

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 405



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

RECENT REPORTS JULY/AUGUST 2009

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records sourced from sightings received by the county recorder or reported on Cambirds (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cambirds/>).

Collared Pratincole by Ben Green



Successful breeding of both common grebe species was recorded at several sites. Peak numbers were recorded in late August with post breeding flocks of 23 and 25 **Little Grebes** at Grafham Water and Ouse Fen respectively. **Great Crested Grebes** congregate in larger groups and 281 were counted at Grafham Water on the August WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) count. Flocking of **Great Cormorants** was noted at Fen Drayton Lakes where 112 were roosting at the end of the period.

Heron species are often well represented within the county and although elusive, **Bitterns** were seen at Fen Drayton Lakes and Ely BF. A lucky observer connected with an adult type **Night Heron** at Fen Drayton Lakes on the Aug 16th where 46 **Little Egrets** were recorded roosting next evening. Cambridgeshire is currently one of the reliable places to find **Great Egrets** in the UK. Two arrived at Ouse Fen on Aug 15th and remained in the area until the months end. One of the Egrets was carrying colour rings which have enabled the origins of this bird to be established. It is an immature bird ringed as a nestling by Dr Loic Marion at Lac de Grand-Lieu near Nantes, France on the 14th May 2009 and this is the first sighting since then. A third bird was seen over the Nene Washes on Aug 29th when both birds were still present at Ouse Fen.

The familiar Geese and Swans gracing our parks, lakes and riversides included a couple of Mandarin, up to 5 **Egyptian Geese** at Fen Drayton Lakes and 203 **Mute Swans** at Grafham Water. A **Whooper Swan** seen at the Ouse Washes on Aug 8th was presumably the same individual as that seen in late-May, especially as early returning birds usually arrive in family groups. Continuing the northern theme **Common Scoter** appeared in small, short staying groups at Grafham Water and Fen Drayton Lakes. The effectiveness of the **Ruddy Duck** cull was evident with only a few birds seen at a restricted number of sites.

July and August are the months of moult for most wildfowl, gone are the boldly coloured drakes of winter and spring and drab and tatty eclipse plumage is assumed. Birds in heavy moult keep a low profile as they are most vulnerable to predation at this time as they have an incomplete set of flight feathers. At the Cam Washes 160 **Teal** had gathered by Aug 29th and 137 **Gadwall** were at Grafham Water for the August WeBS count when 814 **Tufted Ducks** were also recorded. **Garganey** were recorded from 5 sites with up to 5 birds on the Ouse Washes. Low numbers of **Pintail**,

Shelduck, **Wigeon**, and **Shoveler** began to build from the end of July and **Pochard** peaked at with 30 or so birds at few sites throughout. Two notable *Aythya* ducks were recorded during the period. Firstly a long staying, moulting drake **Scaup** at Paxton Pits on Jul 7th and then Grafham Water from the 30th until the end of August. The second was a fine drake **Ferruginous Duck** which was seen on Aug 1st at Buckden GP but did not stay long enough to be enjoyed by many birders.

Larger raptors are an increasingly frequent feature of our skies. **Marsh Harriers** and **Buzzards** continue to breed successfully at more sites. **Red Kites** are also gaining a foothold with several confirmed breeding sites and more suspected. **Kestrels**, **Sparrowhawks**, **Hobbies** and **Peregrines** were all found in the family way and 10 **Osprey** records, although not impressive compared with some other years, may one day lead the way to breeding. A couple of early **Hen Harriers** were found in late August and, with skywatching becoming a staple part of many birders routine, scarcer species reported during the period included single **Honey Buzzard** and **Montagu's Harrier**. The provision of good quality, descriptive identification notes which explain the elimination of similar, confusion species is particularly important when submitting sightings of these rare taloned treats.

The summer is not a great time to find many gamebirds apart from **Pheasant** and **Red-legged Partridge** coveys bred and released for the shoot. **Grey Partridge** were regularly reported from the Comberton/Toft/Barton area reflecting keen observer coverage in this area and 5 **Quail** were reported, mostly singing birds. **Corncrakes** fell silent on the Washes and a juvenile **Spotted Crake** skulking in the Grafham Lagoons was the first at the site since 1984. **Cranes** continued to be seen sporadically in their favoured area.

