

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

*Bulletin* No. 392



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

## RECENT REPORTS MAY AND JUNE 2007

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records; comments are made by Bruce Martin (Wildfowl, Divers to Herons), Vincent Lea (Gamebirds, Raptors, Rails), Jonathan Taylor (Waders), John Harding (Gulls and Terns), Jon Pavey (Pigeons to Woodpeckers), Jono Leadley (Larks to Thrushes), Mike Foley (Warblers to Tits), and David Heath (Wood Nuthatch to Buntings) and Vicki Harley (Hybrids and Exotica). If you have valid reasons to dispute comments (e.g. further records) please forward these to the county recorder (address on back page).

### Roger Clarke – Memorial Appeal

Please read about – and donate to – the Club's project to commemorate former Club Chairman Roger Clarke on p12.

### Forthcoming Events

Details of future events are given on pp12–13.

If you are interested in drawing birds, please look at the details of a new venture for the Club, a sketching workshop.

The next indoor meeting takes place on September 11th.

Please check the Club website for up-to-date information.

*Semipalmated Sandpiper*  
by Ben Green



Numbers in brackets indicate May and June maximums.

## **WILDFOWL**

**Mute Swan** At Fen Drayton GP (63; 110), Needingworth GP (21; 26), Ouse Fen (51; 48) and Paxton Pits (77; 76). At least 10 broods were noted.

**Whooper Swan** Single birds were seen at both the Nene Washes and the Ouse Washes during the period.

**Pink-footed Goose** Single birds were seen at Needingworth GP on May 8th and at Grafham Water on Jun 11–24th.

**Greylag Goose** At Fen Drayton GP (32; 181) and Needingworth GP (94; 653). At Paxton Pits 343 were counted on Jun 19th and double figures at 6 other sites. Broods were noted at least 8 sites.

**Canada Goose** Double figures were noted at 8 sites.

**Barnacle Goose** Eight birds were recorded at Paxton Pits on Jun 19th and 7 at Earith on the Ouse Washes on Jun 18th. A single bird was also present at Grafham Water during the period.

**Egyptian Goose** Two birds were at Buckden GP and Paxton Pits during May and 2 at the Ouse Washes on Jun 20th.

**Ruddy Shelduck** A male of unknown origin was Wicken Fen in mid May, no doubt the same bird seen previously in that area.

**Common Shelduck** Counts in the mid twenties were made on the Nene Washes and Ouse Washes. In the teens at Paxton Pits and Wicken Fen and single figures at 4 other sites. Broods were noted only at Grafham Water.

**Mandarin** Singles males were noted at Blackbush Drove, the Nene Washes and Wicken Fen in May.

**Eurasian Wigeon** Six birds were at the Ouse Washes on May 2nd. Thereafter 1 to 2 birds were seen at 6 sites during the period.

**Gadwall** Twenty-five at Paxton Pits, 23 at Wicken Fen, 15 at the Cam Washes and 10 at Ouse Fen were the only double-figure counts during the period. Single figures were noted at 6 other sites. Broods were reported from 3 sites.

**Eurasian Teal** Apart from the surprising count of 30 (for the time of year) on Jun 26th at the Ouse Washes Earith, single numbers were noted at 8 sites. A female with young was seen at Kingfishers Bridge on Jun 29th.

**Mallard** Double-figure counts were noted at 10 sites.

**Northern Pintail** Three birds were at the Nene Washes on May 6th and 2 on 12th. Singles were at the Ouse Washes on Jun 9th and the Nene Washes on Jun 15th.

**Garganey** Reported from 6 sites with 4 the maximum counts at the Nene and Ouse Washes, 3 at Ouse and Wicken Fens, 2 at Paxton Pits and a single at Fen Drayton GP.

**Northern Shoveler** Single figure counts were noted at 9 sites.

**Red-crested Pochard** Single birds were noted at Maxey GP on May 11th and at Ouse Fen on May 18th & 30th.

**Common Pochard** Thirteen birds were at the Ouse Washes on Jun 5th and 11 at the Nene washes on

May 23rd. Single figures were noted at 6 other sites.

**Tufted Duck** At Needingworth GP (63:49). Single figure counts came from 7 other sites.

**Greater Scaup** A male was at Grafham Water on Jun 3rd and 4th.

**Common Scoter** A female was at Block Fen on May 6th and a male at Shropshire's reservoir on May 12th.

**Goldeneye** A male was at Barleycraft GP on May 12th, a male at Buckden GP for most of May and a male at Needingworth GP on Jun 17th.

**Goosander** A bird was seen at the Nene Washes on Jun 16th and 28th.

**Ruddy Duck** Reported from 4 sites.

## **GAMEBIRDS**

**Red-legged Partridge** Reports from just 12 locations, with 11 at Benwick the only double-figure tally.

**Grey Partridge** Reported from 16 localities, mostly ones and twos, but 10 territories were held on one holding in Bassingbourn where the farmer is considering entering Higher Level Stewardship.

**Common Quail** One calling briefly at Sutton Gault on 2nd May and 1 seen in flight on 6th at the same Bassingbourn farm that held 10 Grey Partridge territories (above).

**Common Pheasant** Twelve reports, including 4 breeding records.

## **DIVERS TO HERONS**

**Little Grebe** Noted in single figures at 10 sites with breeding at the Cambridge Botanic Gardens, Farcet Fen (Crowtree), Great Eversden golf club pond and Mepal GP.

**Great Crested Grebe** Double figures noted at Fen Drayton GP (26), Grafham Water (47), Needingworth GP (22) and Roswell Pits (15). Breeding noted at 10 sites.

**Black-necked Grebe** An adult bird was present at Paxton Pits on June 24th.

**Northern Fulmar** A bird was seen flying south over March at noon on May 28th.

**Great Cormorant** Reported from 10 sites with 20 at Grafham Water being the highest count.

**Great Bittern** Booming was noted at 2 sites and a bird was seen at a third site.

**Little Egret** Reported from 11 sites with double figures at the Nene Washes (35), the Ouse Washes at Earith (21) and Wicken Fen (13).

**Great Egret** Reports from individual observers on June 14th of a bird flying NE over St Neots at 8.20am and Eye at 11.50am could refer to the same bird.

**Grey Heron** Noted at 13 sites with a count of 38 on the Nene Washes the highest count. The only other double-figure count was 11 at Needingworth GP.

**White Stork** A visitor reported seeing one flying over Wicken Fen on Jun 3rd.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** An adult bird was present at Paxton Pits on May 11th and 13th (seen going to roost on the 13th) and an immature bird was present at the same site on Jun 2nd.

