

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 401



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

RECENT REPORTS NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2008

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), Mike Foley (Larks 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 (contact details on back page).

AGM

The AGM of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club will be held at St Johns Church Hall on Friday March 13th 2008. Any nominations for Officers or Council Members must be sent to the Club Chairman as soon as possible.

Short-eared Owls by Graham Easy



Numbers in brackets indicate November and December maximums.

WILDFOWL

Mute Swan At Fen Drayton Lakes (138;80), Grafham Water (164;142) and the Ouse Washes (612;745). At Ouse Fen there were 121 birds on Dec 28th. Double-figure counts came from 5 other sites.

Tundra Swan The Ouse Washes dawn roost counts produced (188;124) in the Cambs section. Birds away from the Washes were seen at Paxton Pits with 6 on Nov 2nd, Kingfishers Bridge 2 on Nov 19th, Grafham Water 2 on Dec 28th and Ouse Fen 10 on Dec 29th.

Whooper Swan The Ouse Washes dawn roost counts produced (3722;4202) in the Cambs section. Seven birds were at Holme Fen on Nov 7th, 8 at Fen Drayton Lakes on Nov 23rd and 8 on Dec 25th, 5 over Trumpington on Nov 24th and 1–2 in the Wicken Fen Cam Washes area from Nov 27th to the year's end.

Bean Goose Three of the Tundra race commuted between Waterbeach Fen and Kingfishers Bridge in December with 5 birds north of KFB on 28th and 29th.

Pink-footed Goose Five birds were at Swaffham Prior Fen on Nov 6th and 16 flew over Wisbech on Nov 30th. Singles were seen at Orton BP on Dec 8th and Cambourne on Dec 24th.

Great White-fronted Goose Ten were at Ouse Fen on Nov 5th and 25th, singles on Swaffham Prior Fen on Nov 6th, Cambridge Research Park on Nov 15th and the Cam Washes on Dec 6th. Six flew west over Grafham on Nov 22nd and 30 east on Dec 26th.

Greylag Goose Three-figure counts were at Grafham Water (171;263), Kingfishers Bridge (330;147), the Ouse Washes (839;399), Paxton Pits (169) and Waterbeach Fen (427).

Canada Goose Three/four-figure counts from the Ouse Washes (1378;1097), Waterbeach Fen (139) and Wicken Fen (117).

Brent Goose Three birds at Grafham Water on Dec 26th were joined later by a fourth.

Egyptian Goose Up to 6 birds frequented a meadow adjacent to the Ouse Washes north of Earith during the period. Four birds were seen at Witcham on Dec 27th and singles were at Fen Drayton Lakes on Dec 11th, and Perry on Dec 27th to the year's end.

Common Shelduck Up to 8 birds at Needingworth GP, 4 at Grafham Water, 3 at Kingfishers Bridge and 2 at Four Gotes and Paxton Pits.

Mandarin A pair at Grafham Water on Nov 20th.

Eurasian Wigeon At Buckden GP (484;538), Fen Drayton Lakes (1085;762), Grafham Water (15;136), Needingworth GP (538;655), Ouse Fen (211;117), the Ouse Washes (10,414;15,155) and Wicken Fen (183;360). Double figures counted at 5 other sites.

Gadwall At Buckden GP (109;83), Fen Drayton Lakes (442;309), Grafham Water (80;373), Needingworth GP (77;140), the Ouse Washes (395;433), Paxton Pits (238) and Wicken Fen (96;155). Double figures counts from 6 other sites.

Eurasian Teal At Kingfishers Bridge (122;186), Ouse Fen (134;146), the Ouse Washes (2250;720),

Paxton Pits (157) and Wicken Fen (317;239).

Double figures were counted at 8 other sites.

Mallard At Ely BF (70;140), Fen Drayton Lakes (203;169), Four Gotes (219;238), Grafham Water (184;391), Kingfishers Bridge (65;116), the Ouse Washes (1956;1666), the River Cam (Newnham to Stourbridge Common (262), Wicken Fen (129;137) and Woodwalton Fen (76;102). Double figures were counted at 8 other sites.

Northern Pintail At the Nene Washes (200) and the Ouse Washes (401;173). Five birds were at Fen Drayton Lakes, 3 at Paxton Pits and 2 at Grafham Water and Kingfishers Bridge.

Northern Shoveler At the Ouse Washes (748;342) and Wicken Fen (136;115). Double figures were seen at 8 other sites.

Red-crested Pochard Five birds were at Grafham Water on Dec 14th and singles were seen at Orton BP, the Ouse Washes and Paxton Pits.

Common Pochard At the Ouse Washes (508;730). Double figures were present at 9 other sites.

Tufted Duck At Buckden GP (182;144), Fen Drayton Lakes (420;502), Grafham Water (512;1591), the Ouse Washes (962;1792) and Paxton Pits (258). Double figures at 6 other sites.

Great Scaup Single birds were at Holme Fen on Nov 12th, the Ouse Washes on Nov 17th, Wicken Fen on Nov 20th, Cambourne in November and December and Fen Drayton Lakes on Dec 11–13th.

Common Scoter One bird was at Grafham Water from Nov 4th to 29th with a second bird on 5th.

Goldeneye At Buckden GP (34;62), Fen Drayton Lakes (49;46), Grafham Water (66;96) and Paxton Pits (35). Single figures were seen at 5 other sites.

Smew Up to 4 birds were at Fen Drayton Lakes, 2 at Grafham Water and singles at Needingworth GP and River Lane GP.