During July and August locally breeding waders may feed next to returning breeders from the Arctic, adults will move start moving south earlier in the season and juveniles follow some weeks later. The wide range of species, plumages and ages of waders that can be found at this time of year can make any patch of lake edge, pool side mud or flooded field worth regular attention. The scrapes at Tubney Fen produced a star wader in the form of an obliging **Collared Pratincole** taking up

evening residency hawking insects and resting before flying off at dusk on Aug 11th. **Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank** all bred on our wetlands and **Avocets** were particularly successful at Grafham Lagoons where at least 6 young fledged during the first successful breeding at the site (they bred, but failed in 2008). Returning **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover** were seen at several sites and peaked with 1200 of the former and 90 of the latter at the Cam Washes.

A flock of 7 migrating **Sanderling** were dumped onto the dam at Grafham Water during a heavy rainstorm on Jul 30th, and 4 were seen there the next day. A **Turnstone** or 2 were also present around Grafham Water at this time and at the tail end of August Ouse Fen recorded 2 birds. Although **Dunlin** were seen in small numbers at a range of sites the peak was of 8 birds with the **Sanderling** at Grafham Water. **Ruff** were also seen throughout the period with the greatest number being 25 at the Ouse Washes on Jul 5th. **Wood Sandpipers** had a flurry in early July with 10 birds reported including 6 at the Cam Washes on the 4th. **Greenshank** and **Green Sandpiper** are vocal migrants and were seen into double figures at several sites with the Cam Washes holding the greatest number of both species. A juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** at Fen Drayton Lakes on Aug 16th and a smattering of **Whimbrel** sightings finish off the notable wader sightings.

An **Arctic Skua** at Grafham Water on Jul 1st was both unseasonal and unwell. After taking up a short, sickly residence on the dam wall it was later put-down. The 4 **Arctic Skuas** that flew through Grafham Water on Aug 20th were in much better health. **Little Gulls** and **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen at a few sites but the notable *Larid* records centred around the seemingly annual late July build up in **Yellow-legged Gulls**, peaking at 85 on the 23rd, at Paxton Pits with many roosting at nearby Grafham Water. One **Caspian Gull** was seen at Dogsthorpe Tip on Aug 10th. **Common Terns** bred at several sites including Fen Drayton Lakes where 47 pairs reared 36 young. This site also produced one of the highlights of the period in the form of a superb adult summer plumaged **White-winged Black Tern** from Jul 10 – 13th which was very popular with local and visiting birders alike. The bird had originally been seen on the 9th at Needingworth GP and is believed to be the same seen previously at Cley, Norfolk. **Black**

Terns were recorded in some numbers with peaks of 29+ and 41+ at Grafham Water on Aug 9th and 23rd respectively, quite a few of these birds hung on for several days after. Grafham Water also had multiple **Sandwich Tern** records with 4 on Jul 4th and birds were also recorded at Paxton Pits and Shropshire's reservoir.

Turtle Doves remain a relatively frequent feature around rural areas and plenty of purring birds were reported. The key word here is relative as the species has experienced profound declines within the UK and it will be interesting to compare the results of this species distribution in Cambridgeshire during the current BTO Atlas survey with the 2 previous atlas projects. The **Cuckoo** is also a declining species featured in the media this year and perhaps mirroring this there were very few records were received.

Barn Owls were successful at young birds rung at several sites. The mid summer evenings proved to be a good time to seek evidence of breeding **Little Owls** and evidence of breeding was again recorded from a spread of sites.

The screaming **Swift** survey continues to generate important data for mapping the species as a breeder and in turn informing planning and development decisions at county level. Another scarce and declining species is the **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, a male was seen in a lucky birders garden on several occasions and may have bred nearby.

Hirundines flocked from mid August onwards and several triple figure counts were made including 200+ **Sand Martins** at Grafham Water and 100+ at Fen Drayton Lakes on Aug 30th. At Wimpole Hall 500+ **House Martins** congregated on Aug 16th. Pre-migration flocking was also noted in **Yellow Wagtails** and 40 at Woodwalton Fen on the last day of August was the peak count.

A **Redstart** was a regular at Ferry Meadows for a week at the end of the month and **Whinchats** were also on the move being recorded at plenty of suitable sites, with more birds being reported than **Wheatears**. **Stonechats** were recorded breeding successfully from 3 sites making this a red letter year for this species and **Black Redstart** was another confirmed breeder this year. Other notable passerines were few and far between with records of most warbler species

focused upon breeding success. Two pairs of **Bearded Tits** at Wicken Fen reared young and the extensive reedbeds here can surely hold a few more pairs in the future. The seemingly annual mini-eruptions of **Crossbill** in July and August continued this year with small numbers reported widely, most birds are recorded as fly-overs and the strident “chup chup” call of birds overhead ensure that many birds do not pass over unnoticed. High counts included 20 over Hemingford Grey and 10 at Over and Elton and 18 at Southey Wood on Jul 13th were the only ones likely to linger.

