

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 411



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

RECENT REPORTS JULY/AUGUST 2010

These are unchecked reports rather than confirmed records sourced from sightings received by the county recorder or reported on the "What's About?" page on the CBC website.

Pied Flycatcher by Ben Green



July was largely warm and dry, and the emphasis was very much on breeding species completing their nesting activities. August was unsettled, with very heavy rain at times. A feature of this Bulletin period was the return wader passage beginning in earnest and post-breeding flocking for many groups. Where numbers are given in parentheses these indicate the monthly maxima for July and August respectively at a given site.

Moulting flocks of **Mute Swan** included those at Fen Drayton Lakes (327,358), with other counts of (289,292) at Grafham Water and (69,104) at Ouse Fen. Ouse Fen also attracted many **Greylag Geese** (142,436), other counts being those at Fen Drayton Lakes (195,249), Needingworth GP (119,183), Wicken Fen (28,181) and August counts of 116 at Grafham Water, 217 at Barrington Quarry and 295 at Kingfisher Bridge. Numbers of **Greater Canada Geese** were generally lower than the last species with, for example, (114,139) at Needingworth GP, (74,77) at Fen Drayton Lakes, and 108 at Grafham Water and 262 at Kingfisher Bridge on 15th August. Up to 8 **Egyptian Geese** were noted at Fen Drayton Lakes before 7 of them relocated to Grafham Water on at least 21st and 23rd August. Sandwiched in between these dates an impressive 24 were recorded at Earith on 22nd. **Common Shelducks** were noted from five localities with only Grafham Water recording more than 4 (a maximum of 22 in August). A single **Mandarin Duck** was noted on Bolton's Pit, Cambridge during both months.

Eurasian Wigeon started to return, with 20 at Fen Drayton Lakes by the end of July, and lower numbers at other sites. The same applied for **Eurasian Teal** with counts of (4,68) at Fen Drayton Lakes, (12,39) at Grafham Water, (1,30) at Ouse Fen and (4,24) at Kingfisher Bridge while 19 found floods by the Cam in Cambridge in late August. A drake **Green-winged Teal** at Grafham Water on 6th to 7th July seems likely to be the same bird seen there during July in both 2007 and 2008. **Gadwall** nested at Fen Drayton Lakes, Grafham Water (2 broods) and Kingfisher Bridge (11 broods), and counts of over 100 came from Fen Drayton Lakes (181,253), Grafham Water (169 in August), and Ouse Fen (117 in July). Peak **Mallard** counts were at Fen Drayton Lakes (287,320) Ouse Fen (232,750) and Grafham Water (737 in August). Again, the largest counts of **Tufted Ducks** were at Fen Drayton Lakes (550,761) and Grafham Water (210,569).

The long staying drake **Northern Pintail** at Fen Drayton Lakes was joined by another, and sightings of up to 2 birds also came from Grafham Water and Maxey GP. Numbers of **Northern Shoveler** remained low; only Grafham Water and Fen Drayton Lakes managed double figures with 25 and 14 respectively. **Garganey** were confirmed nesting at the Ouse Washes, and elsewhere there were peaks of 1 at Kingfisher Bridge, 2 at Berry Fen, 3 at Maxey GP and Ouse Fen, and 9 at Grafham Water. Last Bulletin's ringed drake **Blue-winged Teal** was seen again at Berry Fen on 4th to 5th July, before being reported back at Fen Drayton Lakes on 14th August after which it disappeared again. **Northern Pochard** is a species which appears in numbers in the summer. A bird with a blue nasal saddle was noted at Grafham Water in August; in prior years such birds have been proven to have originated from France. Definitely of local origin were 2 broods of chicks noted at one site. The prime summer site was again Fen Drayton Lakes where 31 on 3rd July had increased to 127 by month end and 202 by 15th August, whilst at nearby Ouse Fen numbers peaked at 86.