Red-breasted Merganser Up to 3 birds were at Fen Drayton Lakes and 1 at Grafham Water.

Goosander Nine birds were at the Ouse Washes on Nov 17th, 8 at Maxey GP on Dec 13th, 6 at Grafham Water on Nov 11th, 5 at Ouse Fen on Nov 25th and 3 at Kingfishers Bridge on Nov 18th. One to two birds were reported from 4 other sites.

Ruddy Duck Reported from 6 sites.

GAMEBIRDS

Red-legged Partridge Several double-figure counts of coveys around the county, with 20 at Westfield Farm in Comberton the largest count.

Grey Partridge Seen in slightly smaller numbers, but 18 at the Countryside Restoration Trust's other site, Lark Rise Farm in Barton was the largest count (3 coveys).

Common Pheasant Just 10 reports received, with 22+ in the Elm area the largest count. One near albino seen at Pymoor.

DIVERS TO HERONS

Great Northern Diver The juvenile at Grafham Water in October was seen throughout November and was joined by another bird on Dec 1st.

Little Grebe Double figures were noted at Grafham Water (11), Needingworth GP (13), the Ouse

Washes (19) and Paxton Pits (19). Single figures were counted at 8 other sites.

Great Crested Grebe Three-figure counts were made at Grafham Water (471) and double figures at Fen Drayton Lakes (82). Also noted at 10 other sites.

Red-necked Grebe The September bird at Grafham Water was present throughout the period.

Slavonian Grebe One at Bradley Fen on Nov 17th.

Black-necked Grebe Two birds were at Ferry Meadows CP on Nov 7th, 2 at Paxton Pits on Nov 29th and singles at Grafham Water on 2 dates in November and 3 dates in December.

Great Cormorant Double figures noted at 10 sites.

European Shag A single bird was at Fen Drayton Lakes from Dec 4th to 13th and a second bird at this site on Dec 6th.

Great Bittern Three birds were seen in the Kingfishers Bridge area on Dec 6th. Up to 2 at Fen Drayton Lakes and singles at Fowlmere RSPB, Paxton Pits and Wicken Fen during the period.

Cattle Egret Two birds were seen at Buckden GP on Nov 1st and 8th before making a brief appearance at Fen Drayton Lakes on Nov 9th.

Little Egret Between 1 and 7 were reported from 17 sites.

Grey Heron Double figures were present at Fen Drayton Lakes (11), Grafham Water (13) and Ouse Washes (19). Single figures were at 17 other sites.

RAPTORS

Red Kite Seen in ones or twos several times over the period, with 3 together the highest total. Mostly seen in the north-west of the county but a couple at the opposite end as well – 7 locations in total.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier Reported from 13 sites, often 2 birds per site, though careful observation of all birds seen at Kingfishers Bridge suggest 5 birds were present there. Surprisingly only 1 at the Nene Washes.

Hen Harrier Wicken Fen held 4 at the roost in December. Others were seen at Cam Washes, Fowlmere, Kingfishers Bridge, Nene Washes, Old Weston, Ouse Washes, Swaffham Prior Fen, Witchford and Woodwalton Fen.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk Thirty-one sites held Sparrowhawks, but only Elm had more than 2 birds. The only note concerning prey items was of one hunting Starlings at the Fowlmere roost.

Common Buzzard A high count of 6 at Rostherne Mere topped an excellent series of 65 reports for the period. One in Cambridge near Kings College is probably more surprising than the much-admired Peregrine.

Rough-legged Buzzard A well-watched bird has been entertaining much of the club's membership throughout the winter at Wentworth/Coveney, while one reported at Eltisley on Christmas Day will need a description to be accepted.

Common Kestrel With 67 reports this just beats Common Buzzard for sightings for the first time in a long while. Four at the Ouse Washes WeBS counts in both months is a fairly low 'high count'.

Merlin A pair at the Cam Washes, otherwise singles from about 15 locations, many in Fenland.

Eurasian Hobby A late bird seen on Nov 15th at Grafham Water was the only report.

Peregrine Falcon The most watched bird of the period must be the ringed individual often using the Catholic Church on Lensfield Road in Cambridge. A bit of detective work revealed it hatched in 2007 on Chichester Cathedral:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/media/releases/details.asp?id=tc:9-205642>. Others were seen at all the more expected large wetland sites.

RAILS

Water Rail The most unusual report came from the Golf Club pond at Great Eversden; 10 other more regular wetland sites had multiple sightings (or hearings!) with 13 at Kingfishers Bridge the max.

Common Moorhen Main records came from the WeBS counters, with the Ouse Washes having by far the highest numbers (375; 270). One seen on Nov 29th in Elm was a garden tick; by Dec 31st there were 3, all feeding on apples.

Common Coot Coot kept the WeBS counters slightly busier than Moorhen, with Ouse Washes top of the table again (804; 2357) but Grafham Water (1558; 1796) and Fen Drayton (1567; 1174) did well too.

Common Crane Ten records, came in, but most of these were of 2 birds that resided at the Nene Washes throughout December. Optimistic reserve managers there are creating special scrapes which may entice the birds to nest.

WADERS

Eurasian Oystercatcher Ouse Fen on Nov 4th and Fowlmere on Dec 17th.

American Golden Plover Following an adult near Brownhill Staunth Oct 29–30th; a juvenile was at Barleycroft Nov 14–16th.