## RAPTORS

**Honey Buzzard** Singles seen at Paxton Pits and Wardy Hill/Ouse Washes during May, and another at Elm in June.

**Black Kite** Following the late April sighting (last bulletin), a remarkable run of 4 sightings in May at Wittering (6th), Wilburton (11th), Manea (14th) (conceivably the same individual), then 1 on Jun 28th at Elton/Fotheringay.

**Red Kite** Well established as a resident, with singletons sighted from 21 locations throughout May and June, and a possible breeding attempt recorded.

**Eurasian Marsh Harrier** Breeding noted or possible from 6 sites, and many other singles seen around the county. No reports received from Woodwalton Fen.

**Hen Harrier** A bird logged at Wicken Fen on Jun 7th, then a male seen there on 30th.

**Montagu's Harrier** Ringtails reported on May 6th from Keyston and 11th at Elsworth.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** Only one indication of breeding behaviour (a stick-carrying male), but 2 or more birds seen at Elm and St Ives and singles from 10 other locations.

**Common Buzzard** Widely reported over the period, with 48 records. Maxima from Grafham Water (7+), Paxton Pits, Hamerton and Girton (all with 6); the latter group on migration. Several breeding pairs noted.

**Osprey** Eight reports in May included 2 at Wicken Fen, the day after a single there, and singles at Grafham on 15th and 18th, a possible lingering bird. One in June on the 1st.

**Common Kestrel** Widely reported, with breeding noted at several locations.

**Eurasian Hobby** With 69 records this was the most reported raptor, and some high counts: 14 at Fen Drayton, 11 Wicken Fen, 9 Paxton Pits, and 8 Nene Washes all in May. Fewer high counts in June but widespread ones and twos indicative of breeding. One seen to catch a Whitethroat at Paxton Pits.

**Peregrine Falcon** A well-publicised pair bred at Peterborough power station, raising one young – the first county record of breeding. Also recorded at the Nene Washes 6 times in May and once in June.

## RAILS

**Water Rail** Reports from Paxton Pits, Nene Washes, Gault Holes (Mepal) and Kingfishers Bridge (singles) and Sutton Gault with 4.

**Spotted Crake** Up to 3 calling at the Nene Washes, and one on the 16th May at the Ouse Washes. With an average of only 10 sites nationally Cambridgeshire is a stronghold for this rarity.

**Corn Crake** The Nene Washes reintroduction scheme continues to show signs of success, with singles reported from the area on 12th and 14th May, and 3 calling on the 30th.

**Common Moorhen** Scattered reports of small numbers and breeding activity.

**Common Coot** Highest counts at Fen Drayton (109) and Ouse Fen (95) with successful breeding noted at many sites.

**Common Crane** An historic year for this species, which secretively bred just over the Cambs border at Lakenheath fen; singles were regularly seen at the Nene Washes throughout the period, so who knows...?

## WADERS

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** Highest counts from Nene Washes with minimum of 7 pairs, also in May up to 7 birds at Paxton Pits, Grafham Water and Needingworth Pits and 1–3 from a further 6 sites. No fledglings reported.

**Avocet** Highest count from Ouse Washes with peak of 17 in May. Scarcer elsewhere than in recent years. Only 1 known breeding attempt in county.

**Little Plover** Highest counts from Maxey GP with 10+ in May, and young seen, Cambridge Research Park with 6 (2 broods seen); Paxton with 5, Grafham Water 2 pairs, Nene Washes 1 pair. Also 2s from Fen Drayton GP, Ouse Fen. 1–4 recorded from a further eleven sites.

**Ringed Plover** Highest counts in May mostly involving the tundra race as follows: Paxton Pits 1–37 daily with peak of 41 on 26th, Nene Washes 1–10 daily with peak of 36 on 28th, Wicken Fen 26 on 28th, Maxey GP 18 on 11th, Ouse Fen 12 on 13th.

**European Golden Plover** One remained at Maxey Pits area to May 12th.

**Grey Plover** Four at Nene Washes on May 1st, 1–2 at Paxton Pits on May 13th, 19th, 20th and 26th, and 1 at Wicken Fen on May 13th.

**Northern Lapwing** Further to March/April, breeding reported from 9 sites including 12 pairs at Wicken Fen, Ouse Washes pilot project 9, Cam Washes 6, Grafham Water 2. Other reports were of individual farmland nesting pairs. Post-breeding gatherings from June 17th with 100 at Wicken Fen and 90+ at Farcet Fen on June 23rd.

**Red Knot** Singles at Paxton Pits on May 3rd and 5th and 3 on 10th.

**Sanderling** Following singles from May 8th to 12th from 4 sites a strong passage ensued through to early June with almost daily records from key sites. Highest counts from Paxton Pits were 6 on 19th–20th and 27th–28th, Grafham Water 4 on 18th–19th and 25th and 5 on 28th and 1–3 from Maxey GP and Nene Washes.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** The county's first record came on May 19th from Ouse Fen.

**Curlew Sandpiper** In May from Maxey GP on 19th, Over Fen on 20th and 2 at Paxton Pits on 22nd.

**Little Stint** Single at Ouse Washes on May 1st.

**Dunlin** In May highest counts from Paxton Pits with a huge spring passage count of 200 on 11th with 1–70 daily, Maxey GP 35 on 14th, Nene Washes 34 on 10th, Over Fen 29 on 12th, 1–11 from a further 5 sites.

**Ruff** 1–3 at the Ouse and Nene Washes in early May and 1 at Paxton Pits on May 1st. In June, 3

males on Nene Washes from 22nd to 30th and a male at Ouse Washes on 22nd.

**Common Snipe** Large numbers of young seen on the Nene Washes from mid-May to mid-June where drumming was still going strong to late June, the wet weather providing extra inducement to keep breeding. Spring and summer flooding at the Ouse Washes wiped out any nesting there, although the pilot project held a minimum of 7 pairs.

**Eurasian Woodcock** Reported from the 3 main sites Woodwalton Fen (6), Wicken Fen (5) and Monks Wood (young seen).

**Black-tailed Godwit** The UK's main breeding population at the Nene Washes fledged at least 20 young in June, a big improvement on 2006 productivity. Elsewhere 1–11 from a further 4 sites.

**Bar-tailed godwit** The remnants of the large scale April movement were in evidence to May 5th with up to 24 at Nene Washes, Paxton Pits 11, Maxey GP 8 and Wicken Fen 1–2 and 15 flying through, Grafham Water 1, Ouse Washes 3.

## SKUAS TO TERNS

**Arctic Skua** Three flew east at Litlington on May 26th.

**Mediterranean Gull** Up to 5 at Paxton during May; last noted there June 2nd; elsewhere, 1 at Buckden GP on May 9th.

**Little Gull** Two at Ferry Meadows GP on May 1st; thereafter singles noted in May at Fletton BP, Orton BP, Grafham, Paxton, Nene Washes and Buckden GP. In June, only 1 record at Maxey GP on 19th.