Red-crested Pochards were at Needingworth GP on 15th August, and then 8, including 6 juveniles, popped up at Fen Drayton Lakes on 22nd - from where? Cambridgeshire **Common Scoters** certainly favour the largest waterbody in the county, Grafham Water, and there were 4 records there during this period - single drakes on 2nd and 26th July, a party of 12 on 29th August, and 2 drakes two days later. As in prior years a drake **Common Goldeneye** was noted at the height of summer - this one was also at Grafham Water from at least 18th July. The recently published report on Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2008 (British Birds 103:482-538) contains details of the first apparently wild breeding pair in England - in Avon - so who knows, maybe one year? As widely reported elsewhere, the **Ruddy Duck** eradication programme continues apace, yet the species still just about clings on in the county - for how much longer?

Common Quails called at Hatley St George on 31st July and 2 at Litlington on 22 August, the latter also including a rare and lucky sighting of a bird in flight. **Grey Partridges** are always worth reporting, and confirmed nesting came from Coton and Grafham Water, with coveys of 11 at Chrishall Grange and 15 at Melbourn, 2 pairs at Fowlmere village, single

pairs at Comberton and Whaddon, and a 'small group' at Westmoor Fen.

Little Grebes nested at Grafham Water (7 pairs) and Kingfisher Bridge (5 pairs) whilst the highest counts included 18 at Ouse Fen and 17 at Needingworth GP. After a promising spring for the species the only **Black-necked Grebes** reports were at Grafham Water – an adult on 22nd July and a juvenile on 1st August. **Great Crested Grebe** counts included August maxima of 191 at Grafham Water and 126 at Fen Drayton GP.

Two single **Northern Gannets** were noted in August – over South Bretton on 16th August, and a juvenile flew north over a Huntingdon Road, Cambridge garden on 28th. A juvenile **Shag** arrived at Ferry Meadows CP on 16th and stayed for eight days – the coincidence in dates with the nearby **Gannet** above is noteworthy. Still no news of nesting **Great Cormorants**, the most significant report received was of 26 roosting at Barrington Quarry on 30th August – a high count for south Cambs.

Great Bitterns were only reported at two sites – Fen Drayton Lakes and Kingfisher Bridge. Sadly, after the much reported breeding at the latter site in recent years, nesting was not confirmed there this year. **Cattle Egrets** are undoubtedly becoming more regular in the county, and the first of the year was located in the Barleycraft GP egret roost on 10th, and also noted feeding on the nearby Ouse Washes at Earith. **Little Egrets** disperse widely after nesting, and in previous years some very high counts have been made at this time of year. The highest count this year was at the aforementioned roost, which held up to 43, with these birds presumably including those reported at Ouse Fen and Bury Fen. A further roost of up to 20 was located at Stirtloe Pits. Otherwise the only double figure counts were up to 15 at Ouse Washes RSPB, 14 at Grafham Water and 13 at Maxey GP. The only **Great Egret** report was of one flying north over Fen Drayton GP on August 28th.

Red Kites were reported from 11 localities and **Eurasian Marsh Harriers** at 24. There were no communal roosts of the latter species reported, so the highest count of 5 referred to a family party. The only **Osprey** was over Mill Road, Cambridge on 13th August. **Eurasian Hobbies** were noted at no less than 40 sites, and thankfully a number referred to successful nesting. This secretive little falcon can be quite

noisy when young have fledged, which appeared to be rather late at several sites. **Peregrine Falcon** were confirmed nesting at a second site this year, with two or three young fledged. Tantalising singles at Buckden, Godmanchester, Ouse Washes and St Neots perhaps suggest that there are as yet unreported pairs, or may well be in future years. **Common Buzzard** is now widely distributed and reported, and perhaps the most interesting report was of 13 together at Chrishall Grange feeding on invertebrates in oilseed stubble. A further count of 13 came from Ellington, with 10 at nearby Grafham Water. The only **Merlin** was a single at Loves Farm, St Neots on 15th August. Finally, both **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** and **Common Kestrel** were widely reported with further proof of breeding for both.