European Golden Plover Highest counts from Nene Washes (300; 8000 –mid December; all gone by end of month as Washes froze up), Ouse Fen area (4350; 1000), Hemingford Abbots up to 3000 in December, Paxton Pits up to 3000 in November, Croydon 1100 on Dec 29th, Stretham 1260 on Dec 19th, Fen Drayton Lakes (1000; 250), Toft (500; 500) and one day counts from Westly Bottom 700, Trumpington 600, Ouse Washes 450, Swaffham Prior Fen 400.

Grey Plover Singles Barleycroft on Nov 13th and 15th and Ouse Washes on Dec 15th.

Northern Lapwing Highest counts as follows: Nene Washes (1500; 12000), Ouse Washes (2047; 6590), Wicken Fen (500; 3000) Paxton Pits (3000; 0), Ouse Fen (320; 1100), Kingfishers Bridge (800; 600) and 100–700 from a further 5 sites.

Red Knot One at Maxey GP on Nov 2nd.

Pectoral Sandpiper One at Ouse Washes on Nov 2nd.

Dunlin Highest counts from Needingworth GP/Barleycroft (71; 79), Nene Washes (10; 20), Paxton Pits up to 8 in November and singles from a further 5 sites.

Ruff Highest count from Nene Washes (62; 36), Barleycroft/Needingworth 36 Nov 14–15th, Ouse Washes (25; 20), Buckden/Stirtloe Pits 10 on Nov 17th, Mare Fen (Swavesey) 10 on Dec 18th.

Jack Snipe Up to 11 at an undisclosed site in south of county from Dec 5th to 23rd, 6 at Mepal airfield on Dec 29th, 3 at Ouse Washes on Dec 15th and singles from Berry Fen and Maxey/Etton GP.

Common Snipe Reported from 12 sites with highest counts from Ouse Fen (167; 22), Wicken Fen 100+ on Dec 20th, Nene Washes 40 on Nov 26th, Ouse Washes (39; 19), (Cambourne (15; 26), Fen Drayton GP 22 on Nov 5th, Grafham Water (19; 3), Mepal Airfield 10 on Dec 29th, Barton (6; 3).

Eurasian Woodcock An exceptional 35 were flushed during a beat at Kingfishers Bridge on Dec 6th and 1–2 from a further 19 locations.

Black-tailed Godwit Main locality was Nene Washes with (135; 400) elsewhere Ouse Washes (9; 50), Barleycroft GP 35 on Nov 14th and Fen Drayton Lakes 26 on Dec 4th.

Eurasian Curlew Singles from Kingfishers Bridge, Nene Washes, Ouse Fen and Ouse Washes.

Common Redshank Highest counts from Needingworth GP/Barleycroft (69; 5), Four Gotes (tidal Nene) (21; 8), Ouse Washes (20; 7), Nene Washes (1; 8), Buckden GP (8; 1), Grafham Water (5; 4) and Kingfishers Bridge (3).

Common Greenshank One at Wicken Fen on Nov 8th and 2 at Ouse Fen on Nov 23rd.

Green Sandpiper Highest counts Ouse Fen (5) on Nov 16th and Kingfishers Bridge (4) on Dec 31st and 1–2 from a further 8 sites.

Common Sandpiper Wintering individual on Tidal River Nene at Four Gotes returning for its fourth winter (if it's the same bird!).

Ruddy Turnstone A single at Grafham Water on Nov 1st.

SKUAS TO TERNS

Mediterranean Gull Eight single sightings, 2 in early November at Grafham, and then 6 more towards the end of December, mostly at Ferry Meadows CP, but also at Buckden and Grafham; the latter sightings involved at least 3 different birds.

Little Gull One flew towards Earith at Ouse Fen on Nov 1st.

Black-headed Gull Over 1000 were counted at Buckden on Dec 17th; there were 350 at Kingston on Nov 17th.

Ring-billed Gull A bird suspected of being a first-winter of this species was observed for 2 minutes at Long Drove Cottenham on Dec 31st.

Common Gull Two large counts during the period: 250 at Ferry Meadows CP on 20th Dec, and 190 at Paxton on Nov 28th.

Lesser Black-backed Gull Total of 336 roosted at Kingfishers bridge on Nov 22nd, and 760 were at Long Drove Cottenham on Dec 31st.

Herring Gull At least 180 were observed moving up the river Nene at Newton on Dec 16th and 85 were at Buckden on the next day.

Yellow-legged Gull Sixteen reports during the period, mostly from Long Drove Cottenham, but also

reported from Grafham, Milton, Paxton and Fen Drayton; 6 were at Long Drove on Dec 2nd and 5 at Fen Drayton on Nov 24th.

Caspian Gull Singles reported on 5 occasions, 3 from Long Drove and 1 each from Grafham and Fen Drayton.

Iceland Gull The bird seen flying north at St Neot's Priory Park on Nov 3rd represents the earliest winter county record ever, and one was at Long Drove Cottenham at the end of December.

Glaucous Gull At least 1 bird was reported regularly at Long Drove Cottenham from Nov 28th to the end of the year.

Great Black-backed Gull Kingfishers bridge saw the majority of the records. First light count numbers reached 223 on Nov 18th, 247 on Dec 2nd, peaked on Dec 11th when 459 were observed leaving to feed at first light, fell to 231 on Dec 23rd, and, with conditions now icy, dropped to 33 at the end of the year. Seventy-eight were at Buckden on Dec 17th Dec and 50 at Long Drove Cottenham on Dec 31st.