**Black-headed Gull** Highest counts: 150 at Needingworth GP on May 8th, 64 at Fen Drayton on May 14th, and 44 at Lower Farcet Fen on June 26th. Three chicks observed at Paxton on May 30th.

**Common Gull** Three first-summerers at Paxton on May 15th. Otherwise only singles reported.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** The highest count was 150 at Landbeach Tip on June 17th; other notable counts were 50+ at Buckden GP on May 10th and 61 at Paxton on May 18th.

**Herring Gull** Only three singles reported from Buckden GP, Paxton Pits and Ouse Fen.

**Yellow-legged Gull** Seventeen were at Paxton Pits on May 18th, in a month of almost continuous reports from this site. Elsewhere, 3 at Buckden GP on May 21st, all first summerers, 2 at Grafham on May 1st, and 1 there paired with a Lesser Black-back (another similar pairing reported from Paxton); singles also at Nene Washes and Ouse Fen in May.

**Great Black-backed Gull** Three first-summerers at Grafham on May 7th, and a single at Paxton throughout May; also an adult at Buckden GP on May 20th.

**Sandwich Tern** One at Paxton on May 2nd and 2 at Grafham on May 25th.

**Common Tern** Many reports. Highest counts: 72 at Paxton on May 21st; 55 at Fen Drayton on May 14th, with 34 there on June 16th; and 30 at Kingfisher Bridge on June 29th. Other noteworthy records included plenty of fly-overs at both

Cambridge and Cambourne, and one at Crafts Hill of a bird carrying fish.

**Arctic Tern** A total of 16 reports. Ten were at Paxton on May 10th, with 1 or 2 reported regularly there throughout May. Also in May birds reported from Grafham regularly, with a maximum of 5 on May 7th. In June the only reports were of singles at Ouse Washes on 11th and 30th, and one at Pymore on 11th.

**Little Tern** One flew east at Grafham on May 7th and 3 were at Paxton in the early morning on May 15th.

**Black Tern** Reported regularly throughout the county during the period. The maximum was 3 at Fletton BP on May 2nd. There were 2 at Grafham on May 11th and Maxey GP on May 31st; otherwise reports of singles from Ferry Meadows CP and Nene Washes on May 1st, Paxton on May 2nd, and singles still at Fletton on 3rd and 4th; Grafham hosted singles throughout the rest of May, and through June, and elsewhere there were reports from Nene Washes on May 13th and June 30th, Paxton on May 16th, Fletton BP on June 7th and 9th, and Fen Drayton on June 25th, all of single birds.

## NEAR PASSERINES

**Feral Pigeon** Wisbech town centre continued to hold around 100 birds during the period; the Elizabeth bridge, Cambridge, flock has reportedly disappeared now holes are covered with wire netting.

**Stock Pigeon** Seventeen records across the county, of up to 10 birds

**Wood Pigeon** Five hundred recorded at Girton on Jun 12th; 390 at Comberton a day later.

**Collared Dove** Six records, including 20+ birds recorded at Elm.

**Turtle Dove** Fifty-four records from 41 sites, with typically 1–3 birds. Paxton Pits held the most birds (8).

**Common Cuckoo** Forty-seven records from 27 sites. Except for 12 at Isleham, all records involved 1 to 4 birds.

**Barn Owl** Reported from over 20 sites, including a late afternoon observation near the Ely Tesco. Three positive breeding records.

**Little Owl** Between 1 and 4 birds from 19 sites, with several breeding records.

**Tawny Owl** Heard calling in 9 locations, including four records of juveniles.

**Long-eared Owl** A single record of a juvenile calling.

**Common Swift** Recorded widely in varying numbers. Largest count was 500+ at Earith.

**Common Kingfisher** Recorded at 15 sites; 6 young ringed at Wicken Fen in May.

**Hoopoe** One observed in Harston in late June; reportedly 1 occurred in Grafham earlier in the month.

**Green Woodpecker** Reports of 1–8 birds from 16 sites.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** Up to 5 birds recorded from 19 sites.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** A single record of a male on May 4th.

## PASSERINES

**Woodlark** A single singing in Suffolk was heard from Isleham on June 23rd.

**Skylark** Reported from 8 sites in May and 14 sites in June. Of note, were 40 territories recorded at Bassingbourn, 26 on Westfield Farm, Comberton, and 22 at Lark Rise Farm, Barton.

**Sand Martin** Only a single report received; 6 at St Ives on June 17th, which included a juvenile.

**Barn Swallow** Reported from 13 sites in May and 10 in June. Notable counts included 500 at Paxton Pits on May 13th, 120+ at Blackbush Drove on May 14th and 50 at Fletton Brick Pits on May 3rd.

**House Martin** Reported from 7 sites in May and two sites in June. Notable counts include 76 at Paxton Pits on May 4th, 55+ at Wisbech on June 30th and 35+ at Wisbech on May 31st.

**Meadow Pipit** Reported from 5 sites in May and 9 sites in June. The only count of note was 25 singing in Cambourne on May 1st.

**Water Pipit** A bird was present on Bakers Fen, Wicken Fen, May 4–7th. Additionally, a bird was seen at Paxton Pits on May 13th, equalling the latest ever Cambridgeshire record.

**Yellow Wagtail** Reported from 18 sites in May and 6 in June. The only notable count was from March Farmers, Nene Washes, where 15 were seen on May 31st. In addition, single male and female Blue-headed Wagtails were on the dam at Grafham Water on May 1st, with the same or another male seen between 4th and 7th at the same place.

**Grey Wagtail** Single or pairs of birds reported from 7 sites in the period. The only confirmed breeding record came from Grafham Water, where a pair were feeding a newly fledged chick in the lagoons on May 24th.

**Pied Wagtail** Reported from 12 sites during the period.

**White Wagtail** Two were seen on Farcet Fen on May 11th.

**Wren** Reported from 14 sites during the period.

**Dunnock** Reported from 12 sites during the period.

**Robin** Reported from 14 sites during the period.

**Common Nightingale** Reported from 7 sites in May and 3 in June. Notable counts include 29 singing males at Paxton Pits on May 6th.

**Whinchat** A female at Ferry Meadows on May 7th, a single at Kingfisher's Bridge on May 12th and a single at Guinea Hall, Wicken Fen, on May 22nd were the only records.

**Stonechat** The first Cambridgeshire breeding record for possibly 80 years was recorded at an undisclosed site.

**Northern Wheatear** Reported from 20 sites in May. Most reports were of singles or pairs, with 5 at Orton Brick Pits on May 1st the highest count. In addition, birds thought to be of the Greenland subspecies were reported from three sites in mid-May.

