

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

*Bulletin* No. 377



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

## RECENT REPORTS NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 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).

## NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

This bulletin reports the occurrence of 151 species (excluding hybrids and exotics). Interesting winter records include Bean Geese around the Ouse Washes, Purple Sandpiper, Snow Bunting, Great Grey Shrike and a Dartford Warbler on the last day of the year. Fieldwork for the Club's survey of breeding owls will begin soon – for details see p7–8.

## AGM 2005

The 2005 Annual General Meeting will be held at St Johns Church Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge at 8.00 pm on Friday March 11<sup>th</sup> 2005.

## Subscriptions overdue now!

Please read the Treasurer's message on p11.



*Blue and Long-tailed Tits  
by Graham Easy*

Numbers in brackets indicate November and December maximums.

## DIVERS TO HERONS

**Little Grebe** At Fen Drayton GP (7, 15), Grafham Water (3, 3), Kingfishers Bridge (7, 2), Paxton Pits (10, 4) and Shropshire's Reservoir (5, 15). Single figures also recorded at 9 other sites.

**Great Crested Grebe** At Fen Drayton GP (62, 64), Grafham Water (374, 636) and Paxton Pits (33, 28). The only other double-figure sites were 12 each at the Ouse Washes and Roswell Pits. Single figures were noted at 9 other sites.

**Red-necked Grebe** A bird was seen at Ferry Meadows CP on Dec 28th and 30th.

**Slavonian Grebe** Two birds were at Grafham Water on Nov 3rd with a different bird at the same site on Nov 27th. A bird was at Ferry Meadows from Dec 13th to 17th.

**Great Cormorant** Recorded at 18 sites with the highest counts at Fen Drayton GP (73, 55), with 88 in a dusk roost on Nov 8th, Grafham Water (87, 113), Kingfishers Bridge (25, 6), the Nene Washes (30, 37), the Ouse Washes (58, 27) and Wicken Fen (80, 74). The dusk roost counts at Paxton Pits in October and November respectively were 177 and 362.

**Great Bittern** Singles at Wicken Fen on Nov 19th, Dec 6th and 17th. Two at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 20th, with 1 on 21st and 28th, but none were seen in December at this site. Single were also seen at Hauxton Pits on Nov 20th, Woodwalton Fen on Dec 4th to the year's end and Paxton Pits on Dec 31st. Two were also seen at the Nene Washes Eldernell on Dec 13th.

**Little Egret** Singles were seen at the Nene and Ouse Washes in November, at a stream northwest of Histon on Nov 22nd, Trumpington on Dec 27th and Cambridge on Dec 29th. Two birds were at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 22nd and Paxton Pits on Dec 23rd, 1 remaining to the year's end.

**Grey Heron** Single-figure counts were reported from 17 sites and double figures at Fen Drayton GP (17, 11), Grafham Water (6, 6), the Nene Washes (23, 17) and the Ouse Washes (20, 11).

## WILDFOWL

**Mute Swan** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (112, 94), the Nene Washes (76, 81), the Ouse Washes (597, 536) and Paxton Pits (134, 150). Other counts were 117 in the Prior's Fen area in December and 26 at Over Fen on Dec 28th. Single figures were noted from 12 other sites.

**Tundra Swan** The strongholds, as expected, were at the Nene Washes (2, 262) and the Ouse Washes (240, 1683). Flocks seen feeding in fields many miles from these areas may have roosted on the washes, but flocks at Prickwillow/Shippea Hill 31 and Fen Drayton 30 may have roosted locally.

**Whooper Swan** The Ouse Washes with (641, 678) was the main area for this species, though 44 were counted on the Nene Washes on Dec 13th.

**Bean Geese** It has been a good winter for this species in the county with numbers exceeding the previous highest of 40 on the Ouse Washes in 1979. All have been of the Tundra race and the area around the Ouse Washes has hosted most of them. The largest number was c.60 at Fodder Fen on Dec 15th. The first birds to appear were 19 seen at Welches Dam on Nov 29th. Away from the Ouse Washes a flock of 8 were at the Nene Washes from Dec 4th to the 15th and a flock of 12 at Swaffham Prior Fen from Dec 23rd to the year's end.

**Pink-footed Goose** A juvenile thought to be wild was seen at the Ouse Washes on Nov 5th. It stayed away from local feral geese and was gone the next day. The same site then had 13 birds on Nov 22nd and single figures were noted up to Dec 18th. Farcet Fen had 23 birds on Nov 8th and there were 47 on the Nene Washes on Nov 15th. Forty birds flew south over Fowlmere on Dec 1st and 12 circled Kingfishers Bridge before continuing south on the same day. Single birds were at the Nene Washes on Dec 13th and at Paxton Pits on Dec 5th, 12th and 26th.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** At the Ouse Washes, 19 birds were in the dawn roost count Dec 12th and 28 in fields east of Four Balls Farm on the 14th. Fifteen birds were on Fodder Fen on the 15th. Away from the washes, 2 birds were at Paxton Pits on Dec 18th.

**Greylag Goose** At Grafham Water (91, 205), Kingfishers Bridge (200, 700), the Ouse Washes (67, 4) Paxton Pits (518, 378) and Wicken Fen (322, 90). Eighty-nine were at Wimpole Park on Dec 1st and 140 on the Nene Washes on Dec 13th. Also reported from 4 other sites.

**Canada Goose** At Kingfishers Bridge (380, 440), the Ouse Washes (643, 348), Paxton Pits (84, 2) and Wicken Fen (250, 215). At the Cam Washes, 211 on Nov 14th. Also reported from 6 other sites.

**Barnacle Goose** Up to 5 birds noted at 5 sites.

**Common Shelduck** The highest count was 7 at the Nene Washes on Dec 26th and 5 at Grafham Water in November. Single figures seen at 6 other sites.