NEAR PASSERINES

Feral Pigeon The Wisbech town centre flock had over 45 birds throughout the period.

Stock Pigeon On the Ouse Washes 115 on Dec 15th; 3 other records of 20–35 birds.

Wood Pigeon About 5000 birds between Hilton and Papworth on Dec 10th; 2000 birds at Croydon Hill on Dec 29th.

Eurasian Collared Dove At Wicken Fen, 104 on Dec 7th and 63 at Pymoor on Nov 16th.

Rose-ringed Parakeet Two reported in a garden at Harston on Nov 12th.

Barn Owl Thirty-two records of 1–2 birds recorded from 17 locations.

Little Owl Recorded in 10 locations, mostly single birds but 2 at Comberton.

Tawny Owl Only 4 records: 2 pairs in Over throughout report period.

Long-eared Owl Six records, including 5 birds in a roost in late November.

Short-eared Owl Recorded from 11 sites, mainly in the fens. Generally 1-3 birds.

Common Kingfisher 1–4 birds recorded from 23 sites.

Green Woodpecker 1–5 birds recorded from around 25 sites, including several regular sightings.

Great Spotted Woodpecker 1–6 birds recorded from 19 sites mainly in the south of the county, including a bird drumming in Hardwick Wood on Dec 23rd.

PASSERINES

Woodlark One was noted at St. Neots (Monks Hardwick) on Nov 2nd.

Skylark Maximum counts for this second winter period included 270 at Trumpington, where imminent building development has allowed the retention of good overwinter seed areas; 116 at Barton (Lark Rise Farm); 60 at Comberton (Westfield Farm) and 37 in the Dullingham area. Also at 6 other sites.

Meadow Pipit From 9 sites, 89 were noted mid November at the Ouse Washes (WeBS), and sites where >15 birds were present included Cambourne, Four Gotes, Grafham Water, Ouse Fen and St. Neots (Monks Hardwick).

Rock Pipit One bird identified as belonging to the Scandinavian race *littoralis* was seen at Maxey GP on Nov 3rd.

Water Pipit None was reported prior to Nov 25th. Thereafter 1–2 birds were seen at Grafham Water, Kingfishers bridge, Nene Washes, Ouse Fen, and the Ouse Washes.

Grey Wagtail Records were mainly of single birds (14 sites), and of 2 birds at Grafham Water, Kingfishers bridge, Pymore and Stirtloe.

Pied Wagtail Larger counts consisted of 100 pre-roost at Wicken Fen on Dec 23rd, 70+ at Bottisham around the sewage works on Dec 31st, and 61+ at Stirtloe on Dec 31st. The largest November count was 35 at Grafham Water on the 9th.

Bohemian Waxwing Birds filtered in from the coast to many counties, and Cambs did not miss out. After trying to remove duplicate records, it is estimated that numbers reported for each of the 4 quarters of each month were, for November: 21; 4; 1; 3 and for December: 0; 11; 8; 9. Reported from 18 sites, about 11 records were of single birds, with a maximum of 15 birds at Woodwalton Fen on Nov 4th.

Winter Wren The largest number noted in one visit was 14 at Wood Ditton & Ditton Park Wood on Nov 16th.

Hedge Accentor A smattering of records with a maximum count of 6, from a St. Ives garden habitat.

European Robin No unusual numbers or occurrences, with 10 each at Ellington and Grafham Water being the highest counts.

Black Redstart A female/immature was reported on the roof of a house at Stow-cum-Quy on Nov 8th.

Stonechat From 17 sites, Wicken Fen maxima for November and December were 6 and 7, respectively.

Common Blackbird Some wintering groups now well established with 60 and 70+ in November and December respectively. in Elm.

Fieldfare Reported from many sites; a large influx starting in late October continued with c.1000 birds seen on Nov 1st at Ouse Fen. Sites with 200+ in November included Buckden GP, Ouse Washes, Kingfishers bridge and Elm. Sites in December included Comberton (Westfield farm), Fulbourn, Toft, Croydon Hill, Elm and Hemingford Abbots.

Song Thrush Noted in low numbers at 8 sites, plus 10+ in Elm in each month, and 5 at Buckden and Stirtloe Pits on Nov 17th.

Redwing A continuing influx at the start of November allowed numbers to build to c.300 at Ouse Fen on Nov 1st. Other sites with numbers 50+ included Aldreth (Hill), CRT Barton, Kingfishers bridge and Kingston.

Mistle Thrush From a few sites, a maximum of 5 were noted in a stubble field in Stirtloe in December.

Cetti's Warbler Singing birds were noted at 2 sites – Grafham Water (second only site record) and at Wicken Fen where it is now regular. It was also noted at 3 other sites. All reports bar one were in the

first month of the period.

Blackcap Recorded at 5 sites – single birds were seen at Huntingdon, Wicken Fen and in and around Cambridge.

Common Chiffchaff Present at 7 sites, with no special mention of associations with sewage works.

Goldcrest Widespread reports of mainly 1–3 birds. At Wicken Fen, 25 different birds were processed by ringers during November and 10+ were present at Girton College in mid-November. One feeding in an open stubble field at Stirtloe was an odd sight.

Firecrest Reported from 2 sites in Cambridge in early November, at Ouse Washes RSPB visitor centre on Nov 7th, at Woodwalton Fen (2 birds, unknown observer) on Nov 15th, and also at Grafham Water on Nov 16th.

Wood Nuthatch Recorded at 5 sites including 2 birds at Wandlebury CP. The peak count however was 4 in the 'Belts' at Wimpole on December 17th.