**Ring Ouzel** Following the huge influx in April, reported from 7 sites in May. A female at Moonshine Gap on May 1st was followed by 2 females at Fowlmere and a single female at Stilton on 3rd, 5 at Kings Delph on the 4th, with singles at

Caldecote on 5th, Orwell on 6th and Paxton Pits, which remained until the 12th.

**Blackbird** Reported from 12 sites during the period.

**Song Thrush** Reported from 13 sites during the period.

**Redwing** One at Wicken Fen on May 6th was the only record.

**Mistle Thrush** Reported from 11 sites during the period with 10 at Elm on June 27th the only count of note.

**Cetti's Warbler** Up to 7 were noted at Wicken Fen during the period; elsewhere 3 were in song at a site near Mepal.

**Common Grasshopper Warbler** Noted at Fen Drayton GP, Little Eversden, Paxton Pits, Toft, Wicken Fen (maximum 6) and Woodwalton Fen (maximum 7).

**Sedge Warbler** Reported from 10 sites, including 2 new territories at Lake Ewart, Cambourne.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler** Locations with double figures included Earith GP, Fen Drayton GP, Isleham (East Fen), Landbeach GP, Lower Farcet Fen, Paxton Pits and Ramsey Mere (Mere Farm). The presence of a singing bird at the Cambridge Botanic Garden on 21 June in a small area designed to depict Fen habitat was very unusual.

**Lesser Whitethroat** Most reports were of 1–3 birds, but up to 8 were noted at Paxton Pits in May.

**Common Whitethroat** From 38 sites, 29 birds were recorded at Little Thetford (Braham Farm) on May 20th; the Parish of Landbeach had 16+ territories in June.

**Garden Warbler** Singing males were noted at 13 sites, mainly in May, with 18 singing birds at Fen Drayton GP on May 14th.

**Blackcap** Higher counts included 18 singing birds at Paxton Pits (June 19th), and 12 at little Thetford (Braham Farm).

**Wood Warbler** One was reported at Raveley Wood on May 2nd, and another at Pendragon Woods (Papworth Everard) on May 13th (the latter via *Rare Birds Alert*).

**Common Chiffchaff** Reported from many sites, with 17 singing birds found at Paxton Pits on June 19th.

**Willow Warbler** Noted at 17 sites, with a reported maximum of 29 singing birds at Paxton Pits on June 19th.

**Goldcrest** Reported from 5 sites with confirmed breeding at two. One bird at Farcet Fen in late June was an unusual occurrence.

**Spotted Flycatcher** Noted at 13 sites (less than half the 2006 number for the period), with 2+ birds seen at 5 of these.

**Pied Flycatcher** One was reported at Little Abingdon on May 4th (via *BirdGuides*).

**Bearded Tit** One breeding pair confirmed.

**Long-tailed Tit** Noted at 8 sites, with family parties / groups up to 15+ (Barton) in June.

**Marsh Tit** Present at Great Paxton, Hardwick Wood, Monks Wood, Paxton Pits, Upton Wood and Wimpole Hall, and breeding at 4 of these sites. At Monks Wood, 23 pairs raised 125 young, but some attempts were washed out by rain in early May.

**Coal Tit** Reported from 3 sites with evidence of breeding in or near a garden site and at Priory Park (St Neots).

**Blue Tit** Priory Park (St Neots) held 34 breeding pairs, and Isleham (East Fen) had 20 reported, with records from 9 other sites. Chris Thorne, ringing at Wicken Fen, has made an interesting comment of breeding interactions with Great Tits, reproduced as follows: "One of our (50 or so) Wicken Fen nest boxes had a Blue Tit in residence, with about 6 eggs. At that stage, the Blue Tits were ousted by a pair of Great Tits, who proceeded to lay directly into the Blue Tit clutch (this is unusual – Great Tits usurping Blue Tits is not unusual, but they normally lay down some more nest material over the Blue Tit eggs, so that the latter do not hatch). Thus a mixed clutch of eggs was incubated by the female Great Tit, and almost all of the mixed clutch hatched. On May 19 we ringed 4 baby Blue Tits and 6 Great Tits in that box, and they all left the nest successfully. Unfortunately, we have not, yet, retrapped any of them, so we do not know whether the Blue Tits think they are Great Tits or whatever!"

**Great Tit** From 10 sites, with Priory Park (St Neots) having 28 breeding pairs in early June.

**Wood Nuthatch** Reported from 3 sites with counts of 2 birds at Monks Wood and just singles at Hayley Wood and Gamlingay Wood.

**Eurasian Treecreeper** Records were received from 4 sites mostly involving single birds, but a breeding pair were noted at Priory Park, St. Neots, and several were ringed at Wicken Fen.

**Eurasian Golden Oriole** A single unconfirmed bird was noted at Wicken per Rarebirdalert on Jun 4th .

**Eurasian Jay** Reported from 13 sites with juvenile birds included within the peak count of 4+ at Elm on Jun 30th.

**Black-billed Magpie** The peak count again included juveniles and was also from Elm on Jun 30th. A bird was also seen predated 2 Blackbird chicks by the reed-bed hide at Fowlmere RSPB on May 7th.

**Eurasian Jackdaw** Reported from 6 sites with the peak count being 28 at Wilbraham Common on May 12th.

**Rook** Records were received from 6 sites with the maximum again coming from Wilbraham Common being 34 birds on Jun 16th.

**Carrion Crow** Records were received from 10 sites with just 28 birds at West Field Farm, Comberton being the peak count.

**Common Starling** Reported from 18 sites with an estimated 1,000 pre-roost birds at Cambridge Science Park on Jun 18th being the maximum count. A further 200+ adults and young were recorded foraging at Bar Hill playing fields on Jun 27th.

**House Sparrow** Reported from 11 sites with juvenile birds included within the peak count of 75+ at Elm on Jun 30th.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** Records were received from 2 sites including news of encouraging breeding success. The peak count was 9 at Block

Fen GP's on May 31st supported by 8+ at Farcet Fen on May 12th.

**Chaffinch** The peak count was from Braham Farm, Little Thetford with 43 birds. St. Neot's Priory Park hosted 16 breeding pairs on Jun 1st.

**European Greenfinch** Reports received from 14 sites with 34 birds at Braham Farm, Little Thetford on Jun 4th being the peak count.

**European Goldfinch** Records were received from 10 sites with the maximum being 25 birds at Braham Farm, Little Thetford on May 20th.

**Common Linnet** A farm survey at Bassingbourn recorded 17 territories on May 6th and an additional 15 were reported at Braham Farm, Little Thetford on May 20th.