Looking Ahead

October is a month of arrivals and departures, a good fall of migrants along the east coast, usually the result of easterly airflows and poor weather, can filter inland and a Yellow-browed Warbler is an increasingly discovered bird in the county. Flocks of Pink-footed Geese will pass over on their way to Norfolk and American Golden Plover could also be on the cards hiding within the Golden Plover flocks arriving on our arable lands. Many hope for a re-run of the Sociable Plover which frequented the Chatteris fens in the near past and it is possible that last years Rough-legged Buzzard will return to winter again. Winter is arguably the most spectacular time to be out birding in Cambridgeshire and during November wildfowl numbers will increase, wild swans will arrive from the north and east, flocking gulls, wader flocks, harrier roosts and roving hoards of tits, finches and buntings will all start to become prevalent in our birding experience. Enjoy.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Duncan Poyser

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Saving Ely's Wildspace

Andrew Balmford (Chair, Local Campaigners for the Protection of Rural Ely, and Professor of Conservation Science, Dept of Zoology, University of Cambridge)

There are places around the fringes of Ely where, if you're lucky and patient enough, you can do something utterly extraordinary. You can stand within sight of the city's vast Norman cathedral and, at the same time, hear the ping of Bearded Reedlings or the boom of a Bittern, then turn and marvel at Marsh Harriers quartering a reedbed. The truly fortunate might spot an Egret drifting into roost, or watch, as a deep vee on the water, reveals itself as an Otter. Even a routine visit is likely to yield Reed and Sedge Warblers, a Cuckoo calling out across the flood meadows, or the electric flash of a Kingfisher zipping along the river. These riches, all within walking distance of Britain's fastest-growing city, make the remaining habitat patches, strung out along Ely's eastern edge, exceptionally valuable for wildlife and people alike. Yet they're also isolated, vulnerable, and under considerable threat.

Many of the key sites - which run along both sides of the Great Ouse, from the railway station north as far as Queen Adelaide - are the legacies of now-abandoned industries. The clay pits at Roswell, first excavated in medieval times, yielded the bricks used to build the city, and as late as the 1940s, the gault to reinforce the region's riverbanks. The settling ponds at Queen Adelaide were constructed to hold the washings from the adjacent beet factory. Yet, over the past half century, while agricultural intensification has rendered the surrounding arable landscape increasingly hostile, these industrial activities have waned, and the wildlife has moved in.

Reed Buntings, Snipe, Lapwing, Barn Owls, Water Rails, Cetti's and Grasshopper Warblers, Bee Orchids and Water Voles are now all frequent sightings. In total, over 200 bird species have been recorded; the plant list runs to around 340. There has been official recognition of the area's importance too. It's now partly covered by three County Wildlife Sites, in 1984 a small portion of it was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for the remarkable reptile fossils exposed in its Kimmeridge clay, and it's been flagged as part of a green corridor in the County Council's Green Vision for Cambridgeshire. Yet none of this provides statutory protection for the area's wildlife - as local people found out in late 2006, when the Thomas Parsons Charity sold the largest pit at Roswell to a developer.

In an interview with a boating magazine, the new owner, who also owns a 200-berth marina near the railway station, discussed providing moorings on the pit for between 50 and 500 motorised boats. In the spring of 2007 he started clearing trees, building tracks, and installing services around the main pit. Local residents concerned that the site was being converted into another marina, and outraged that the work was being conducted prior to any planning application, formed a group calling itself the Local Campaigners for the Protection of Rural Ely (LCPRE).

They were worried about the impacts of habitat damage and eventual pollution and disturbance from boat traffic, not just on the area's wildlife, but on its human visitors too. Very many people visit the area to walk, sail, fish and play, as well as generally enjoy nature, and a survey that LCPRE asked me to carry out, with university scientists, confirmed LCPRE's concerns. We found that, very roughly, there were an astonishing 90 000 visits each year to the area (over twice the number recorded at Wicken Fen), and regardless of their reason for coming, the visitors were overwhelmingly opposed to moorings on the pits.

LCPRE stepped up its campaign. It wrote letters to politicians and the press, talked with local radio and television, and held a meeting attended by around 400 members of the public. More action followed. LCPRE persuaded East Cambridgeshire District Council to place a Tree Preservation Order on the remaining woodland, and hired a barrister who confirmed that the work already conducted did require planning permission. When LCPRE became a membership organisation, they recruited 1000 members in just one year. Eventually the Council responded by serving an enforcement notice on the owner, which LCPRE's barrister then helped the Council to successfully defend at a subsequent appeal. With no planning application in sight, the owner now has until October 2009 to remove most of the infrastructure he's installed at the main pit.