Eurasian Treecreeper Reports from 8 sites mainly involved single birds but 3 were noted at Grafham Water on Dec 28th.

Eurasian Jay Woodwalton Fen was by far the best place to see Jays in the period with a peak count of 20 birds on November 4th.

Black-billed Magpie A pre-roost count of 47 birds at Little Wilbraham Fen on Nov 4th was a notable record. A further 26 birds were also recorded at Ellington on Nov 24th.

Eurasian Jackdaw A report of 300+ birds flying south from roost at Eynesbury on Dec 24th was the peak count.

Rook A flock of 1000+ birds were reported flying to roost by Fowlmere RSPB on Nov 18th with a further 450 recorded at Ouse Fen on Dec 18th.

Carriion Crow Reported from 5 sites with 100 birds at Westfield Farm, Comberton during November being the peak count.

Common Starling A report of 5000+ birds displaying and roosting in a reed bed at Fen Drayton RSPB on Nov 16th was the peak count. A further 4000 birds were also noted at the Ouse Washes, near the Norfolk border on Dec 15th.

House Sparrow A maximum count of 55+ birds at Elm on Nov 30th.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow Reported from 6 sites with a rough count of 60 birds roosting at Orton brick pit on Nov 7th being a notable peak count. A further 9 birds were ringed at Wicken Fen on Dec 15th.

Chaffinch Records were received from 9 sites with a maximum of 100+ birds at Stirtloe on Dec 29th.

Brambling Reports of Brambling are very thin on the ground this winter with the peak count being just 3 birds at Ouse Fen during the period.

European Greenfinch Records were received from 12 sites with 120+ birds at March Farmers on Dec 18th being the peak count.

European Goldfinch Recorded from 17 sites with the maximum being 206 birds from the Ouse Washes during the WeBS count on Dec 15th.

Eurasian Siskin Records continued to increase during the period peaking with a report of 70+ birds at Woodwalton Fen on Dec 30th.

Common Linnet Reports were received from 10 sites with the highest being a flock of 95 birds at

Trumpington on Nov 3rd. An additional 93 birds were noted near reservoirs at Gt. Eversden.

Lesser Redpoll Reported from 12 sites with the peak count being 20 birds at Wicken Fen throughout the period.

Mealy Redpoll A single bird was recorded at both Grafham Water and Woodwalton Fen during December. The Grafham bird was noted as being a male whilst the Woodwalton bird was female.

Common Bullfinch Records came from 22 sites with a peak count being 27 birds at Buckden & Stirtloe pits on Nov 17th.

Hawfinch A single bird was noted at Brownhill Staunch, near Ouse Fen on Nov 9th.

Snow Bunting A single female bird was reported over the Ouse Washes on Nov 17th.

Yellowhammer Reported from 15 sites with the maximum being 40+ birds at Stirtloe on Dec 29th. A further 35 birds were also noted at Coveney.

Reed Bunting Records included a peak count of 51 birds at Kingfishers Bridge on Dec 10th.

Corn Bunting The maximum count was 50+ birds at Buckden GP's on Dec 29th

HYBRIDS

Greylag x Canada Goose Individuals recorded at Kingfishers Bridge, Ouse Washes and Waterbeach Fen.

Canada x Barnacle Goose A bird thought to be of this combination was recorded on the Ouse Washes on Nov 16th.

Tufed Duck x Pochard Recorded at Cambridge Research Park and Grafham Water.

Lesser Scaup x Tufted Duck A drake of this combination was seen at Grafham Water on Dec 1st. Was it the same individual recorded in 2007?

EXOTICA

Black Swan Individual birds on several dates at Buckden and Stirtloe Pits in November and again at the year's end.

Bar-headed Goose One at Paxton Pits reported on Nov. 29th.

Ross's Goose An unringed adult seen with Greylags Kingfishers Bridge on several dates in November. Also seen at Wicken Fen and Waterbeach Fen, and feeding on potatoes at Joist Farm. It had previously been recorded as a Lesser Snow Goose.

Wood Duck Records of single males from Earith and River Cam, Chesterton, in December.

White-cheeked Pintail One recorded on two dates at Grafham Water.

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CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB /BTO CONFERENCE WETLANDS WEEKEND 18th/19th October 2008

As a reminder to those who attended this most enjoyable event, and to inform other members, Andy Musgrove, of the BTO, has provided abstracts of his talks, delivered at the conference.

Awash with waterbirds: Cambridgeshire in winter

The inland county of Cambridgeshire (including Huntingdonshire and Peterborough) contains a great deal of water. Even when one removes the rivers and fenland ditches, there are still about 6500 still waters. All this wetland habitat means that the county is a haven for wintering waterbirds. These birds are monitored by volunteers for the national Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), a scheme administered by the British Trust for Ornithology on behalf also of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Over the last five years, WeBS counters (organised in the county by Bruce Martin) have covered 68 count areas in Cambridgeshire, including all but one of the 40 still waters in excess of 10 hectares in size. In total, the counted sites cover 2% of the land area of the county. On average, these counts have revealed about 129,000 wintering waterbirds. Although Cambridgeshire only covers about 1.5% of the land area of Britain, the county supports 62% (5000) of the Bewick's Swans in Britain, 62% (3500) of the Whooper Swans, 11% (44,800) of the Wigeon, 11% (1900) of the Gadwall, 13% (3700) of the Pintail, 10% (1500) of the Shoveler, 43% (300) of Ruff and 20% (3000) of Black-tailed Godwit, along with smaller numbers of many other species.