Other than five at Fowlmere **Water Rail** records were all of singles; at Grafham Water, Ouse Fen and Woodwalton Fen. After last Bulletins news of 20+ singing male **Corncrakes** at the Nene Washes, the only record submitted this period was of a bird flushed at Stretham during harvesting operations on 30th August. The highest counts of **Common Moorhen** were 47 at Grafham Water in August, Fen Drayton Lakes (13, 35) and Ouse Fen (8, 16). Flocks of **Common Coots** rapidly gather at favoured waterbodies after the breeding season, and this is reflected in the counts received – for example at Fen Drayton Lakes (968, 1031), Grafham Water (500, 1055), Needingworth GP (277,334) and Kingfisher Bridge (190,235).

Following the format of the last Bulletin, and dealing firstly with the breeding waders **Eurasian Oystercatchers** were noted at 15 sites, with the highest count being 15 at Chain Corner. **Pied Avocets** occurred at several sites, with the first breeding for Paxton Pits. Migrants were reported in early July at Fen Drayton Lakes (2), and at Berry Fen, where up to 4 were recorded, these had departed from a Cambridgeshire breeding site the previous day.

Little Plovers were reported from 10 sites, with by far the highest count being of 17 at Paxton Pits on 19th July. **Ringed Plovers** were also recorded from 10 sites, and again the peak (of 14) was at Paxton Pits, although there were also 10 at Fen Drayton Lakes. By August all counts were down to a maximum of 3. One at Paxton Pits on 19th July was considered to be of the form *tundrae*.

Northern Lapwings gathered in large flocks, with Needingworth GP (124,755) holding the most, nearby Ouse Fen (70,500), and the other highest counts were 286 at Tubney Fen in July, and in August 257 at Waterbeach Fen and 200 at Whittlesford. **Common Snipe** began to move away from their nesting sites, and there were 40 at King's Dyke NR on 10th August, and 10-12 at Fen Drayton Lakes, Ouse Fen and Paxton Pits, but no further breeding data is yet forthcoming.

Black-tailed Godwits are one of the commoner passage waders with reports from 15 sites. However few were submitted to subspecies level as definite *limosa* or *islandica*, which may distort the true picture of movements. 43 at the Ouse Washes in early July included juveniles and were considered to be nominate *limosa*, indicating likely breeding from within the county or nearby. Up to 40 at Berry Fen were also considered to be *limosa*. Kingfisher Bridge attracted (17,11), Grafham Water and Waterbeach up to 13 each, and 1-3 at the other sites included 2 adults at Fowlmere NR in late July, and 3 juveniles there on 11th August. **Common Redshanks** peaked at 21 at Berry Fen in July before it dried out, and after early August only 1-2 birds remained anywhere.

European Golden Plover were reported from 3 localities – the first were 3 at Duxford on 30th July, and were followed by one at Ferry Meadows CP on 9th August and 17 at Maxey GP on 15th August. Between 1 and 3 **Sanderlings** were seen on 7 dates at Grafham Water, whilst no more than 7 **Dunlins** were recorded at 8 sites, with perhaps the most noteworthy being a single at Fowlmere NR which provided only the fourth reserve record. **Ruff** were noted at 11 sites, with peaks of 10 at Berry Fen and 15 at the Ouse Washes. **Whimbrels** traditionally peak during late July, and the 12 records for this Bulletin exactly doubled those of its larger relation the **Eurasian Curlew**. **Whimbrel** counts included 10 at Overcote on 19th, 16 on 23rd over Fowlmere NR, 19 at Wicken Fen on 31st and in August 11 at Ouse Fen on 11th. The **Curlews** were all singles bar 2 over Grafham Water on 17th August. A juvenile at Fen Drayton Lakes on 29th August may just have been the bird seen flying west over Fanshawe Road, Cambridge earlier that day by the same observer.