In the meantime the campaigners have turned their attention to the wider area. Anxious to avoid repetitions of the “Roswell incident” they asked members and landowners for their views on the future of the whole of the Wildspace. The resulting Wildspace Vision, produced with the Wildlife Trust, contains a raft of ideas, endorsed by most local stakeholders, for managing the area in an integrated way for both wildlife and wildlife-friendly recreation.

Most excitingly, the group also worked closely with Natural England, RSPB and the Wildlife Trust to collate evidence supporting Natural England’s June 2008 proposal to extend SSSI status to a much larger, 86-hectare swathe of the Wildspace. This was notified this time, not just for its geological features, but also for its breeding and wintering bitterns, and its assemblage of breeding wetland birds. Despite another appeal by the owner of Roswell, this designation was approved in February 2009, with the result that no activities that threaten the SSSI’s “notifiable features” (now critically, many of its birds as well as its fossils) can be conducted without Natural England’s approval. Most of the Wildspace is now a lot safer.

There are still major challenges ahead. Local planners, having seen Ely’s population soar by 53 % in just 16 years, are proposing a further 50 % growth by 2027. The District Council has recently approved plans for a country park over much of the western part of the Wildspace - though after widely-voiced public concerns there’s been some shift in emphasis away from infrastructure and towards conservation. The beet pits at Queen Adelaide urgently need engineering work to meet health and safety standards - but the owners are working hard with Natural England and others to ensure this does not harm the bitterns, voles and harriers. And the owner of Roswell seems determined to continue trying to develop his site, notwithstanding its SSSI designation.

So the future for LCPRE looks set to remain busy. We will continue to raise public awareness, oppose harmful developments, and work with the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and local landowners to identify and implement sustainable management practices across the Wildspace. But there are reasons to be cheerful. Thirty months on and there are still no commercial moorings at Roswell. The support of many hundreds of Ely’s citizens for their remaining wild areas has been inspirational. And Bitterns still boom and Harriers still soar within sight of the city’s other great masterpiece.

What you can do

If you want to get involved in helping to save Ely’s Wildspace then visit LCPRE’s website (www.elywildspace.org.uk), where, for as little as £1, you can become a member, and for just £20 you can buy a stunning limited edition print of an Ely Bittern. Please also make sure to send any interesting sightings of birds around Ely to the Cambridgeshire Bird Club, via their website (cbcwhatsabout.blogspot.com).



The Red Kite in Cambridgeshire

John Harding.

Driving past Kimbolton yesterday, out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of a bird of prey low over a field. It looked more like a Red Kite than a Buzzard. Over forty years ago, when I started birdwatching in Cambridgeshire, the possibility of its being a kite would have been non-existent, and a buzzard hardly more plausible for that matter. The status of Red Kite in the county has changed dramatically over the years. It is not difficult to support the fact that Kites were once common birds in the county. One doesn't have to engage in arcane discussions about place-name evidence. The early naturalists knew how to identify kites, and the differences between Red Kite and Black Kite. Selby, writing in 1825, says 'in all the wooded districts of the eastern and midland counties of England it is abundant'. In the fourth edition of Yarrell's *A History of British Birds*, Alfred Newton, the editor, writes: 'when the first edition of this work was published [1843], the woods near Alconbury Hill were still the breeding-places of the Kite, but it was extirpated there about the year 1844, or soon after'. It is clear, therefore, that kites bred in Huntingdonshire (and presumably in the Soke of Peterborough, too). But were kites breeding in old Cambridgeshire? There is no direct evidence of this, but certainly kites would have been a common sight in the old county in the early nineteenth century. Evidence for this comes from hunting records. Ticehurst, in *The Birds of Suffolk*, writes that in 1783 a notice appeared in a Suffolk newspaper as follows: 'The gentlemen of the Falconer's Society are hereby acquainted that the hawks will be in England in the first week of March and will begin Kite and Crow hawking immediately on their arrival. The quarters are fixed at Bourn Bridge, Cambridgeshire, until the first April meeting when they go to Barton Mills and Brandon'. Interestingly, Ticehurst reports that the Red Kite became rare in Suffolk from the 1840s, just when breeding ceased in Huntingdonshire. Hawking for kites also took place regularly on Royston Heath. A kite was obtained at Histon in 1844, as reported in Lack's *The Birds of Cambridgeshire*. All in all, we can conclude that kites were a common sight throughout the area which is now covered by our new county until the middle of the nineteenth century.