**Mandarin** There was 12 birds at Stibbington on Dec 23rd, 9 at Wimpole Park on Dec 5th, 2 each at Paxton Pits on Nov 1st and Grafham Water Nov 6th and a single at Shropshire's Reservoir on Nov 17th.

**Eurasian Wigeon** At Fen Drayton GP (498, 914), Grafham Water (106, 63), Kingfishers Bridge (144, 1040), the Nene Washes (2954, 4644), the Ouse Washes (20855, 21505), Paxton Pits (1431, 1455) and Wicken Fen (135, 600). Other three-figure counts were at Needingworth GP (100), Godmanchester GP (180) and Shropshire's Reservoir (150). Small numbers were also reported from 8 other sites.

**Gadwall** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (247, 400), Grafham Water (66, 40), the Ouse Washes (397, 313), and Paxton Pits (169, 176). Double figures also noted at 6 other sites.

**Eurasian Teal** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (62, 69), Grafham Water (665, 403), Kingfishers

Bridge (150, 142), the Nene Washes (726, 673), the Ouse Washes (3461, 2108), Paxton Pits (83, 380) and Wicken Fen (270, 273). Other notable counts were 150+ from mid December at Over Fen and 93 at Long Drove Cottenham on Dec 1st.

**Green-winged Teal** One was present on the Nene Washes on Dec 13th.

**Mallard** A female with 3 tiny ducklings were seen at Hilton on Nov 6th and 8th. Counts at Fen Drayton GP (119, 125), Grafham Water (380, 296), Kingfishers Bridge (114, 146), Milton CP (87, 54), the Nene Washes (377, 176), the Ouse Washes (2013, 2512), Paxton Pits (71, 88) and Wicken Fen (178, 460). Other three-figure counts also noted at River Cam Cambridge (100), River Lark (130), River Little Ouse (180) and Over Fen GP 150.

**Northern Pintail** Again the Ouse Washes was the stronghold for this species with maximum counts in November of 1602 and December 1559. The only other notable count was at the Nene Washes with 107 in December. Single figures were noted at 6 other sites.

**Garganey** A wintering male was at Woodwalton Fen from mid November to the year's end.

**Northern Shoveler** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (20, 50), Grafham Water (209, 266), the Nene Washes (71, 132), the Ouse Washes (618, 469) and Paxton Pits (43, 36). Forty-plus were at Fidwell Fen on Nov 1st before the floodwater drained from the fields. Also noted at 5 other sites

**Red-crested Pochard** Pairs were at Grafham Water on Nov 20th and Needingworth GP on Dec 11th. The numbers at Needingworth GP had increased to 13 on Dec 30th. Singles were noted at Stibbington GP on Dec 23rd and Mepal GP on Dec 30th. Two pairs were at Paxton Pits on Dec 31st.

**Common Pochard** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (70, 122), Grafham Water (55, 79), the Ouse Washes (1156, 531) and Paxton Pits (109, 141). There was a good count at Mepal GP of 380 before the washes were flooded. Double-figure counts were also noted at 7 other sites.

**Tufted Duck** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (494, 409), Grafham Water (857, 695), the Ouse Washes (1936, 697) and Paxton Pits (738, 712). One hundred birds were present at Block Fen GP on Nov 23rd and double figures noted at 10 other sites.

**Greater Scaup** Singles were at Paxton Pits on Nov 20th and Woodwalton Fen on Dec 11th.

**Black Scoter** Twenty birds were at Ferry Meadows on Nov 1st and 1 on the 8th, whilst at Grafham Water 21 birds were present, also on Nov 1st.

These remained until the 12th when 13 left and the remaining 8 dropped to 2 on the 13th. The last 2 stayed until Dec 5th. A different 8 birds spent just one day at the same site on Nov 16th. A single was at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 8th.

**Goldeneye** Counts at Fen Drayton GP were (75, 92), Grafham Water (111, 115) and Paxton Pits (67, 101). Also reported from 8 other sites.

**Smew** A redhead was seen on Nov 1st, the earliest ever at Paxton Pits and by the year's end up to 9 birds had been recorded at this site. Up to 12 birds had been seen at Fen Drayton GP. Numbers fluctuated greatly, possibly due to disturbance by fishermen in boats on the previously unfished Far Fen Lake, (the lake most favoured by the birds). The only other site was Needingworth GP with 7 on Dec 31st.

**Red-breasted Merganser** A male and female were at Paxton Pits on Nov 7th. A female was at Grafham Water on Nov 12th, and then a male was seen at that site on Nov 21st.

**Goosander** Singles were first seen at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 6th and Ferry Meadows on the 7th. Two were at Wicken Fen on Nov 14th with 1 on 19th. Paxton Pits had its first on Nov 20th and 12 birds had been seen by the year's end. Cambourne, Ferry Meadows CP, Fen Drayton GP and Tanholt GP had all been host to 4 birds before the end of November. Grafham Water didn't see any birds until Dec 9th when 4 males arrived. The only other site was the Ouse Washes with 2 on Dec 19th.

**Ruddy Duck** Single-figure counts were noted at 8 sites during the period, apart from Grafham Water where they reached 10 on Dec 29th.

## RAPTORS

**Red Kite** Single wandering winter birds at Trumpington on Nov 1st, Elton and Glatton on Nov 6th, Perry on Nov 12th and the last of the year at Great Chishill on Dec 18th.

**Marsh Harrier** As is usual in winter, records were concentrated around Wicken Fen, Nene Washes and Ouse Washes, with a peak of 2 at Kingfishers Bridge on Nov 7th. Away from these areas, a single was seen at Woodwalton Fen on two dates mid-November.

**Hen Harrier** Peak counts from the favoured wintering sites included; Wicken Fen (4, 5), Nene Washes (3, 2), Ouse Washes (2, 1). These roosting birds were also seen in surrounding areas, with the only bird noted far from these location being one at Werrington on Nov 22nd.