The sites supporting these waterbirds can be broadly divided into two categories; natural fens/washes, and more recently created gravel pits. By far the most important two sites are the Ouse Washes (supporting about 78,000 birds) and the Nene Washes (about 31,000 birds), whilst other sites supporting mean numbers in excess of 2000 waterbirds include Ouse Fen, Fen Drayton, Little Paxton, Kingfishers Bridge, Grafham Water, Wicken Fen and Godmanchester Gravel Pits; another 12 sites support 1000 birds or more in the winter.

There is a great deal known about the wintering waterbirds of Cambridgeshire thanks to the exceptional efforts of the dedicated team of volunteer counters. New counters are always extremely welcome and there is no shortage of available wetlands to count. To find out more about getting involved please contact the WeBS Local Organiser, Bruce Martin, or the WeBS Office at the BTO in Thetford.

Cambridgeshire's waterbirds: the global context

One of the key features of the avifauna of the UK is the importance for wintering waterbirds. This is because of several factors, including a relatively mild winter climate (thanks to the warming effect of the transatlantic gulf stream), well-managed areas of protected wetland habitats and our position on several key migratory flyways. Birds wintering in Cambridgeshire come from two main areas. Most birds spend the summer in Fennoscandia, the Baltic States and Russia, but significant numbers of at least two species (Whooper Swan and Black-tailed Godwit) also arrive from Iceland.

Cambridgeshire supports over 1% of the flyway populations of ten waterbird species: Bewick's Swan, Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Pochard Golden Plover and Black-tailed Godwit. Four of these species are examined in more detail.

Bewick's Swans breed in the northernmost parts of mainland Russia, migrating southwest through the White and Baltic Seas to winter in northwest Europe, principally the Netherlands and Britain. They arrive here late, with very few in Britain before November and most leave by the end of February. Numbers wintering in Britain rose through the 1970s and have fluctuated since, although there is an indication of a more recent decline. The Ouse and Nene Washes have hosted an increasingly large proportion of the national total as sites further west have become less favoured in recent winters.

Whooper Swans breed further south in Russia and Fennoscandia, and also breed in Iceland from where it appears that the majority of British and Irish wintering birds originate. Although the species is much more widespread in northern Britain, the Ouse Washes hosts the single largest flock in the country. Whoopers arrive a little earlier and depart later from Britain than Bewick's, presumably due to the fact that there is no intervening land between the wintering and breeding grounds. Numbers of Whoopers in Britain remained relatively stable until the last decade since when there has been a substantial increase, especially on the Ouse Washes. It is possible that some of this increase could involve continental breeding birds although the extent to which this is the case is hard to quantify.

The Pintail is a very widespread breeding species across the entire northern hemisphere. In addition to the concentration of birds wintering in north-west Europe, many more birds cross the Sahara and winter in the wetlands of the Sahel region. Pintail start to arrive in Britain in numbers in September, with most departing in March. Numbers increased strongly from the mid 60s to mid 70s but have been relatively stable ever since.

Cambridgeshire's Black-tailed Godwits comprise two very distinct populations. The small numbers of breeding birds on the fens are part of the nominate subspecies which breeds (in declining numbers) from the Netherlands across into Russia. Most of these birds winter in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the subspecies *islandica* breeds largely in Iceland and winters in north-west Europe. Numbers in Britain peak in August and September, as birds return to moult on our estuaries. Some of these birds then continue further south into France or Iberia whilst others remain for the winter. The pattern of occurrence is very different on the Ouse Washes, where numbers are typically very low in late summer and early autumn, but there is a late winter peak, usually in March, when many birds arrive to fuel up before departing for Iceland. Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits have increased dramatically in recent years, with wintering numbers in Britain roughly doubling over 15 years.

News from Lake Oursi in Burkina Faso

Peter Herkenrath

Members will recall that the Club has entered into a partnership with the bird club at Lake Oursi in the West African state of Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta). The BirdLife International partner organisation in Burkina Faso, NATURAMA, is supporting the local group at Oursi. In December, a delegation of NATURAMA visited the Oursi Museum *Hu Beero*. The museum, which was opened in November 2006, documents the internationally important medieval remains at Oursi. Also in December, delegations from two other sites of ornithological importance in Burkina, Sourou Valley and Kaboré Tambi National Park, visited Oursi. After some birdwatching, they discussed conservation issues and exchanged their respective experience. Both Sourou Valley in the north-west and Kaboré Tambi in the south of the country are BirdLife-identified Important Bird Areas as is Lake Oursi. Just before this meeting, members of the local Oursi group participated in the national planning meeting of NATURAMA for 2009, which took place in the town of Gorom-Gorom, which is located close to Lake Oursi.

From 18 to 28 November 2008, NATURAMA conducted a training course at Oursi, during which 157 species of birds were observed in the savannah and the dunes as well as at the lake of Oursi. The list includes many West African species, but also many Palaearctic migrants: Garganey, Little Egret, Marsh Harrier, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Black-winged Stilt, Collared Pratincole, Little Ringed Plover, Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Knot, Little Stint, Dunlin, Ruff, Common Snipe, Great Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Spotted Redshank, Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, White-winged Black Tern, European Turtle Dove, Yellow Wagtail, White Wagtail, Common Redstart, Northern Wheatear, Black-eared Wheatear, Great Reed Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Orphean Warbler, Subalpine Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Willow Warbler, Wood Warbler, Chiffchaff and Woodchat Shrike. Species observed that breed in western Africa and also include wintering birds from the Palaearctic include Squacco Heron, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, Black Kite, Tawny Eagle, Moorhen and Hoopoe.