When CBC started to produce its Reports in the 1920s, the Red Kite was never seen in Cambridgeshire. The 'first satisfactory report' dates from 1970, one reported flying over Little Downham on 4 June. A note accompanied that record to say that there had been the occasional reports before, but only from non-birdwatchers, and these had been rejected because of insufficient evidence that Buzzard and Marsh Harrier had been excluded. The second acceptable record came two years later, when the RSPB reported one on the Ouse Washes on 22 May. The first year of multiple reports was 1988: two birds were seen in old Cambridgeshire, bringing that area's total to nine, and there were two reports from Huntingdonshire as well that year. The first indication that kites in the county were appearing as a result of re-introductions came in 1992: the wing-tag on a bird seen in the Dullingham area over the summer showed that it 'was originally from a Welsh nest and was released with Spanish birds at a site in southern Britain in July 1991', as the Report says, with reticent geographical precision. By the mid-1990s county birders could expect to find kites for their year-lists without much difficulty and in 1999 there was the first report of an unsuccessful breeding attempt at a site 'in the north-west of the county'. The first successful breeding followed in 2004. These are described as the first breeding in the county since Brampton Wood in 1848. (I haven't found reference to this and would be interested to hear its source.) Re-introduction programmes are not without their controversial aspects but few would bemoan the reappearance of such a marvellous bird as a regular feature of the county's avifauna.

Editors Comment

Table showing number of suspected breeding pairs of Red Kite and Buzzard in Cambridgeshire 1998 -2008

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Red Kite	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	2	8	6
Buzzard	0	3	6	9	12	16	17	30	32	41	36

If Red Kites were to colonise the county half as successfully as Buzzards then we could reasonably expect 20 or more pairs to be breeding in Cambridgeshire by 2020. To find out more about the re-establishment of Red Kite as a feature of the English countryside then don't miss Ian Carter's talk "The Ecology and Conservation of the Red Kite" on November 13th at St Johns Church Hall 8.00pm

Cambs Bird Race - 2009

Richard Baines

Last year the Die Hards (Richard Patient, Ade Cooper, Mark Ward and Jonathan Taylor) set a staggering new 24 hour county record, seeing 135 species. When one of the rival Cambirders birdrace team was unable to make this year's big day, hopes of finding a suitable replacement were not high. Richard Baines, a resident of Flamborough Head, Yorkshire's migrant hotspot, was persuaded to extend a business trip and join the Cambirders (Mark Hawkes, Ben Green and Duncan Poyser) on their whistle stop trip around the county to enjoy a rich and varied birding experience. This is his account of the day:

"It's not normal for 4 grown men to lie on a bank at 11.45pm at Wicken Fen listening for distant calls of waders, desperate to hear a Green Sandpiper or even a mega, such as Curlew!! But that's what happens when you get so close to a winning total on a bird race. All normality was left behind. At 12am, almost 24 hours earlier, we fell into the car and headed out into the dark. The form of the day very quickly took shape as Mark and Dunk, our main driving force, discussed the merits of every tick, twist, dip or turn. In the back were Ben and I, though I must admit I hardly remember anything of our journeys, apart from arriving and waking up at each stop.

The first stop is often memorable on a bird race, it sets the tone. If it's a dip, then give it up now and back to bed; if it's a tick, then the adrenaline kicks in and we are up and running. This day was no exception, as we stopped at a Stone Curlew site. Out in the darkness, in a desolate place, Stonies were calling right on cue. Nocturnal listening continued at a variety of roadside stops and Long-eared Owl, Tawny Owl, Whimbrel, Cetti's Warbler and omnipresent Sedge and Reed Warblers were all heard in the early hours. At one Fenland stop, a distinctive, but unidentified wader call was heard several times overhead. Our suspicions were confirmed when we checked the Birds Sounds of Europe CD on the car stereo, but we felt it would be more than a little dubious to tick a nocturnal Dotterel on call only.

Dawn broke on the Fens and our ears were trained on the marshes in silence. One of the first calls from out of the rising mist was the whipping of a Spotted Crake, followed a while later by the monotonous rasps of Corncrake. Wow! This was a special place and I felt privileged to be in, what must have been, the only place in the UK with both crakes calling that morning. We soaked up the atmosphere, which was probably a mistake as there should be no time on a bird race for such leisurely delights!