**Goshawk** A single was seen over Dogsthorpe on Nov 29th.

**Sparrowhawk** Recorded from 28 sites. Numbers ranged from 1–2, apart from along the Ouse Washes (5, 3).

**Common Buzzard** Recorded from 17 sites (same as Nov–Dec 2003), suggesting a regular resident population. Usually 1–3 birds, but up to 7 at one site.

**Kestrel** Recorded from 32 sites, numbers ranged from 1–4, apart from Nene Washes (36, 24), Ouse Washes (7, 4) and 5 at Farcet Fen in December.

**Merlin** Singles were recorded at both Nene and Ouse Washes during both months, with further singles in November at Fidwell Fen on 3rd, Farcet Fen on 4th (22nd, 30th), Holme Fen on 6th, Trumpington on 7th, Huntingdon on 9th, Barton on 13th, Brinkley Wood on 14th, Elm on 19th and in

December at Leverington on 2nd, Paxton Pits on 17th (and 25th), Car Dyke on 19th, Farcet Fen on 19th, Fen Drayton GP on 20th, Swaffham Prior Fen on 29th and Newton on 30th.

**Peregrine** Recorded regularly at Nene Washes (1, 2) and Ouse Washes (2, 2). Two were at Wicken Fen on Dec 12th, and singles were seen at Facet Fen and Paxton Pits on Nov 4th and Dec 5th, Anglesey Abbey on Nov 10th and Kingfishers Bridge on Nov 26th.

## GAMEBIRDS TO COOT

**Red-legged Partridge** Recorded from 10 sites, numbers ranging from 3 to 84 birds.

**Grey Partridge** Recorded from 8 sites, numbers ranging from 1 to 37 birds.

**Pheasant** Recorded from 9 sites, with numbers ranging from 1 to 37 birds.

**Water Rail** Recorded from 14 sites, with peak counts from Kingfishers Bridge (12, 10), Wicken Fen (8, 6), Fen Drayton GP (6, 2), Nene Washes (5, 5), with 1–2 elsewhere.

**Moorhen** Reported from 20 sites, with peak counts from Grafham Water (78, 35), Ouse Washes (75, 24), Nene Washes (39, 60), Paxton Pits (35, 17) and 30 at Dogsthorpe in December, otherwise 1–27 at other sites.

**Coot** Reported from 18 sites, with peak counts from Fen Drayton GP (1434, 1525), Paxton Pits (1411, 1422), Ouse Washes (666, 870), Grafham Water (359, 267), also 280 were counted at Block Fen and 260 at Orton BP in November. At Godmanchester GP the semi-albino was again present for its 3rd winter.

## WADERS

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** At Grafham Water on Nov 8th and heard over Ely at 22:30hrs on Nov 10th.

**Eurasian Dotterel** One at Fidwell Fen on Nov 3rd.

**Pacific Golden Plover** The bird found on Oct 30th remained at Fidwell Fen to Nov 2nd.

**European Golden Plover** Highest counts as follows: Kingfishers Bridge (8000, 0!), Fidwell Fen (5000+, 0), Nene Washes (976, 3250), Cottenham (3000, 0), Ouse Washes (1500, 1608), Westwick (2000+, 0), Over Fen (0, 1500), Fen Drayton GP (0, 1000).

**Grey Plover** Single Nene Washes on Dec 13th.

**Northern Lapwing** Main locality was Ouse Washes with peaks of 10 833 on Nov 29th and 7262 on Dec 13th, low numbers at Nene Washes – peaks of 2200 and 3226. Elsewhere – Gorefield 2500, Fen Drayton 1000 and several smaller groups of under 600.

**Red Knot** A single first winter bird at Godmanchester GP on Dec 13th.

**Little Stint** Four juveniles at Fidwell Fen on Nov 1st with 2 remaining to 4th and single at the Ouse Washes on Nov 1st.

**Purple Sandpiper** One at Ouse Washes on Nov 9th was atypically feeding amongst grassy vegetation.

**Dunlin** Highest counts Ouse Washes (176, 175), Barleycraft GP (0, 73), Nene Washes (5, 21), Fidwell Fen (20, 0), Fen Drayton GP (0, 10).

**Ruff** Highest counts from Ouse Washes (151, 233), Nene Washes (80, 47), Fortreys Hall (10, 42), also 13 at Priors Fen GP and 4 at Barleycraft GP.

**Jack Snipe** A poor autumn, highest count was 5 at Paxton Pits on Nov 14th and only single here in December, Priors Fen GP 1–2, Kingfishers Bridge single through November and single Kings Dyke NR.

**Common Snipe** A poor showing, it is worrying when all the Cambs sites on any one date only add up to 200 birds. Highest counts as follows: Ouse Washes (62, 67) Nene Washes (60, 8), Paxton Pits (20, 32), Wicken Fen (30, 0), Over Fen GP (13, 19), Kingfishers Bridge (12, 4). One at Paxton Pits was noted as having dark underwings.

**Eurasian Woodcock** Up to 4 at Paxton Pits, two's recorded at 2 sites and singles from 11 sites.

**Black-tailed Godwit** Unusually high counts for the period at Ouse Washes (200, 428), elsewhere 3 at Grafham Water and Nene Washes, 2 at Priors Fen GP and 1 at Barleycraft GP were more the norm.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** On Nov 7th 1 Paxton Pits and 2 at Nene Washes, and 2 Priors Fen GP on Nov 8th.

**Eurasian Curlew** Single at Nene Washes on Nov 8th was the only record! Is this the end for a magnificent wader?

**Spotted Redshank** Single at Ouse Washes on Nov 15th.

**Common Redshank** Highest counts as follows Ouse Washes (119, 212), Nene Washes (49, 103), Fidwell Fen (35, 0), Grafham Water (17, 9), Kingfishers Bridge (15, 11), Paxton Pits (2, 10) and 1–6 from a further 6 sites.