Christmas quiz answers

The Venerable P. Witt reveals all! Easy as it is nowadays to research any subject on the internet, I deliberately chose questions that favoured the bibliophiles. The clues in the introductory verse were: 'hunts in vain' - this hints that you would look in vain among Hunts records, most of the answers refer to 'old Cambs'; 'lack a certain book' - many of the solutions are found in David Lack's 'The Birds of Cambridgeshire', a slim volume published in 1934 and long since out of print and out of date, but well worth reading for its historical perspective, it originally cost 7s 6d (37½p)!; 'shining clare' - an obvious reference to the poet John Clare.

1. The Rev. Edward Armstrong, author of *The Life of the Wren*, *Birds of the Grey Wind* and other works.
2. David Lack
3. Jeremy Sorensen
4. Eric Ennion, John Moyes, Ian Nisbet and Ian Wallace.
5. At the junction of Reach and Burwell Lodes at the western end of Adventurer's Fen.
6. Old fenland meres, alas long since drained.
7. Leonard Jenyns
8. Eric Ennion (a Black Redstart; some older members are known to have an original tie with this emblem still lurking in the musty depths of their wardrobes).
9. Black-browed Albatross
10. Little Gull
11. Collared Dove
12. Ring-necked Duck
13. Great Bustard
14. Baillon's Crake
15. Pallas's Sandgrouse (oh, for another invasion!)

16. Cormorant (I included the caveat regarding possible misidentification as although the species is now much more common, it is rarely if ever seen perched on city buildings, unlike the Shag).

17. Squacco Heron

18. Alpine Accentor

19. Cirl Bunting

20. Wryneck

21. Gadwall

22. Rook

23. Brent Goose

24. Willow Tit ('the last' being the Marsh Tit)

25. Bittern

26. Dotterel

27. Greylag Goose

28. Great Tit (From a poem by John Clare (1793-1864), a lover of the countryside and a keen observer of the wildlife of the Nene valley. His poems, including 'A Wryneck's Nest', 'A Woodlark's Nest' and 'The Landrail' are witness to the great changes in our avifauna. He was born and buried at Helpston, near Peterborough and his manuscripts are in the Peterborough Museum).

29. John Clare again: 'bumbarrels' (what a delightful name!) are Long-tailed Tits, 'bluecaps' are Blue Tits, 'firetails' are Redstarts, 'pettichaps' is the Chiffchaff and 'redcaps' are Goldfinches.

30. As you will have noted, all of the questions have a local connection and this is no exception. They all share their names with officers of the club: Cox's Sandpiper, Scott's Oriole, Newell's Shearwater and Kirtland's Warbler. (Cox's Sandpiper, first discovered in Australia in 1955 and described as a new species in 1982 was eventually proved by DNA analysis in 1996 to be a hybrid between a male Pectoral Sandpiper and a female Curlew Sandpiper).

If you scored over 15 you did well, over 20 and you did brilliantly; if you managed all 30 you will be the honoured and deserving recipient of the P. Witt trophy – a badly stuffed and mounted Lapwing!

Atlas Roving Day – 10th January 2009

Duncan Poyser

The club's second Atlas Roving Day was a chilling affair. The aim of these Atlas days is to gather roving records in underwatched areas of the county for the ongoing BTO Atlas; records will also be of great value to our own proposed County Atlas. Support for the day has increased and five teams braved the cold to record birds in two areas, the first in West Huntingdonshire and the second in East Cambridgeshire. Highlights included Red Kite, Peregrine, Merlin and daylight views of Barn and Tawny Owl. Flocks of farmland passerines are sadly notable after crippling declines in some species so a flock of 200 Reed Buntings was exceptional on a national level and double-figure counts of Corn Bunting, Tree Sparrow and hundreds of Linnet were also noteworthy. After a great day in the field warming rounds of soup, jacket spuds and chilli were enjoyed thanks to the Chairman's hospitality.

The following quotes give a flavour of the day. We're already excited about the next Roving Day, planned for the summer.

'My highlight was the Tawny Owl in Monkswood, oh and falling over on a field track – thankfully it was frozen solid so I didn't get wet!' *Louise Bacon*

'Despite it being freezing cold, it was great fun. Knowing that we were helping to close some gaps in the atlas kept us going. We got to several sites that I had never been to before and we even saw some good birds.' *Peter Herkenrath*

'Because of the bitter cold most of our birding was done from the inside of the car! But the frozen ground and the open landscape was perfect for car-bound birding. However, in the afternoon, the wind moved to the south and we could walk the banks of the River Lark in relative comfort and watch Barn Owls hunting. An excellent end to a great day.'

Robin Cox

'One thing I do remember was the large flock of Whooper and Bewicks and the fact that they were sitting on bare fields apparently not feeding and wondering if the dark soil was slightly warmer and therefore more comfortable?' *Chris*

Bird ringing demonstration at Wicken Fen – 3 January 2009

Kevin Harris

CBC members were invited to attend a ringing demonstration by the Wicken Fen Bird Ringing Group. I arrived at about 7.45 on a cold and frosty morning, when it was just beginning to get light. Over the main reedbeds a Marsh Harrier was being mobbed by a Crow. A second Marsh Harrier then came up out of the reeds.