**Common Crossbill** One report was received of a solitary bird over Hemingford Grey on Jun 21st.

**Common Bullfinch** The maximum count was 6 birds at both Braham Farm, Little Thetford on May 6th and Paxton Pits on May 26th.

**Yellowhammer** Reported from 18 sites with the maximum being 17 at Bassingbourn on May 6th.

**Reed Bunting** Records were received from 16 sites with the peak being 17 singing males at Paxton Pits on Jun 19th. A further 17 birds were also reported from Little Thetford on May 20th

**Corn Bunting** Reports were received from 17 sites with the peak count being 70 birds at Heydon on May 8th. A further 13 territories were identified at Bassingbourn during a farm survey.

## HYBRIDS

**Scaup x Tufted Duck** A presumed Scaup x Tufted Duck drake of the Lesser Scaup type was observed at Grafham Water.

## EXOTICA

**Black Swan** Singles at Fen Drayton and Roswell Pits (Ely) and 3 at Ouse Fen.

**Bar-headed Goose** At Paxton Pits in late May. It seems likely that this bird is the one that was seen at Grafham Water on June 13th.

**Indian Peafowl** One at Wilbraham Common on May 12th.

**Helmeted Guineafowl** Ten recorded at Hawks Mill Farm, Wilbraham, on June 16th.

**Eastern Rosella** One in a garden in Earith village, on June 30th.

**Contributors:** Colin Addington, Louise Bacon, Geoff Barlow, Rowena Baxter, Carlos Davies, Steve Dudley, David Griffiths, Stephen Hartley, Kevin Harris, Mark Hawkes, Peter Herkenrath, Julian Hughes, Bob Humphrey, John Le Gassick, Vince Lea, Mark Missin, Rob Partridge, Mark Peck, Robert Pople, Michael Price, Tony Roberts, Bob & Ann Scott, Clive Sinclair, Nigel Spowell, Chris Thorne, Alan & Brenda Wadsworth, Cambridgeshire Bird Club website.

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 Club's database for the Annual Report.

## Bulletin bird: Semipalmated Sandpiper at Ouse Fen

### Part 1 by Richard Patient

On Saturday 19th May 2007 I headed out without a great deal of expectation as there were strong northwesterly winds blowing. I spent some time at Fen Drayton GP, but mainly due to the wind it was a struggle. Highlights were hundreds of Swifts and 14+ Hobbies; all great to watch but hardly unexpected here at this time of year. After a couple of hours I decided to act upon an impulse and check Ouse Fen on my way home. I was aware via Cambirds that a Stint there this morning had briefly masqueraded as a Temminck's before being 'confirmed' as a Little, and thought that at the least a double check of this would be worthwhile.

Consequently I arrived at Over at c13:00. Viewing here was also pretty miserable due to the wind, so I drove my car along the rough track to provide a little shelter. However when I arrived at the usual wader area I could see no migrant waders at all. However, after about 15 minutes I noticed four waders on a very distant sandbar – two Dunlin, a Tundra Ringed Plover and 'the' stint. At this range there was nothing to ring alarm bells and I casually thought to myself 'there's the Little'. As there was little else to check I kept an eye on this small group of waders, and when they came a little closer I began to get seriously interested in the stint. Two features in particular kept drawing my attention – firstly it's overall greyness, with no hint of the orangey-rufous tones I associate with spring Littles, and secondly the marked pectoral band comprised of fine grey streaking with bold marks also extending to the extreme upper flanks. Taken together these plumage features were reminiscent of a summer plumaged White-rumped Sandpiper. There was an absence of a mantle V or split supercilium, and the bird looked a little on the stocky side for a Little Stint. I started to think along the lines of Semipalmated Sandpiper, but surely that was just fanciful...

The next half hour or so was almost farcical – the bird kept extremely distant, I could barely hold my telescope still due to the wind, the direction of the strong sunlight was far from ideal, and I could not find my 'car copy' of the Collins Guide for reference (I later found it at home!) When the bird briefly came one island closer I tried to take some pictures, but all were ruined by camera shake. Frustrated, I retired inside the car and set up the tripod on the back seat, at which point my shutter release cable failed! I managed to click off half a dozen or so poor record shots before the stint returned to the back of the pool. I then decided to concentrate on telescope views again, this time trying to ascertain the exact bill shape; if I could see a 'blob end' I felt confident enough to release the news as a Semipalmated. Sadly, I couldn't. Matters were then taken out of my hands to some extent as at 14:10 the stint got up and flew strongly away on it's own, way out of sight beyond the end of the pit. I was now in an invidious position – I was the only one claiming to have seen a rather unlikely difficult-to-identify first for the county, an individual which had previously been identified by others as a far more likely species, and with just poor photographs to back up my claim. I decided that the best course of action was to go home to refer to literature, check my photos on a computer screen and make some phone calls, and then return later in the afternoon at a time when the light should be much better, in the hope that the bird had reappeared.

I got home and hit the books – firstly checking Lars Jonsson's seminal stint paper in *British Birds* in 1984 (fortunately I had just started subscribing then), and *Shorebirds of North America*. I very quickly found a photo of a bird with a similar bill shape (labelled as a long-billed eastern bird), and it wasn't at all difficult to find plumage similarities with the Ouse Fen bird. Surely it was a Semi-P? I decided at this point to make some phone calls to various regular birding companions who I thought would be around. In the event I spoke to both Mark Ward and Ade Cooper to tell them that I had seen a peep at Ouse Fen that looks a like a Semi-P but I wanted a second opinion to make sure that I wasn't going mad! Both assured me that they would head over and check the site even though I explained that the bird had flown and may not even be present now. I also downloaded my photos onto my computer and then e-mailed them to Steve Cooper for an ID opinion, but could not get hold of him either to visit Ouse Fen or to opine on the pictures.

I was browsing through further reference material when my phone rang – it was Bruce Martin. His call was most welcome as it transpired that Richard Thomas had seen me driving away from Ouse Fen, and that the stint had returned. Richard had asked Bruce to enquire what I thought of the stint and I responded along the lines of 'Don't tell me, he's thinking it's a Semi-P, 'cos so am I!' Bruce replied in

the affirmative and gave me Richard's number. Therefore at 16:30 I rang Richard and I think we were both grateful that we were not after all seeing things! We now had two courses available – either to try for better views, ideally to see the semipalmations on the feet after which the bird is named, or to contact other observers. In the event we opted for the latter course as it gave a chance for others to see the bird, it now being late afternoon. Accordingly Richard rang Mark Hawkes, who then also spoke to me before heading straight to the site.