**Green Sandpiper** Highest count was 7 at Godmanchester GP on Nov 30th, 1–2 from a further 13 sites.

**Common Sandpiper** Singles in November at North Bank SW, Wicken Fen, Fen Drayton GP and Grafham Water, in December at Grafham Water on 5th and Paxton Pits to month's end.

**Ruddy Turnstone** Singles at Ouse Washes on Nov 11th and Priors Fen GP on 13th.

## SKUAS TO TERNS

**Mediterranean Gull** Sightings of this species were once again down on recent years with only 5 records received none of which were at landfills sites. Noted in November at Prior's Fen on 4th and Fen Drayton GP on 24th, in December at Ouse Washes on 4th also Grafham Water and Paxton Pits on 9th. All records were of adult birds.

**Little Gull** One at the Ouse Washes on Nov 1st.

**Black-headed Gull** Again no counts from major roost sites; this means the sight of thousands of birds are being ignored – what other species does this happen to? Feeding flocks of 100–550 noted at

10 sites. Leucistic individuals showed some site fidelity to Fen Drayton GP and Grafham Water during the period.

**Common Gull** Seventy roosted at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 13th and up to 39 at Monks Hardwick during December.

**Lesser Black backed Gull** 400+ roosted at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 13th and 297 at Shropshires Res. on Nov 22nd.

**Herring Gull** Seventy roosting at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 13th was the only record of note.

**Western Yellow-legged Gull** Up to 5 at Fen Drayton GP and up to 3 noted at Grafham Water, elsewhere 1–2 at 6 sites during the period.

**Caspian Gull** In November, singles at Paxton Pits on 7th and Fen Drayton GP on 8th. Towards the end of the year up to 3 birds noted in the Milton / Landbeach area. Also singles at Grafham Water on Dec 4th and 18th.

**Iceland Gull** The first bird of the winter was a 2cy at Fen Drayton GP on Nov 28th.

**Greater Black-backed Gull** No records of note!

**Black Tern** A late juvenile bird was noted on the Ouse Washes to Nov 1st.

## NEAR PASSERINES

**Feral Pigeon** Counts from sites around Cambridge resulted in a total of 156+ birds. Wisbech Town Centre held up to 180 birds during the period with 78 at Comberton and 80 noted at Soham.

**Stock Pigeon** Largest counts received were of 70 near Little Ouse and 65 at Fen Drayton GP.

**Wood Pigeon** Fields of oilseed attracted 1500+ at Western Colville on Dec 28th. An albino bird was noted at Paxton Pits on Nov 3rd.

**Collared Dove** Flocks of 20–35 noted at Elm, Kingfishers Bridge, Monks Hardwick and Upware.

**Barn Owl** Thirty-six records from 26 sites.

**Little Owl** Only 7 records from 7 sites.

**Tawny Owl** Calling birds noted from 18 sites – keep sending in all records.

**Long-eared Owl** Singles reported from 2 sites.

**Short-eared Owl.** November saw another boom time for this owl on the Nene Washes with up to 65 birds being recorded. By December numbers were much reduced down to 11 at the beginning of the month. Elsewhere 1–3 reported from 16 sites.

**Kingfisher** Reported from 25 widespread sites with up to 4 at Paxton pits and Roswell Pits.

**Green Woodpecker** Records received from 24 sites including up to 7 at Ouse Washes.

**Greater Spotted Woodpecker** The 47 records received outnumbered the previous species for a change, at Wicken Fen 12 different birds have been ringed during the year. Drumming was noted at Caldecott, Great Eversden and Paxton Pits during December!

**Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker** Reported from Grafham Water, Monks wood, Paxton Pits, Wimpole Park and Woodwalton Fen during the period.

## PASSERINES

**Skylark** Reported from 15 sites with a maximum of 90 at Trumpington on Nov 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Barn Swallow** 3–4 late birds noted during the period. The first was noted at Reach on Nov 8th with another at North Bank, Peterborough the same day (also seen there on 14th), the third individual was noted at Grafham Water on Nov 14th.

**Meadow Pipit** Records were received from 7 sites with the highest count coming from Monk's Hardwick, St. Neots with 70 present on Nov 7th.

**Water Pipit** As many as 14 were recorded as follows, all records related to singles unless stated otherwise: Fidwell Fen Nov 1st, Fen Drayton Nov 6th, Ouse Washes (Jolly Bankers) Nov 24th, Nene Washes (Eldernell) Dec 1st, Ouse Washes (Sutton Gault) 3 on Dec 4th, Nene Washes (March Farmers), Kingfishers Bridge Dec 9th, Nene Washes (Eldernell) Dec 24th, Kingfishers Bridge Dec 31st.

**Grey Wagtail** Reports received from 16 sites with the majority of records concerning 1–2 birds. The maximum was 3 at North Bank SF on Nov 11th.

**Pied Wagtail** Counts received from 8 sites with a maximum of 131 at Farcet Fen on Nov 30th.

**Bohemian Waxwing** Following on from the early records in October many reports were received during the period as follows: Peterborough (Cathedral Grounds) 1 on Nov 5th, Ouse Washes 2 on Nov 6th, (Helpston 3 on Nov 8th, Coates 2 on Nov 9th, Woodwalton Fen 1 on Nov 20th, Ely 2 from Nov 24th to Dec 5th, Netherton 3 on Nov 24th, Peterborough 3 on Nov 30th to Dec 1st.

Cambridge: Station Road 16 on Nov 8th with 1 at Milton Road/Arbury Road the same day, Addenbrooke's Hospital 2 on Dec 13th, Fitzwilliam College on Dec 13th, Antarctic Survey on 16th with 3 on 22nd, Fanshawe Road on 18th. Finally 1 at Melbourn on Dec 24th.