Gone are the days when **Spotted Redshanks** could be expected in numbers - the only record was a juvenile at Grafham Water from 17th to 23rd August. **Common Greenshank** were at

17 sites, mostly 1-3, but peaks included 10 at Berry Fen in July, and 9 at Ouse Washes and 14 at Grafham Water during August. **Green Sandpipers** were at 22 sites, with the highest counts at Isleham Water Meadows (10), Maxey GP (14), Kingfisher Bridge (18), Grafham Water (18) and Cam Washes (20). **Common Sandpipers** were at 19 sites, mostly 1-3, but with July peaks of 16 at Grafham Water, 9 at the tidal Nene and 5 at Fen Drayton Lakes. Between 1 and 3 **Wood Sandpipers** were at 6 sites, but easily the highest count was of 10 at Kingfisher Bridge on 21st August. A single **Ruddy Turnstone** was at Fen Drayton Lakes on 31st July, and 1-3 at Grafham Water on 8 dates included a colour-ringed bird previously noted in Norfolk.

Promising winds prompted several observers to try a 'seawatch' at Foul Anchor on 30th August (it is actually more of a 'skywatch'). They were duly rewarded with 19 **Great Skuas** and 3 **Arctic Skuas** heading southwest into Cambs. As long ago as the 1990 and 1993 Cambridgeshire Bird Reports Graham Easy pointed out the conditions to look out for, and predicted the annual passage of over a thousand skuas in Cambridgeshire skies. Expect to hear more from this site over the remaining autumn months.

Mediterranean Gulls seem to be scarcer than they used to be in the county, but there were sightings of juveniles at Grafham Water on 5 dates (where there was also an adult on Aug 7th), Tanholt GP and following the plough in the south of the county at Hinxton on August 3rd and a different bird a week later at Melbourn. The only **Little Gulls** were up to 2 juveniles at Grafham Water from August 14th to 30th. **Common Gulls** reappeared in the county at a number of sites between 10th and 13th July, with 100 roosting at Grafham Water by 23rd, and in early August there were 71 at Duxford on 4th and 26 at Hinxton on 3rd. The number of **Yellow-legged Gulls** in the county seems to increase each summer, and a concerted effort at a Grafham Water roost count revealed 88 on 23rd July, making it the second commonest large gull there. By contrast there were just 2 **Herring Gulls** and a single **Great Black-backed Gull** on the same date. The only other site holding double figures of **Yellow-legged Gulls** was Paxton Pits where the peak was 71, probably involving many of the same birds. By contrast **Caspian Gulls** are genuinely scarce during the summer and the only reports were both of second summers – at Tanholt GP on 21st July and at

Grafham Water next day. Scrutiny of the usual late summer flocking of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** on the south Cambs arable revealed the presence of groups of 200 to 700 at various sites, including a roost of hundreds on the runway of Duxford Imperial War Museum, and a peak of 1550 at Melbourn on 28th August. Associated species included up to 6 **Yellow-legged Gulls**, 2 **Herring Gulls** and a single juvenile **Great Black-back**. Finally, at Wisbech 20 pairs of **Lesser Black-backs** nested, and 8 pairs of **Herring Gulls**.

Grafham Water, unsurprisingly, provided most of the unusual tern sightings, with a single **Sandwich Tern** on 4th July and 10 there on 8th August, 3 sightings of 1-2 **Arctic Terns** and 1-4 **Black Terns** on scattered dates. Further **Black Terns** were seen at Hinchingsbrooke CP (1) and Fen Drayton Lakes (8), all on 14th August. At Grafham Water there were 88 **Common Terns** in mid July, at the same time 77 at Barleycraft GP included 22 young, 60 were at Ferry Meadows CP in mid August, at Fen Drayton Lakes (40,26), and nests were noted at Kingfisher Bridge with up to 30 birds present.