Remaining on the Fens, we enjoyed quality birds such as Crane, Nightingale and Grasshopper Warbler and our target birds fell one by one, the pace was starting to rise as the morning lengthened. A Little Owl showed well on the way to the woods where a lengthy wait was rewarded with great views of a drumming Lesser Spotted Woodpecker; this was one of the many highlights of the day.

Mid morning blues kicked in under the leafy canopy; we must have walked every path in search of Marsh Tit. "There's supposed to be 5000 pairs here, every branch drips with 'em" I remember hearing repeatedly at every junction. Sticking together is vital on a bird race, I don't think we did very well and I often thought this could cost us. We were unbelievably lucky as not one, but two separate, Siskins flew over on our marathon walk, putting to bed the doubts of the one that dipped the first.

Next it was back to the Washes where we spent quite some time wringing every last tick out of the wetland. Ben was sharp eyed on the scope and pulled out a series of distant blobs which turned out to be; Black-tailed Godwits harbouring a much appreciated Bar-tailed, several Ruff, Whooper Swan, Pintail, Little Ringed Plover, Ringed Plover and a very last gasp drake Garganey flying in to top it off.

We were still going well and full of hope but it was all to change in the next few hours as several sites didn't really live up to expectations and some guaranteed tick-and-run species decided to hide for what seemed like hours. A dodgy goose stop yielded no convicts and, after what seemed like lengthy stops at Grafham and Paxton, we were only a few up with House Martin, Black Tern and Red Crested Pochard added to the notebook. There's usually one bird that drives a team mad and ours was Scaup, a long staying female was still present in the morning at Grafham and we expected an easy bonus but after a lengthy search and much cussing we had to leave.

Back on the Washes a bonus Med Gull, Whimbrel and Greenshank were good value and it was some relief that we clapped our eyes on a Teal! It also was one of the many sites where I thought we needed a military folding bridge in our pack to span the drain and save us time.

It was now early evening and Dunk and Mark's 'where next??' debates were at a peak. At this point civility almost kicked in as we visited a private wetland site where we were met by the landowner and were offered a cup of tea! A stray Bewicks Swan left over from the winter flocks was a genuine wild bird, as was a beautiful drake Mandarin, we were assured. We took his word on it but having time for the cup of tea would have been even better!

Off to the reedbeds next, where we needed to strain our ears even more for Bearded Tit and Water Rail but they did us proud, as did the resident booming Bittern. The late afternoon depression and the 'where the hell will we get 20 ticks from' suddenly changed into 'we could really do this'. The record of 135 seemed on again. At that point we maybe should have finished on a high and gone for a pint. A roding Woodcock was our final bird giving us a total of 134, three better than the team's previous best. We realised we could strain our ears no longer on that damp bank. There was more chance of that damn female Scaup dropping out of the sky than hearing the call of a Curlew or Green Sandpiper!"

Apart from the Scaup, other birds present on the day but not seen included Stonechat and Egyptian Goose. Is a 140 total possible on one of those blinding May days with the wind in the east, loads of birds on the move and lady luck shining down? Only time will tell.

Cambridge Bird Club Field Trip - Cavenham Heath NNR - 12 July 2009

Clive Sinclair

On a mild evening, 26 CBC members and others were met by the reserve manager, Mike Taylor, who gave a brief introduction to the reserve and then showed us around while commenting on items of interest.

Walking down the track from the car park large amounts of ragwort were noticeable. Although this is poisonous to stock it is a valuable pollen source and is the food plant for the cinnabar moth. Also of interest, by the track, was mossy stone-crop which has the smallest flower of all UK plants.

Various humps and ditches were noted on the reserve. Some are the remains of a bomb dump used by the nearby airfield in World War II, others are the remains of anti-glider obstacles from the same period.

There were good numbers (10-20) of Stone Curlew providing some good close views. These are birds which assemble on the heath after breeding locally on both breckland warrens and arable land. Also present were Green Woodpeckers and Stonechat, good views were obtained of two Hobbies.

At the end of the track we reached the River Lark and a disused gravel-pit. Some common water birds were seen there.

We returned to the car park via a path over the heath. Mike pointed out some of the trial plots where management work is being carried out to compare methods of reducing the effects of nitrogen accumulation in the surface soil of the heath. Rotovation of the surface seemed to be the best way to maintain the required heathland vegetation at a reasonable cost.

Tree Pipits were heard but not seen from the path. No Nightjars were heard up to 10pm and Mike thought it unlikely that any were present.

Thanks to Mike Taylor the evening was a pleasant introduction to the reserve for those of us not familiar with the area.