**Stonechat** 1–2 birds were noted from at least 20 sites with records from Bradley Fen, Cam Washes Upware, Elm, Ely, Fidwell Fen, Grafham Water, Grange Farm Knapwell, Kingfishers Bridge, Nene Washes, Over Fen, Paxton Pits, Priors Fen, Shropshire's Reservoir, Somersham, Toft, Wicken Fen and Woodwalton Fen. The maximum in the period was a superb 34 at Nene Washes on Nov 15th and 19th.

**Blackbird** Records were received from 7 sites with maximum of 100 at Priory Park, St. Neots on Nov 11th

**Fieldfare** Records received from 17 sites with average numbers recorded. The maximum count was from Wicken Fen with 500 on Nov 16th.

**Song Thrush** Records were received from 5 sites with 1–3 individuals being the norm at most sites. The maximum was 4 at Shropshire's Reservoir on Dec 26th.

**Redwing** Recorded from at least 13 sites with lower than average counts. Most sites recorded between 20 and 50. The maximum noted during the period was from Fen Drayton with 100 on Dec 20th.

**Mistle Thrush** Reports were received from 10 sites with 1–2 being the norm. Five were noted at Elm throughout the period.

**Cetti's Warbler** One was reported from Fen Drayton on Nov 27th (two observers), and another was noted on the Nene Washes (Dec 13th).

**Eurasian Reed Warbler** One very late individual was killed by a cat at Barway (Dec 2nd).

**Dartford Warbler** An amazing discovery of a single bird was made by Zbigniew Karpowicz on Dec 31st at Landbeach on the minor road to Cottenham. Having stopped to check a flock of Lapwing, he found the bird in an adjacent field. It frequented both the conservation field (mainly grasses and clumps of thistles) and the weedy dry ditch adjacent to the road. It remained there for several days.

**Blackcap** At 10 sites, 4 records were from gardens. One bird was seen to be feasting on holly berries. Numbers of males and females were evenly split, as were Nov and Dec records. One to two birds were noted at the various sites.

**Common Chiffchaff** From 14 sites, 6 were noted together at dusk at Barleycraft GP (Dec 30th), 5 at Grafham Water (Dec 9th), and 4 at Fen Drayton GP, including an *abietinus* type (N. Fenno-Scandia) (Dec 14th). At other sites, 1–2 birds were noted.

**Goldcrest** Some higher numbers from the 23 sites reported consisted of 15 at Godmanchester GP, 10+ at Paxton Pits, 6 at Stretham and 6 at Wicken Fen.

**Firecrest** At Paxton Pits, 1 was seen on Dec 5th and also on the 8th, 11th and 31st. Singles were also noted at Wicken Fen (Nov 14th) and at Woodwalton Fen (Dec 26th).

**Bearded Tit** Kingfishers Bridge boasted high numbers from Nov 26th to Dec 9th. At least 11 birds were noted on the first date, with a maximum of 13, possibly 15 on Nov 29th. Eight birds approx. were noted on Dec 9th. Elsewhere, the Nene Washes held 2 on Nov 15<sup>th</sup> and one on Dec 13<sup>th</sup> (WeBS), with another, presumably different, bird at Eldernell on the same day. Singles were reported from Prior's Fen GP Nov 6th, 8th and 14<sup>th</sup>, and 2+ were found at Wicken Fen on Nov 14th.

**Long-tailed Tit** Reported from 22 sites, the two highest counts made were 60, in several flocks, at Paxton Pits on Nov 20th, and 43 at Wicken Fen on Dec 10th.

**Marsh Tit** Records were received from Abbotsley GC, Ditton Park Wood, Fordham Woods, Hardwick Wood, Monks Wood, Paxton Pits, Wimpole Hall Park, The Gloucesters (Wimpole), and Weston Colville. Monks Wood held 80 on Nov 16th. Elsewhere 1–4 birds were noted.

**Willow Tit** One bird visited RSPB Ouse Washes from Nov 5th to 7th, frequenting the bird table.

**Coal Tit** Recorded at 10 sites, 10+ were noted at Ditton Park Woods on Nov 6th. At other sites, numbers ranged from 1 to 3 often in gardens.

**Blue Tit** From 10 sites, numbers ranged up to 62 and 111, the latter counts being made at Wicken Fen of different birds caught in ringing operations in

Nov and Dec respectively.

**Great Tit** From 11 sites, numbers ranged up to 21 and 54, the latter counts being made at Wicken Fen of different birds caught in ringing operations in Nov and Dec respectively. Sixteen were noted The Gloucesters (Wimpole) on Nov 11th.

**Wood Nuthatch** Recorded only from the Wimpole area, with 3 at the Gloucesters (Wimpole) in both months, and 1 seen in a tit flock at Wimpole on Dec. 30th.

**Treecreeper** Records received from 10 sites. Maximum counts were of 4 at Godmanchester GP/Tip on Dec. 13th, and 4 at Hardwick Wood on Dec. 30th.

**Great Grey Shrike** A bird found at Wimpole Hall on Nov. 29th stayed until the end of the year and was appreciated by many observers.

**Jay** Recorded from 15 sites, with no counts of more than 4 individuals.

**Magpie** Reported from 11 sites, with maximum counts of 60+ in a roost in Cambridge on Dec. 26th, 50 at Eaton Ford on Dec. 1st, and 18–25+ at Elm throughout the period.

**Jackdaw** Records received from just 6 sites, with c.800 at Brinkley Wood, Weston Colville on Nov. 14th, and c.200 at Wicken Fen on Nov 16th, the highest counts.

**Rook** A record of 1120 flying over Toft to a corvid roost in Hardwick on Nov. 20th, was the highest count.

**Carrion Crow** Records received from 10+ sites, of which 150–170 at Wicken Fen throughout the period was the most noteworthy.