The highest count of Stock Pigeon was of 60 at Wicken Fen. **European Turtle Dove** records came from 28 locations. Many were of single birds, but at 18 sites useful comments revealed that birds were singing or pairs were noted, indicating some likelihood of breeding. 10 roosted at Barleycraft GP – long gone are the days when double figure flocks were easily found, 4 males each were at Mepal and Fowlmere NR, 3-4 pairs nested at Grafham Water, 2 males were at Elm, and 'several' at Pidley. All **Common Cuckoo** records were of singles, with a latish bird at Cam Washes on 27th August. There is little meaningful to report regarding the three commoner owl species this Bulletin, but the elusive *Asios* yielded some interesting information, with **Long-eared Owl** confirmed nesting at several sites and a summer sighting of **Short-eared Owl** at Soham Mere on 2nd August.

Movement of **Common Swifts** was highlighted by 200 south over Birdwood Road, Cambridge on 22nd August, whereas at Cottenham one was still entering a nest site on 19th August, and at Elm there were up to 60 during July. **Common Kingfishers** were recorded at 17 sites, including welcome news of further confirmed breeding. The only record of **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was of a male in a

Brampton garden on several dates – are they really that rare now?

Far and away the largest count of **Sand Martins** was of 1400+ at Grafham Water on 29th August, along with 700 **Barn Swallows** and 500 **House Martins**. Other notable counts of **Barn Swallows** in late August included 300 at Croydon on 16th, 250 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 22nd August, 89 at Barton and 60 at both Toft and Waterbeach Fen. **House Martin** groups included 60 at Birdwood Road, Cambridge and Waterbeach Fen and 50 at Eynesbury. **Tree Pipit** can be an early migrant, and singles were noted heading south over Coploe Hill on 15th August and at Grange Farm on 18th. **Yellow Wagtails** disperse in August after breeding, and small numbers of passage birds were widely noted, with gatherings of up to 40 at Grafham Water, 30 at Cam Washes and 14 at Trumpington.

Common Nightingales seem to fade away once they stop singing, and there were no reports this period. A single **Black Redstart** was in a Somersham garden on 14th to 15th July. **Common Redstart** is to be expected on return passage, and singles were seen during August at Earith on 7th and Mare Fen on 22nd, with singles at Fowlmere NR - the most prolific site for this species in the county – on both 22nd and 27th. The first return **Whinchat** was at Ouse Fen on 5th to 6th August, then during 20th to 22nd birds were seen at Grafham Water, Maxey GP, Ouse Fen, Southoe and Fen Drayton Lakes (3), with one at Chrishall Grange on 31st. The only **Common Stonechat** was a male at Wicken Fen on 31st July, a former nesting site. Single August **Northern Wheatears** were seen at Fen Drayton Lakes, King's Dyke NR, Ouse Washes and Tubney Fen.

Cetti's Warblers voiced their presence at Berry Fen, Fen Drayton Lakes, Fowlmere NR and Wicken Fen. **Common Grasshopper Warblers** are often still reeling in August, and so it proved with singles at Fen Drayton Lakes and Ouse Fen following July singers at Fowlmere NR, Great Eversden and Ouse Washes. One was flushed at Chippenham Fen on 18th August, and another ringed at Wicken Fen a week later. There was little to report regarding common warblers this month. **Goldcrests** were noted at (just) 11 sites, with comments including – 'just one pair at Fowlmere NR where there would usually be 5 pairs', and 'first of the year at Mepal'. In contrast notes on a pair of **Firecrests** revealed that a male singing from late March had

attracted a female by 11th April. By June the pair were confirmed nesting but the first attempt appeared to fail, probably due to heavy rain. On 9th June there were still up to 16 visits an hour to build a new nest, but activity ceased shortly thereafter, and neither bird was seen after 2nd August – a sad failure. Elsewhere a male sang in a Witcham garden on 23rd August.

Spotted Flycatcher reports came from 20 sites, with confirmed nesting at Cambridge Crematorium, Dullingham, Eaton Socon, Gamlingay, Haddenham, Heydon, Monks Wood and Reach. A single **Pied Flycatcher** at Hilton on 29th August frequented the same hedge as one there last autumn. Ten or more **Bearded Tits** were ringed at Wicken Fen. **Long-tailed Tits** gather in large groups post-breeding, and accordingly flocks of 20 were reported at Fen Drayton Lakes and Mepal. **Marsh Tits** were reported at 5 sites, and **Coal Tits** at 11.