I returned at c.17:30 and parked at the end of the road as I was expecting a crowd to gather shortly! Mark Hawkes was the only person present but had been putting his phone to good use by contacting various locals and information services as he could see why we were so interested in this bird. When I arrived the stint was in the near corner in superb light, and the wind had dropped almost miraculously since earlier. The difference in viewing was astounding, and I could now make out reddish on the ear coverts and also some feather details that I could not see earlier. Ben Green and Duncan Poyser soon joined us and were taking photos (there are some photos on the CBC website), and when Mark asked me exactly what a Semi-P should look like at this time of year, knowing that I had just spent some time poring over the books, I had no hesitation in saying 'Just like that!'

In these evening views the dull general coloration, dark centred scapulars and general lethargic feeding action were indeed reminiscent of Temminck's Stint, albeit the birds structure was wrong for that species. On close head on views I felt that I could see an expansion of the bill tip, a feature often shown by this species, however again I could not see this when it was more distant, and I have not seen any photos of this individual showing this feature. Mark updated the pager services with the hot news that it was indeed a Semipalmated Sandpiper to ensure that as many people as possible shared in this unique event.

Thanks are due to all those mentioned above, and of course to Ian Ellis the original finder of the bird, for their part in unravelling this story. With hindsight perhaps the most difficult part of the identification was the sheer sense of disbelief that this was indeed a Semipalmated Sandpiper in Cambridgeshire, in spring. I certainly felt a huge surge of relief when I spoke to Richard and realised that he had reached the same conclusion as me. Having seen both Yellowlegs species and Buff-breasted Sandpiper in the county in previous springs, as well as the recent Wilson's Phalarope, I wonder which nearctic wader will be next...

## ***Part 2 by Richard Thomas***

On Saturday 19th May 2007, I decided to check my local patch, Ouse Fen, early, in case any migrant waders were present. Although spring 2007 had been exceptionally poor, both in terms of numbers and variety of waders on passage, it was with a sense of anticipation that I left the house around 7.00 am, for it was an auspicious date – exactly 1 year earlier, on 19th May – I had found a Broad-billed Sandpiper at the Fen.

Forty minutes later I returned home, disappointed. I had not seen a single migrant wader species, and I remember commenting to my wife, Sarah, that it was probably the dullest visit to the Fen this year. How things were about to change!

Two hours later, Mark Hawkes phoned me to say Ian Ellis was watching a possible Temminck's Stint at Ouse Fen. I was pretty annoyed not to have found it, but shortly afterwards, Mark texted me to say it was just a Little Stint. I wasn't surprised – the light conditions at Ouse Fen in the morning are terrible, looking straight into the sun, so it was perfectly understandable how the two could be confused. I thought no more about the bird.

On returning home from shopping, just after 14.00, I decided to check the Fen for waders. As I drove down there, Richard Patient passed me, leaving the site. Arriving at the wader area, a couple of birdwatchers from Paxton were present, but hadn't seen the stint. There were several Dunlins and a Turnstone, and after about 15 minutes, two Dunlin and the stint appeared on the mud in front of me. 'I've got the stint,' I remarked to the Paxton birdwatchers, telling them where it was, then declared 'Crikey, it's a bit dull for a Little Stint!' In fact the more I watched the bird, the odder it seemed – there didn't appear to be any rufous feather edging in the mantle or wing feathers, the upperparts appeared rather grey-brown, and the breast sides and upperchest were finely streaked with grey. I remarked

that I'd never seen a Little Stint this late in the year that didn't show some rufous, and commented that although it was a remote possibility, I thought the bird could be a Semipalmated Sandpiper, and I was going home to check some literature and photos. I spent the next 15 minutes or so feverishly searching the web for photos of summer-plumaged Little Stints and Semipalmated Sandpipers. All the photos of the former showed extensive rufous feather edges on the upperparts, and neck sides, and one photo of a Semipalmated Sandpiper on the Cornell site at:

[http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/BNA/demo/account/Semipalmated\\_Sandpiper/](http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/BNA/demo/account/Semipalmated_Sandpiper/) looked to me the spitting image of the bird on Ouse Fen!

I quickly returned to the Fen to study the bird further. I had some concerns – first, the only summer-plumaged Semi-p. I had seen (Cley, May 1989) had appeared greyer than this bird. Second, was it just a Little Stint that had delayed moult out of winter plumage? Third, the bill didn't appear blunt enough for a typical Semi-p., and apparently lacked a 'blob' at the tip. However, I had seen the Semi-p. at Felixstowe in November 1982, which had at first been considered a Western Sandpiper because of its rather long, fine bill, so although not typical, the bill shape didn't rule out Semi-p.

After 30 minutes watching the bird on my own, it appeared very settled so I decided to get closer. I climbed the fence and approached to within 25 yards. At this range, I could be absolutely certain the mantle and wings were indeed fresh summer-plumage, with dark centres to the scapulars and lacking rufous edging. I was able to see the sides of the crown were quite rufous – I am unaware if this is considered a feature of adult Semi-p., but it was something I had noted on several photos I had earlier looked at. I kept concentrating on the feet, trying to confirm if there was indeed webbing between the toes, after which the species is named; this is a notoriously difficult feature to see, and water films between the toes can easily give a false impression of webbing. On Dunlins at this range, I could clearly see individual toes, but on the stint, every time it lifted its feet, they appeared to have 'a bit extra', making the feet look a little club-footed. Things were looking good!

I returned home, rechecked more photos on the web and decided it was time to phone Bruce Martin. Bruce was in Norfolk, but I advised him strongly to come and have a look at the Ouse Fen stint, because either I was seeing things or it looked to me like a Semi-p.! I told him I'd seen Richard Patient leaving the site earlier, and suggested he call Richard to see what he'd thought of the bird (I hadn't got Richard's number). Shortly afterwards, Richard called me. Like me, he was suspicious the bird was a Semi-p., but had seen it fly off high and assumed it had left Ouse Fen for good. He'd taken some photos and returned home to check literature. He was coming to the conclusion it was a Semi-p. too.

Given the two of us had independently identified the bird as a Semi-p., it was time to alert others. I called Mark Hawkes, and advised him to go and see the stint at Over. I didn't tell him just how strongly I believed it was a Semi-p., as I wanted his unbiased opinion as to its identity. Unfortunately, I had to be at a colleague's party that afternoon, so had to leave. About 18.00 Mark texted me to say he and several other observers believed it was a Semi-p. too, and he'd put the news out. I hurriedly left the party, Sarah calling birders from my mobile as we drove. We arrived back at the Fen where about 20 people had already gathered. The bird was performing well and everyone seemed happy with the identification. At 19.45, the Semi-p., plus a dozen mixed Dunlins and Ringed Plovers, flew off high to the north-east. Fortunately all returned at 20.00 and the bird was then present until dark. I estimate it was seen by around 70 people. It was a good night in the local pub that evening!