**Hooded Crow** A single bird was with Carrion Crows in a field at Six Mile Bottom on Dec 10th.

**Starling** Highest count received was of 1000 at Wicken Fen on Nov 16th. This period in 2003 saw a roost of 5000+ at Ely BF (with birds flying over Stretham), and the year before an even larger roost was at Fen Drayton – where have the big roosts gone?

**House Sparrow** Counts of over 30 birds reported from 6 sites, with 90–150+ at Elm throughout the period (fewer in December) and 120 at Woodhurst on Nov. 8th being the most noteworthy.

**Tree Sparrow** Recorded from 7 sites. Up to 16 at Nene Washes (Eldernell) at a new feeding station was the maximum count, although 11 at Farcet Fen in mid-December was notable. The larger flocks of 2003 seem to have disappeared.

**Chaffinch** Records received from 13 sites. Maximum counts were of 38 at Lark Rise Farm (Barton), 37 at Ouse Washes, and 30 at Paxton Pits. Clearly no influx of finches this winter.

**Brambling** Recorded from 12 sites, with a flock of 100 at Swaffham Bulbeck on Nov 6th (passing through?) and c.20–25+ at Beechwoods NR throughout the period being the only records of more than 2 birds.

**Greenfinch** Noted from just 7 sites. Maximum counts were of 50 in game cover at Shropshire's Res on Dec. 26th, and 34 in Stretham on Christmas

Day.

**Goldfinch** Noted from 20+ sites. Highest counts were of 117 at Wicken Fen on Nov. 30th, 89 at Ouse Washes on Dec. 13th and 60 at Fen Drayton GP on Dec. 26th.

**Siskin** Recorded from just 3 sites, 2 single birds (Cambridge and Fen Drayton CP) and a flock of 30 at Ferry Meadows CP on November 26th.

**Linnet** Records were received from 10+ sites. Peak counts were of 100 at Paxton Pits, 100 at Fen Drayton GP, 90 at Over Fen GP and a number of other records of 20–60 birds.

**Lesser Redpoll** Records were received from 5 sites, mostly involving single birds. However, 4 were at Ferry Meadows CP on Nov. 7th, and 4 were at Linton on Dec. 26th.

**Bullfinch** Reported from 25 sites, with 12–15 at Fen Drayton GP throughout the period being notable.

**Hawfinch** Single birds were seen at Ferry Meadows CP on Nov. 29th, Dec. 21st, and Dec 24th.

**Snow Bunting** A male and female at a farm in Little Thetford on Nov 8th (one was still present the next day) was an excellent county record that was followed by a report of one flying over (calling) Wimpole Hall on Dec. 28th.

**Yellowhammer** Recorded from 17 sites, with 63 at Fen Drayton GP on Nov. 14th, and 55 at Farcet Fen on Dec. 20th being noteworthy.

**Reed Bunting** Recorded from 10+ sites, with 75 at Farcet Fen on Dec. 19th being the only count of

more than 10 birds.

**Corn Bunting** Records were received from 15 sites. Noteworthy records include 110 at Farcet Fen on Dec. 20th, 70 at Cambourne on Nov. 26th, and 60 at Sutton Gault on Dec. 21st, although a number of other reports involved flocks of up to 40.

#### HYBRIDS

##### **Bar-headed Goose x Canada Goose**

Oh dear, well it was waiting to happen; 2 at Ferry Meadows in December.

**Greylag x Canada Goose** Reported from Barleycraft GP (2), Ferry Meadows (2), Kingfishers Bridge (3) and Ouse Washes (2).

**Swan Goose x Greylag** Flocks noted at Ely (15+), Ferry Meadows (15+) and Grafham Water (20+).

**Ferruginous Duck x Pochard** A female noted at Mepal Pits on Nov 23rd–28th.

**Hybrid falcon** A Saker type noted at Horningsea on Nov 8th.

#### EXOTICA

**Black Swan** The usual suspects noted at Priors Fen, Paxton Pits and Ely, the latter may have involved the 2 seen on the Ouse Washes on Dec 30th.

**Muscovy Duck** Up to 59 noted at Ely with a brood of 6 ducklings there on Nov 8th.

**Purple Swamp Hen** Still at large along the R. Ouse between Over and Swavesey.

Contributors: Colin Addington, Richard Allison, Jake Allsop, Paul Atkinson, Louise Bacon, Ian Barton, Peter Bircham, James Cadbury, John Clark, Robert Coleman, Steve Cooper, Robin Cox, Ian Delgado, Steve Dudley, Jill & Stuart Elsom, Dr Mike Foley, Richard Fowling, Don Gardener, Vicki Harley, Kevin Harris, Jack Harrison, Brian & Sheila Harrup, Mark Hawkes, Colin Head, Peter Herkenrath, Julian Hughes, Will Kirby, Charlie Kitchin, Marcus Kohler, Jim Lawrence, John Le Gassick, Vince Lea, Jono Leadley, Stuart & Rita Lingard, Tony Mallyon, Owen & Monica Marks, Paul Mason, Duncan McNiven, Mark Missin, Clare Neville, Dick Newell, John Oates, Rob Palmer, Doug Radford, Dr Gareth Rees, Tony Roberts, Kathleen Rosewarne, Clive Sinclair, Brian Stone, Jonathan Taylor, Richard Thomas, Alan & Brenda Wadsworth, Mark Ward, P. M. Warrington, Michael Wood.

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.