Memories of the East Bank

Robin Cox

In mid March I was walking along the East Bank at Cley, as I often do; there were five Marsh Harriers in the air and two Little Egrets flew across in front of me. I thought back to my first memories of the East Bank in the late 1940s when a single Marsh Harrier would have constituted about 10% of the total British breeding population and a Little Egret would have been an unthinkable rarity. Many things have changed but the East Bank is much the same as I remember it more than sixty years ago.

In those days I would cycle from my home in Cromer to Cley and spend the day with Richard Richardson before cycling home again. Some days we would walk to Blakeney Point and back as well. Richard would have a small group of birding devotees gathered round him and hanging on his every word. Others who might be there included Peter Clark (later to found and manage Holme Bird Observatory), Peter Jackson, Chris Knights (later to become the wonderful bird photographer that he is today), while Billy Bishop, the legendary warden of the Cley Marshes would keep a not so respectful distance (there was always a certain frostiness in the relations between Richard and Billy).

Other Cley personalities who would drop by as we sat on the Bank might be Archie Daukes (the Major), Dick Bagnall-Oakley, a master at Gresham's School and one of the best cine photographers, Maurie Meiklejohn (no relation of Peggy and the author of the Hoodwink and other irascible birding tales), Peggy Meiklejohn and Liz Forster. Female birders were very rare in those days but Peggy and Liz were two formidable and very experienced and accomplished birders. Apart from birding together regularly, Richard would visit Peggy once a week for his bath as there was not such a facility in the house of Mrs Davidson, where he lodged at Hill Top and kept a succession of, mostly Indian, cage birds in an aviary. It was here, on the kitchen table, that he also made most of his paintings, all from memory and a few field sketches.

Clifford Borrer was still an active collector in Cley so news of rarities was kept strictly to the small circle of bird watchers (the term birder had not been coined then) who surrounded the great RAR. As the most junior and inexperienced of the group I was frightened to breathe a word about any unusual sighting and was quite rightly admonished by Richard for not telling anyone about an Alpine Swift I had seen at Cromer.

On the other hand I thought a Hoopoe and a Richard's Pipit at Cromer on the same day was worthy of a mention in the North Norfolk News. Having reported the birds, with descriptions, to the local reporter, the news was, of course, confused by the time it appeared in the newspaper and the Richards pipit was described as a pink bird with a large crest, black and white wings etc and the Hoopoe.....well you can guess! That was when I first learned never to believe everything you read in newspapers and, on the many occasions since that I have been a first hand witness of an event I can say, without exception, that its reporting in the papers has never been accurate.

But I am digressing from those heady days, soon after the war, when a pectoral sandpiper was an almost unique rarity, Fulmar Petrels, called St Kilda gulls, were just beginning to appear in Norfolk and Bitterns at Cley were regular breeding birds. Even by this time I had been bird-watching for several years but how I got into this hobby which has endured for the whole of my life will have to wait for another bulletin, if the Editor invites me.

Editors Comment

Of course Robin, our Club's President, has an open invitation to share his birding memories with us and these will hopefully grace the pages of the bulletin again soon. Moss Taylor will be entertaining the Club with his talk "Richard Richardson: Guardian Spirit of the East Bank" on October 9th at Milton Country Park.

HELP! Birders needed

Peter Herkenrath and Louise Bacon

Can you identify common birds? Are you able to spend an hour out birdwatching four times a year? Do you live or regularly visit any of the following areas?

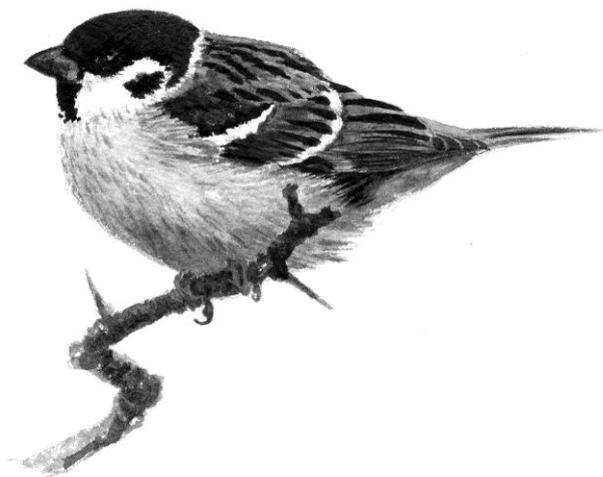
- Caxton – St Neots – Godmanchester triangle
- Ely – Soham to the Suffolk border
- The land between Mepal, Ely and the Norfolk border, bounded by the Ouse washes to NW
- A14 – A1(M) – A47 to county border, could be described as western Huntingdonshire
- Central Huntingdonshire – areas such as Woodwalton, Monkswold, the Riptons, The Stukeleys, Warboys.
- The land between Peterborough and Wisbech, north of the Nene Washes to the Lincolnshire border
- The (very?!) large area between Ramsey, Chatteris, Warboys and March, extending to the Norfolk border and towards the Nene Washes.