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, the Semi-p. was not present the following morning as it would have attracted a considerable crowd.

Semipalmated Sandpiper breeds in the sub-arctic tundra of Canada and Alaska, USA, and winters along the northern and central coasts of South America. It is a national rarity in the United Kingdom, and in the British Isles as a whole there are around 150 records, the majority of them autumn juveniles, principally along the coasts of southern Ireland. It is very rare in spring, with a total of about ten records, and there is just one other record from an inland county – an autumn juvenile in Northants. A spring adult inland in Cambridgeshire is therefore astonishing – but that's Ouse Fen and May 19th for you... see you there next year!

## ***From the County Recorder***

This is the first record for Cambridgeshire. Another was reported at Peterborough sewage farm in August 1983, but despite being submitted to the BBRC, it appears there has not been confirmation on the outcome of this record (something I am currently looking into).

This bird maintains Cambridgeshire's outstanding run of good waders, which in the last 10 years has included Black-winged Stilt, c.10 American Golden Plovers, Pacific Golden Plover, Kentish Plover, Collared Pratincole, Red-necked Stint, Buff-breasted and White-rumped Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Phalarope and Broad-billed Sandpiper – and to bring the whole thing full circle again, the latter species was found at Ouse Fen on 19th May 2006 – exactly a year before the Semipalmated (and favouring the same corner of the same pool!).

## **Bulletin Bird 2: Wilson's Phalarope at Grafham Water**

*Jono Leadley*

After a prolonged spell of easterly winds, I decided to take a day off to give Grafham Water a good grilling before the crowds arrived for the Bank Holiday weekend. Grafham had had a relatively quiet few weeks, despite the promising wind direction, with an early Arctic Skua, a couple of Ring Ouzels and a Spotted Redshank being the best birds among a thin scatter of Arctic Terns and common waders.

I headed first for 'the lagoons', an area of wetland and scrub just east of Perry village, on the south bank of the reservoir. Site owners, Anglian Water, had recently scraped out some of the older lagoons indirectly creating some good wader habitat. Although single Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank may not seem like much, this is pretty good for Grafham in the spring, where high water levels in the reservoir make the site virtually devoid of wader habitat.

My first stop was to check out the lagoon managed by the Wildlife Trust in front of the hide. Apart from a couple of loafing Mallard and some chuntering Reed Warblers in the reedbed, little was in evidence. I headed clockwise round the lagoons to check out the newly scraped area which had attracted the Spotted Redshank earlier in the week. On my arrival a wader called; I looked up to see a Greenshank, which dropped in over my head and on to the lagoon. A good start! At that moment my mobile rang; it was Colin Addington, another Grafham Water birder. Colin informed me that a Whimbrel was showing well at the north end of the dam, near Marlow Car Park. I have seen many Whimbrel over the years at Grafham, but relatively few on the ground, so I thought this was a good opportunity to study one closely and possibly get a photo for my website.

I headed back to my car and drove the short distance to Marlow where I soon joined Colin watching the Whimbrel, which was remarkably approachable. I told Colin of my good fortune with the Greenshank and he stated that he would head over there to look for it, leaving me to digiscope the Whimbrel.

After a while, I strolled back across the grass to view the reservoir and check out some bushes which can often be productive for migrants. After 10 minutes or so, my phone rang again. It was Colin, who I assumed would tell me he had seen the Greenshank. However, he said breathlessly, 'Come to the lagoons, I have got a phalarope!' He explained he had seen it briefly and that he was moving position, in order to get a better view. Whichever phalarope species it was, it would be a great spring record for Grafham, so I immediately legged it back to my car, as fast as I could. I called Mark Hawkes, the County Bird Recorder, but he didn't answer. As I ran, I repeated to myself 'Please be a Wilson's, please be a Wilson's', knowing that a spring Wilson's Phalarope would be an astonishing find. I considered it to be a little early to be a Red-necked Phalarope and Grey Phalaropes were just as rare in spring as Wilson's, so fingers crossed...

My phone rang as I drove down to the lagoons; 'It's a Wilson's!' Colin exclaimed. Wow! Now the adrenaline really was pumping! I leapt out of my car and retraced my steps back to the lagoon where I had been watching the Greenshank half an hour earlier. If only I hadn't so hastily left! I found Colin standing to the north of the hedge that encircles the site, looking through a small gap in to the lagoon behind. After a few tense seconds, I finally caught sight of a small bird swimming between two Gadwall. And there it was, a stonking adult Wilson's Phalarope!

A long black stripe ran from the base of the bill, through the eye and swept down the sides of the neck where it became a beautiful deep maroon. The upperparts were also a deep maroon contrasting with pale grey feathers on the scapulars. The crown too was pale grey, which developed into a stripe, running down the back of the neck and on to the back. The underparts were generally white apart from a delicate peach wash on the front of the neck. The long, straight, needle-fine bill and short white supercilium completed the suite of features which confirmed the identification of this exquisite wader.

We telephoned the Wildlife Trust's warden and then Anglian Water to warn them that this bird could attract the crowds and so would advise birders to park in the nearby Plummer Car Park. Everybody was happy for the news to go out, so within minutes of confirming the identity, the news was broadcast. As we waited for the first birders to arrive, I attempted some very shaky digiscoped record shots, just in case the bird decided to leave. But fortunately, it didn't, and arriving birders were soon enjoying fantastic views as the phalarope followed behind the local dabbling ducks, picking up any invertebrates they disturbed.

Wilson's Phalaropes are the least pelagic of the three phalaropes. At this time of year they are undertaking their northbound migration, from wintering grounds in South America, to the prairies of North America. It is possible that this bird may have arrived in Europe in a previous autumn and is now following a parallel migration route on this side of the Atlantic.

This is the second record of Wilson's Phalarope at Grafham Water, the first being a juvenile in October 1984. It is the fifth or sixth record for Cambridgeshire, the last being in 1991 at Ely Beet Factory. At the time of writing the bird is still present and has showed well to over five hundred birders. The only other spring bird in Cambridgeshire was at the Ouse Washes and it stayed from the end of May until early August, so the Grafham bird might be around for a while yet!

P.S. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the vast majority of birders who followed the parking instructions kindly passed on by Birdguides and other news providers. This will help with future access arrangements. This article first appeared on the Birdguides website.

### **Bulletin Bird 3: Laughing Gull at Grafham Water, the second record for Cambridgeshire**

*Jono Leadley*

The end of June is never the most scintillating birding time at Grafham Water and as such I took my dog for a walk along the dam early on the 24th, expecting to see very little. I was so pessimistic about my chances, that I hadn't even bothered to take my 'scope or camera with me!