## Owl Surveys 2005–2006

*Good first year coverage of the county was achieved in 2004; this reveals particularly an expanding range for Barn Owl, a few more recorders are needed to help fill in gaps for 2005 and 2006 – please join in.*

The Club's Breeding Owl Survey, (which also includes Woodcock!), began in 2004 and will continue in 2005 and 2006. This will lead up to the next full County Breeding Atlas (all species) and National BTO Atlas, both starting in 2007. Good coverage was achieved in 2004 for most county 10 km squares, with around 60 people taking part. New provisional distribution maps have been produced for all four breeding owls and these will be circulated to participants. By tackling nocturnal and crepuscular species three years early, the Cambridgeshire Atlas should present more comprehensive maps for birds which can be under recorded when part of atlas survey methods for all species. The

Club also seems to have pre-empted a major new BTO research programme on owls which was announced on 20 October to start in 2005. Our surveys should provide valuable data for this project.

**New owl recorders** in Cambs. are particularly needed to cover tetrads (2km by 2km) in square TL 56 ( Fen Lodes and Cam Washes) and square TL57 (Wicken Fen and Cam Washes), both very good areas for owls, also further afield in squares TL39 (south of Eldernell), TL48/49 around March, TF20, east of Peterborough and TL07 (Catworth, Molesworth, West Hunts) but help would be appreciated in any area.

Full instructions and recording forms will be supplied (in paper or electronic format). Please contact Louise Bacon Tel 01223 263962, email [louise.bacon2@btinternet.com](mailto:louise.bacon2@btinternet.com) or Bill Jordan Tel 01767 651737 email [bill@31hatley.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:bill@31hatley.fsnet.co.uk). You will receive provisional maps for Barn Owl, Little and Tawny Owls which include the 2004 records.

The second half of the winter is the best time to start assessing potential territories – some owls are on territory quite early in the year.

**Existing owl recorders** should continue to survey new tetrads within their present square for all species using their current instruction sheets, looking for likely habitats or bird presence in the winter months and noting species activity in April to July. Return records to Louise in August/September. Previously visited tetrads should be checked in spring/summer for 'likely' species, which may have been missed in 2004. You will receive provisional maps for Barn Owl, Little and Tawny Owls which include the 2004 records.

**Results in 2004** reveal the spread of Barn Owl into parts of South and West Cambridgeshire where it has been absent for many years. Dense concentrations are being identified in areas of fenland where nest boxes have been erected. Little Owl is again shown to favour South West Cambridgeshire as was highlighted in the last Atlas. Long-eared Owls have been recorded in up to 16 sites, mainly characterised by tall bushes, long grass and often near marshy areas. Tawny Owl appears to have declined, but these are very difficult to PROVE breeding attempts for.



## Song Thrush BAP

**Vince Lea<sup>1</sup> and Catherine Weightman<sup>2</sup>**

**<sup>1</sup>CBC member. <sup>2</sup>Cambridgeshire 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 Song Thrush*

The Song Thrush is still a familiar and widespread bird, with a total UK population estimated at 1,100,000 pairs, but a steady decline over the past three decades has put them onto the 'Red List' of birds of conservation concern. It is associated with a range of habitats in the UK, including farmland, woodland and gardens, and the population changes in these different habitats varies – a 73 % reduction has been recorded for farmland, with 49 % decline in woodland, based on BTO Common Bird Census results between the mid 70's and the mid 90's. This survey does not represent the urban environment effectively, but the RSPB garden bird watch indicates a 34 % decline over the last 25 years. Recently, the trends in population have stabilised and may be reversing, with the most recent update on the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey showing an 18 % increase from 1994–2003. The decline has not been steady over time, but associated with certain periods, particularly hard winters. The main difference between hard weather declines in the 60's and more recent events has been that the population no longer recovers from these events. Recent RSPB research has shown this is mainly



due to poor survival of first year birds, and to a lesser extent juveniles, rather than adults, suggesting that difficulties finding food are exacerbated by inexperience of individuals. Strong candidates for the cause of poor survival are increased use of molluscicides (slug pellets), land drainage, other farming changes and predators.

Other research has shown that the urban environment has a major role to play in Song Thrush populations, with a study in Essex showing 71.5 % of territories to be in gardens, which represented only 2 % of the study area. For this reason, the Biodiversity Action Plan for Song Thrush has been placed within the 'Urban Environment' umbrella, although habitat improvements to farmland and woodland should also benefit the species.

The general situation in Cambridgeshire reflects the national trend, with occupied territories in 72 % of 2km tetrads in the last atlas survey. Major gaps were found in fenland districts. On farmland, the species has been shown to be associated with hedgerows of 4–5 metres in height.

Reasons for the decline are not well known, and are probably a combination of some or all of the following suggested causes (but may also involve other factors):

- Farming changes (intensification) reducing food supply and nesting habitat, e.g loss of spring tillage, loss/poor management of hedgerows and farm woodland, increased use of pesticides
- Severe winter weather (historically) and dry summers creating hard soil conditions and reducing access to soil organisms like earthworms
- Competition with the more abundant and stable Blackbird population
- The main period of effect on the population is shortly after fledging and through the first winter.

The more stable urban population may be aided by a less intensive use of pesticides and late summer watering in gardens.

Under the BAP initiative, Cambridgeshire has had awareness-raising activities for the Song Thrush in urban areas. Because of its urban stronghold, the general public can be a major force for conserving this species. An information pack has been produced for people, in order to promote planting and gardening techniques that are favourable to the species. In addition to this, monitoring of the trends from national surveys is ongoing, using data from the BTO and RSPB. Where partners in the Biodiversity Action Plan group manage land with Song Thrush, they are using appropriate management techniques.

The main target set for the BAP (in the 1990s) was to halt the decline of the species by 2000, which has been met. The setting of more demanding targets to reverse the decline was not considered possible due to the large gaps in understanding of the reasons for the decline, but this appears to be occurring slowly, perhaps because we haven't had a hard winter for many years? There is an objective to restore populations to the levels of the 1970s by 2005, but only 'where possible', which may mean high densities in urban areas while farmland continues to have far fewer than it used to. In addition, the plan aims to use any new research findings to implement further action in future if possible.

