-minute break, followed by an Environmental Forum – 'The Environment for Wildlife and People'

INDOOR MEETINGS CO-ORDINATOR

The Club is looking for someone who is prepared to oversee the smooth running of meetings, particularly at St John's. This need not be an onerous job – helping at one or two meetings would be a worthwhile contribution. Please contact the Secretary, Meetings Secretary or Chairman if you can help or would like to know more (contact details on back page).

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2004

September 10th – Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre

RSPB Reserves and how we manage them by Richard Powell

The talk will be about the reserves of the region and their importance and their management, including a few key examples of how the reserves develop and how they have been created them from dry or humble beginnings into great habitats. Richard Powell became the Regional Director of the RSPB in Eastern England in 1994 having worked for them since 1988. He has experience in all aspects of the management of land and people especially, with a great interest in sustainable development.

October 11th – St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

County update – Birds in Cambridgeshire:

The Corncrake Project by Charlie Kitchin

Cambridgeshire is the focus of an exciting collaboration between the RSPB, English Nature and Whipsnade Wild Animal Park to reintroduce the Corncrake to England. A successful breeding group has been established at Whipsnade and chicks were released on the Nene Washes in 2002, 2003 and just a few weeks ago, at sites managed by 'corncrake-friendly' methods. Charlie Kitchin, Senior Warden of the RSPB's Nene Washes Reserve will give us the latest news on this project.

Owls in Cambridgeshire by Louise Bacon

Sixty volunteers have been surveying owls breeding in the county. Louise Bacon of Cambridgeshire Bird Club' Council and Research Committee will talk about preliminary results from this study, and give news of future Club surveys.

The RSPB/Needingworth Quarry Project by Jon Haw and Brian Chapman

Hanson Aggregates and the RSPB are working together to create a new nature reserve at Needingworth Quarry, which will be managed by the RSPB. Already thousands of trees and shrubs have been planted, and as sand and gravel are extracted from the quarry, a new wetland will be created. Jon Haw (RSPB Reserves Operations Manager) and Brian Chapman (Hanson Operations Manager) will update us on this project.

AN APOLOGY

A sincere apology is offered to anyone who was misled by the incorrect date of June 12th given in Bulletin 372 for the field meeting at Wicken Fen, which was actually held on June 11th, as shown on the programme card. Please feel free to contact an officer of the Club if you wish to confirm details of any future meeting.

FROM THE SECRETARY

New Members.

We welcome the following new member, Colin Addington of Perry (Grafham Water).

Bruce Martin

CLUB CONTACTS

Chairman

Bob Scott

8 Woodlands
St Neots, Huntingdon, Cambs PE19 1UE
Tel: 01480 214904
Email: abscott@tiscali.co.uk

Secretary

Bruce Martin

178 Nuns Way, Cambridge CB4 2NS
Tel: 01223 700656
Email: bruce.s.martin@ntlworld.com

Treasurer

Rita Lingard

14 Spens Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9LS
Tel: 01223 356476
Email: rita.lingard@ntlworld.com

Indoor Meetings Secretary & Bulletin Editor

Vicki Harley

30 Margett Street, Cottenham, Cambs CB4 8QY
Tel: 01954 250340

Website

Simon Stirrup

33 Brenda Gautrey Way, Cottenham, Cambs
CB4 8XW
Tel: 01954 250207
Email: simon.stirrup@virgin.net

Research Officer

Dr Bill Jordan

31 East Hatley, Hatley St George, Sandy, Beds
SG19 3JA
Tel: 01767 651737
Email: bill@31hatley.fsnet.co.uk

Publicity & Promotions

Ann Scott

8 Woodlands, St Neots, Huntingdon, Cambs PE19
1UE
Tel: 01480 214904
Email: abscott@tiscali.co.uk

County Recorder (Old Cambs)

John Oates

7 Fassage Close, Lode, Cambs CB5 9EH
Tel: 01223 812546
Email: joates9151@aol.com

County Recorder (Hunts)

John Clark

7 Westbrook, Hilton, Huntingdon, Cambs PE18 9NW
Tel: 01480 830472
(No email)

Other Council Members

Louise Bacon

236 Wimpole Road, Barton, Cambs, CB3 7AE
Tel: 01223 263962
E-mail: louise.bacon2@btinternet.com

Rowena Baxter

14 Pettitts Close, Dry Drayton, Cambs, CB3 8DQ
E-mail: rcb@eng.cam.ac.uk

Stuart Elsom

117 Andrew Road, Eynesbury, St Neots, Cambs
PE19 2PP
Tel: 01480 471910
Email: stuart.elsom@tringa.co.uk

Peter Herkenrath

50 Sherbourne Close, Cambridge CB4 1RT
01223 420736
Email: peter@herkenrath.fsnet.co.uk

The Cambridgeshire Bird Club exists to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats in the county, identify areas of conservation value and advance the education of the public in the study of birds.

www.cambridgeshirebirdclub.org.uk

Birdline number

Remember that your Cambs bird sightings can be phoned in free of charge to Birdline East Anglia on 0800 083 0803.

Please send records to: John Oates by September 7th

Next Bulletin due out October 2004, covering July and August

GOOD BIRDING!