If the answer to any of these three questions is yes, then you could be able to make a significant contribution to the county and national atlas project which has just 2 years left until completion of fieldwork.

You could take on a timed tetrad visit and cover it in either / both of winter or summer – ONE HOUR is all that is needed per visit. Why not team up with a friend or two and take a couple of adjacent tetrads and make it into a bit of a contest? The other way you can help is by providing Roving Records – if you go to an area regularly, why not start your own roving records account on the British Trust for Ornithology's website. Full details of how to get involved can be found at www.bto.org.uk or by contacting the research committee by email at cambsbirdatlas@btinternet.com, by post to 236 Wimpole Road, Barton CB23 7AE or by telephone to Peter Herkenrath on 01223 276553.

The list above is not comprehensive and represents the broad geographic areas where the biggest gaps in our coverage are. There are gaps across most of the county, and you can find out where by looking at: <http://blx1.bto.org/atlas-results/alloccamb.html#ref> or <http://blx1.bto.org/atlas-results/allochunts.html#ref>

On Saturday November 14th the club will be running it's second Winter Roving Day – we want groups of between two and four people to venture into parts poorly covered during the atlas so far. It's a great opportunity to visit new areas, share your birding and generate valuable survey data along the way There is friendly competition to see who can log the most interesting finds, and there's a hearty, warm supper at the end to swap tales of the days birding – what could be better?. Please contact Duncan Poyser (see contact details on last page) for more information on how to participate in this day.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2009

INDOOR MEETINGS

Friday October 9th, Milton Country Park, 8.00pm
Richard Richardson: Guardian Spirit of the East Bank by Moss Taylor

Moss Taylor was one of many people inspired in their youth by the late Richard Richardson, so much in fact that he felt compelled to write his biography. Moss will illuminate and elucidate many of the anecdotes from his book 'Guardian Spirit of the East Bank'.

Friday November 13th St Johns Church Hall 8.00pm
The Ecology and Conservation of the Red Kite by Ian Carter

Ian has written the book, titled "The Red Kite", about the history of the Red Kite and its long association with man, explaining why populations in many areas are now recovering, and providing details of the serious threats still facing the Kite in parts of its range. In his talk, Ian will bring the story of the Red Kite up to date, including the latest information on the reintroduction programme in England and Scotland.

Friends of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve – Special Event
Thursday 12th November 2pm
The Secret Lives Of Garden Birds by Dominic Couzens

FPPNR are pleased to invite CBC members to a special event in November at St Neots Priory Centre. An acknowledged expert on bird behaviour, Dominic Couzens is a major contributor to "Birdwatching" magazine and is well known as a natural history author and feature writer. Tickets at £4 are limited to just 120 and are available in advance from the Paxton NR visitor centre or SAE to: Trevor Gunton, 15 St James Rd, Little Paxton, Cambs, PE19 6QW.

FROM THE COUNTY RECORDER

In an effort to improve the production time of annual Cambridgeshire Bird Report can all observers please send ALL their daily records and outstanding description for 2009 to me before 28th February 2010. Those received after this date, are not guaranteed to be included in the 2009 CBR. The workload of the production team is ever increasing (during 2008 for example, the Records Committee had to process around 180 descriptions alone). Late submissions of daily sightings mean a lot of extra work the recorders and the section writers. We would all very much appreciate if all these records could be submitted by the above date. Many thanks in advance.

Mark Hawkes

FROM THE BULLETIN EDITOR

There has been a very positive response to the less formal recent reports section. Thank you to all members who have contributed to the production of this bulletin. If you do want to support the bulletin by writing about bird and county related themes or contributing artwork then please contact me, all contributions are very gratefully received.

Duncan Poyser

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new members – John Hagger of Granchester and Jonathan Taylor of Peterborough.

Bruce Martin

Erratum - In Bulletin 403 the date of Bob Scott's death was erroneously stated as 26th April 2009 this should have read 26th March 2009. Sincere apologies for any distress caused.

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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.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Birdline number

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

Please email records to: Mark Hawkes by November 7th

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

Next Bulletin due out November 2009, covering September/October 2009

GOOD BIRDING!