Further information on the UK and Cambridgeshire BAP process can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/default.htm>

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/sub/cntryside/biodiv/plans/index.html>

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## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS 2005

### March – St John’s Church Hall, Cambridge

#### **A.G.M. followed by “Paxton Pits – Past, Present and Future” by Julian Hughes**

Julian Hughes (Species Protection Office, RSPB) will talk about his local patch. This talk will be of interest to CBC members and friends who already know Paxton Pits, as well as those who are yet to discover its varied birdlife.

### April 8th – Milton Country Park Visitor’s Centre

#### **Bird Illustrating in East Africa & Madagascar by John Gale**

John Gale won awards for Bird Illustrator of the Year in 1992 and Bird Artist of the Year in 2002. He has travelled widely to paint birds. His first job as a bird artist was painting the birds of Mount Kinabalu, in Borneo, the highest peak in South East Asia. His illustrations are based on field work and study of museum specimens. He also creates oil paintings of birds in their habitats, concentrating on the theme of fragile environments, such as the Antarctic. He painted 119 of the 286 plates in the recent *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa*. He will be talking about East Africa as well as a recent visit to Madagascar. For examples of John’s work see the website:  
[www.birdfoto.fsnet.co.uk/birdart/birdart.html](http://www.birdfoto.fsnet.co.uk/birdart/birdart.html)

## EXTRA MEETING IN ELY

### April 28<sup>th</sup> – Masonic Hall, Silver Street, Ely (Full details of the venue in the next bulletin)

#### **Raptorphililia by Keith Offord**

Birds of prey (raptors) are one of the most fascinating groups, appealing to a wide range of people. They are incredibly varied, ranging from the diminutive Pygmy Falcon to giants such as the Martial Eagle. They are also dramatic, unpredictable and exciting and have evolved an astonishing range of specialised features designed to help them survive. Their importance as “barometers” of the health of the countryside cannot be overstated and following two centuries of ruthless persecution and poisoning there has now, for many species, been a significant recovery, allowing everyone to enjoy the thrill of seeing them in the British countryside. Keith Offord has spent many years studying and working with birds of prey on the Welsh uplands where he monitors their breeding activity for Countryside Council for Wales. He has also travelled widely throughout the world and photographed many other examples which feature in the talk.

For more information, look at Keith’s website: [www.keithofford.co.uk](http://www.keithofford.co.uk)

**This special meeting will be an ideal opportunity to introduce friends and family to the Bird Club!**

## CORRECTIONS TO PROGRAMME CARD 2005

Please note the following corrections to the details given in the programme card for 2005.

### **At Milton Country Park**

FRIDAY MAY 13th Jeff Baker [not Barker] Little Brown Jobs – Warbler Identification

### **At St John’s Church Hall**

FRIDAY SEPT 9th [not 8th] Debbie Pain The Indian Vulture Crisis

FRIDAY DEC 9th [not 19th] Christmas Social

### **Extra meeting at Masonic Hall Ely**

THURSDAY [not Monday] APR 28th at Masonic Hall, Ely. Keith Offord Raptorphililia

## CBC-ANNOUNCE

CBC-ANNOUNCE is an emailing list being set-up to send announcements and important notices about Club matters to any member who asks to go on the list. Most notices will be reminders of meetings and announcements of any changes in arrangements so you will only receive one or two messages a month. If you would like to be on this emailing list or ask for more information, please contact Vicki Harley, Tel: 01954 250340, email [vicki.harley@care4free.net](mailto:vicki.harley@care4free.net).

## 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](mailto:vicki.harley@care4free.net)).

## FROM THE SECRETARY

### **New Members.**

We welcome the following new members, Ed Bullmore of Cambridge, Anne Crawley, of Chippenham Park, Graham Ekins of Boreham, Essex, Michael Evans of Cambridge, John Leathers of Great Gransden, Steve Millar of Cambridge, Maggie Morton of Willingham, Peter Oakley of Royston, Mark Piercey of Rushden, Northants, Nick Richardson of Bar Hill, Jon Styles of Great Shelford and Stephen Williams of Bedford..

*Bruce Martin*

## A MESSAGE TO ALL MEMBERS FROM THE TREASURER

**Please, please check if you have paid your subscription for 2005.**

Subscriptions were due on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005, ***but nearly 50 of you have still not paid. Please send it to me straight away – it saves me time and the club postage.***

If you think your subscription should have been paid by your bank, please check your bank statement as it should have gone through your account on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2005.

If you pay by cash or cheque, please see me at the indoor meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> February or post your subscription to me at 14 Spens Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9LS.

Subscriptions :- Full membership	£14.00
Senior/concessionary	£10.00
Student	£ 6.00

If you are a tax payer and have not yet completed a 'Gift Aid Form' to enable the club to reclaim 28p in the £ from the Inland Revenue on your subscription, please contact me either on 01223 356476 or email [rita.lingard@ntlworld.com](mailto:rita.lingard@ntlworld.com)

***If you no longer pay tax and have signed either on old covenant or a more recent gift aid form please let me know as the Club will no longer be entitled to reclaim tax on your subscription.***

The tax we reclaim from the Inland Revenue is very important to the finances of the Club, ***last year we were able to reclaim over £850*** but there are still some of you who pay tax that have 'just not yet got round to completing the form'. Please contact me to check and if I do not hold a 'Gift Aid Form' for you I will be very pleased to send one to you by post or email. Remember it does not cost you anything – all the money the Club gains comes from the Inland Revenue.

**Please, please let me have your subscription straight away !!!!**

Rita Lingard (Hon. Treasurer)

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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](http://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 March 7th**  
**Next Bulletin due out April 2005, covering January and February 2005**

# GOOD BIRDING!