Mist nets had been set in several locations around the education area near the visitors' centre. It was not long before the first catches were brought back in small cloth bags. The first birds out were Robins, followed by a lovely Goldcrest. It was remarkable to note that a Robin (itself a fairly small bird) at 23.1g was nearly five times the weight of the Goldcrest at 4.8g.

We got a valuable insight into the various factors which are used to determine age and sex of the birds such as wing length, eye colour, inside beak colour and evidence of full adult moult. We got some great close up views of details that are almost impossible to pick out in the field and we were able to watch all aspects of the ringing from collection, measurement and recording to final release. We each had a turn at releasing birds carefully from our hands – a satisfying experience. Other highlights of the visit were a ringtail Hen Harrier hunting over the reedbeds and a chance to warm up with a cup of coffee and wonderful bacon or sausage butty in the coffee shop.

A total of 116 individuals of 14 species were caught, made up of 37 new birds and 79 retraps, i.e. birds that had been ringed previously (not necessarily at Wicken Fen).

I have put some photos on <http://wildlife-by-kevin-harris.blogspot.com/2009/01/bird-ringing-wicken-fen.html>

We are grateful to the Wicken Fen Bird Ringing Group for their invitation to this demonstration. Another such event has been arranged for Saturday April 4th – see page 11.

New BTO regional organiser

Welcome to Graham Uney, the new BTO regional organiser for the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey in Cambridgeshire. Graham has previously worked on various paid ecological surveys for the BTO and ADAS in Scotland, Cumbria, and Northumberland. There are BBS squares still available in the region, if anyone is interested in taking on one or more of these. The work involves around 5 hours simple surveying per year, and you can submit data either on a paper form or online. All results also count towards the Atlas.

Please get in touch grahamuney@btinternet.com if you're interested.

FORTHCOMING CBC EVENTS 2009

INDOOR MEETINGS

For all indoor meetings, doors open at 7.30 pm for an 8 pm start.

Friday March 13th, St Johns Church Hall

Natural History and Conservation of British Owls by Chris Sperring

Chris Sperring MBE is Conservation Officer for the Hawk and Owl Trust, as well as an experienced Naturalist and Broadcaster. For more information see: <http://www.chrissperring.com/>

Friday April 17th, Milton Country Park Visitors' Centre

Birding in Colombia by Carl Downing

Colombia: a tour through the World's most species diverse country. Carl Downing will be talking about his experiences travelling through what was once described as the 'World's most dangerous country not in a state of war', where it all started and why, after 18 years, he is still so attached to the Country.

It will be illustrated by photos of some of the rarest and most elusive species in the World including the infamous Choco Vireo, discovered by Carl and others during his first trip in 1991.

OUTDOOR MEETINGS

Bird ringing at Wicken Fen – Saturday April 4th

Members of the Cambridge Bird Club are invited to watch bird-ringing at Wicken Fen, by the Wicken Fen Group, on Saturday April 4th 2009, 7.00am–12 noon. Nets will be set in the 'Education Area' which is quite near the Visitor Centre (approach from the National Trust Car Park down Lode Lane, pass the Visitor Centre on the right, and turn left after the final building on the left).

Booking is essential – contact Vicki Harley to book a place (contact details on back page)..

Warbler workshop at Fowlmere –Saturday May 9th

The Cambridgeshire Bird Club, in collaboration with the RSPB, is organising another warbler workshop at the RSPB Fowlmere nature reserve. The aim is to help interested birdwatchers to learn how to identify our various warblers, by sight and sound. This event is especially suitable for beginners, but more advanced birdwatchers who want to refresh their knowledge of warblers or simply want to enjoy the morning chorus are welcome to join. Members and non-members of the Club or the RSPB are welcome. There is no charge. Meet on Saturday May 9th at 6.30am in the car park at the Fowlmere reserve (for directions see www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/f/fowlmere/index.asp). The workshop will take place regardless of the weather and is expected to last approximately 4 hours.

Booking is essential – contact Peter Herkenrath to book a place (contact details on back page).

FROM THE TREASURER

Thank you, to all our members for your valued support throughout 2008. Annual subscriptions for 2009 fell due on 1st January 2009. If you have not paid your subscription for 2009, please ensure that you send your cheque to me as soon as possible. If you wish to start paying by standing order, please let me know and I will send you a form (by post or e-mail). If you normally pay by standing order and have changed your bank account during the year, please ensure that the payment instructions have been passed to your new bank.

Subscriptions for 2009 remain unchanged at:	Full	£14
	Senior/Concessionary	£10
	Student	£6

If you are a UK tax payer and have not yet completed a 'Gift Aid Form' please contact me for a form. Gift Aid enables the club to reclaim 28p in the Pound from the Inland Revenue on your subscription at no cost to you. On the other hand 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.

Kevin Harris

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new members – Will George of Swavesey, Keith O' Hagen of Milton Keynes, Richard Johnson of Cambridge, Deborah Lauterpacht of Meldreth, John and Marilyn McDonough of Little Paxton, Graham Uney of Over and Andrew Wheatley of Cambridge.

Bruce Martin

POST CODE CHANGES

Some post codes in Cambridgeshire have changed recently, but a number of members have not notified Bruce Martin. This means their address labels for bulletins and the Annual Report are incorrect. Will members please check their address label and if the post code is wrong would they kindly inform Bruce so he can correct it.

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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

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 March 7th

Please send records by post to: Louise Bacon by March 7th

Next Bulletin due out April 2009, covering November–December 2008

GOOD BIRDING!