From the south end of the dam, I scanned along the shore; a Common Sandpiper scurried after flies attracted to the debris on the strandline whilst a small group of gulls loafed on the dam wall. I headed along the dam flushing the small handful of Black-headed Gulls in the process. As they banked and flew past me over the water, I was astonished to see one of them was dark slate grey, with a black head and long, heavy drooping bill. It could only be a Laughing Gull! I grabbed my bins and watched as it headed leisurely north, round the tower and away.

Having found Cambridgeshire's first Laughing Gull as recently as November, I could not quite believe what I had just seen. Surely lightning could not strike twice that soon! Trusting that I had not hallucinated, I grabbed my mobile phone and began ringing the news out. Being fairly early on a Sunday morning, the first few birders I called did not answer; presumably tucked up in bed!

As I arrived at the water tower, which is half way along the dam, I was relieved to see the Laughing Gull had landed on the dam shore, and was happily feeding on a large dead fish. I decided to walk past the bird, keeping out of sight behind the wall, so that I could assist any arriving birders from the north end of the dam. To my relief, David Hollin soon arrived and I had my first wonderful views of this elegant gull through his scope, noting the long, deep red bill, white eye crescents, full black hood and long greyish-red legs. Next to nearby Black-headed, the gull looked much darker, being similar to a Lesser-black Backed Gull in tone. The bird had long wings with lots of black on the outer primaries. David grabbed a couple of photos for the record, and shortly more birders began to appear.

Despite appearing to be in full breeding plumage, the bird had brown on the inner primaries and some black marks on the tail, suggesting it was in its second summer. A couple of times during watching, the bird took flight and cruised around for a while. On one occasion, it glided close over the heads of the assembled throng, much to our delight. Mid-morning the bird wandered over towards the lagoons, where it was seen briefly, before appearing to head back to the dam at about 10.30. To my surprise, it was never seen again, despite extensive searching by many birders.

If accepted, this will be Grafham Water and Cambridgeshire's second record.



## **Roger Clarke – Memorial Appeal**

If you have not already contributed to the Club's appeal to commemorate Roger Clarke, one of the country's most distinguished ornithologists and a former Chairman of the Club, please think about doing so now.

Cheques should be made payable to Cambridgeshire Bird Club and sent to The Treasurer, CBC, 2 Millers Lane, Toft, Cambridge CB23 2RX. They can also be given to a Council member at a Club meeting.

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **INDOOR MEETING**

**Friday September 11th Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre**

**Peregrines, Parrots and Poisons: the work of the RSPB's Investigations by Duncan McNiven**

Wild birds face all kinds of problems in the environment – habitat destruction, migration hazards, climate change and agricultural intensification to name just a few. But they also suffer from the criminal activities of people who want to destroy them or use them illegally for commercial gain. This talk will illustrate the lengths that a small team of RSPB investigators go to in order foil these activities and bring the perpetrators to justice. The talk will focus on some of the issues of high conservation concern such as raptor persecution, threats to rare breeding birds in the UK, and the international trade in endangered species. Duncan is a Senior Investigations Officer with the RSPB but is also a life-long birder and member of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club. Before joining the RSPB he worked on ornithological projects in Cameroon, Suriname, New Guinea and California.

**Friday October 12th 2007 Milton Country Park Visitor's Centre**

**Wars, Wetlands and Wildlife: a conservation journey through the Middle East by Richard Porter**

This talk will be about the conservation programme on Yemen's remote island of Socotra (with its high endemism), the effects of the Gulf War, the soaring bird migration from Eastern Europe into Africa and the training of Iraqis for their surveys of the Mesopotamian Marshes.

Richard Porter is an ecologist who has been professionally involved in wildlife conservation for nearly 40 years: initially with RSPB and latterly with BirdLife International, establishing its Middle East programme. Although there is now a regional office in Jordan – with Arab staff – Richard still remains as their part-time adviser. He has written several books on birds of the region and is most pleased with his *Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East* being translated into Arabic and spawning three Arabic country editions: for Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Turkey and Yemen are his favourite countries.

## **OUTDOOR MEETINGS**

### **Saturday September 22nd Sketching Workshop**

Local artist Ben Green, whose drawing of the Semipalmated Sandpiper at Ouse Fen graces the front page of this bulletin, has agreed to lead a sketching workshop for Club members who are interested in drawing birds. Ben has suggested starting at Ely drawing the various feral wildfowl, then perhaps a few hours at Wicken, working from the public path along the bank behind the mere. However alternative sites can be visited according to the wishes and suggestions of participants.

If you are interested please contact Ben by email at [Bengreen@talk21.com](mailto:Bengreen@talk21.com) or Vicki Harley (contact details on back page). If you would like to suggest an alternative site for the workshop, please do.

### **Materials for sketching**

Sketchbook of cartridge paper – the thicker, or heavier, the paper, the better. 140g/m should be fine (the weight of the paper is usually indicated on the pad. The size should be as big as you can comfortably handle. I tend to use A3 or thereabouts. You can use proper watercolour paper as well – but be careful in your choice of texture. Rough grained paper is good for painting interesting effects but not ideal for pencil work. I would recommend learning about the process of sketching outside on cheaper cartridge paper before experimenting with the different types of watercolour papers available. Assortment of pencils. HB to 2B will get used most, but softer pencils (3-6B ) can be handy. Rubbers. Putty rubbers are the best but any good rubber will do. The aim is not to use them too much anyway.

Pencil sharpener or craft knife.

For adding colour to your sketches I find watercolours most useful (a small set of pans are easier to use outside, perhaps with a tube of white gouache ). Coloured pencils can be used instead, or in addition to paint.

Some good watercolour brushes are essential, in all sizes and shapes.

For starters I would recommend at least one wash brush of at least one inch wide, and some round (pointed) brushes between size 4 to 12. The bigger the brush, the more paint it holds. even a big brush should be able to make fine lines as well as fill in broad areas. Thin rigger brushes, or indeed coloured pencils can be used for the finest of details.

Water bottle and jar.

Tissue paper or kitchen roll for blotting excess water.

A camping stool or waterproof blanket to sit on

*Ben Green*

## **FROM THE BULLETIN EDITOR**

If you would like to contribute to the bulletin, please contact me. You can send me a complete item or contact me with an initial idea.

If you would like to receive your bulletin by email or be subscribed to CBC-ANNOUNCE, just send me an email. If you have already made such a request but are still receiving your bulletin in hard copy, please let me know and I will check the e-subscribers list.

*Vicki Harley* (see back page for phone and email).

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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 email records to: Mark Hawkes by July 7th**

**Please send records by post to: Louise Bacon by July 7th**

**Next Bulletin due out October 2007, covering July–August 2007**

# GOOD BIRDING!