Eurasian Jackdaws assembled to feed at Hinxton (69), and roost at Fowlmere NR where there were 600 on 29th August. A sizeable gathering of 45 **Carrion Crows** was noted at Westfield Farm, Comberton. Of 700 **European Starlings** at Newton on 22nd July some 90% were this years young. Records of **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** included 2 or 3 pairs confirmed nesting successfully at Woodhurst, one noted at Doddington, and 3 high west over Cottenham on 15th – what were they up to? Post-breeding flocks of **House Sparrows** included 60 each at

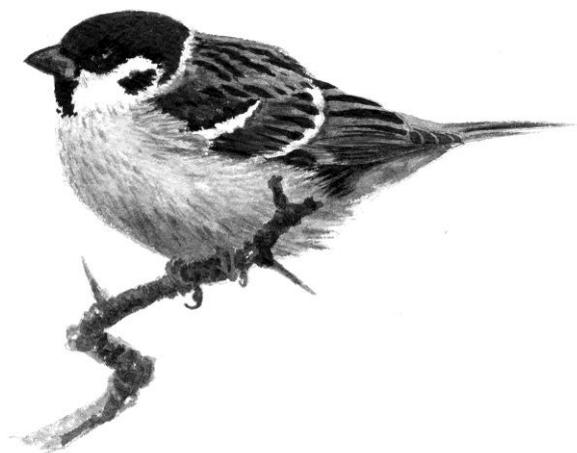
Elm and Melbourn, and a leucistic individual was photographed at Bottisham. All **Common Crossbill** records were during July, with singles at Abington, Arrington, Cambridge and Witcham, 2 at Southey Woods, 5 at Gamlingay Woods and 6 over Peterborough. There were no really large finch flocks yet – these tend to come later in the autumn, for example the maxima of **Eurasian Goldfinch** was 60, and of **Common Linnet** 30. There were just **6 Corn Bunting** records submitted, with no more than 6 at any one site

Exotica included the **Muscovy Duck** colony hanging on at Ely, with a peak of 29 birds including 7 young, and **Black Swan** and **Lesser Canada Goose** also there. A **Northern Bobwhite** was in a Hatley St. George garden on 1st August, and Kingfisher Bridge attracted single **Ross's and Red-breasted Geese**.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Richard Patient.

Thanks to the contributors to the CBC database July/August 2010 :

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Tree Sparrow

Leaving Las Aves– an unexpected holiday extension

Ben Green

(continued from the Bulletin 410)

As we left the mountains a large flock of Linnets seemed to gather near the road to see us off. One bright lemony shape with them proved to be another Citril Finch, and further along the farewell parade a flock of Rock Sparrows hung in the still bare branches like bunting. We drove back to Madrid with great birding images as fresh as the mountain air reeling round our minds, and I was already mentally preparing canvass and watercolour paper.

It didn't quite sink in at first. Ludicrous talk of a volcano erupting in Iceland earlier that day, disrupting flights all over Europe must surely be an overreaction- the panic would all blow over in a few hours wouldn't it? Apparently not. In fact the only thing blowing over was a lethal cocktail of volcanic effluent that ensured we would not be flying anywhere, let alone home. On the bright side it meant that in order to get back, we would have to drive up to the north, and the Pyrenees.

Having rehired the car, we headed up the motorway towards Zaragoza. We soon found ourselves driving through the backdrop to a spaghetti western, with monolithic rock formations protruding from the arid landscape, and the birdlife we saw on the way was equally impressive. Our first break on the drive was a lucky one. We had pulled off the road and almost immediately noticed three Golden Eagles working their way along a low ridge. A short time later, while looking for a garage we stumbled across a rubbish dump on the outskirts of a small town. Griffons, Booted Eagles and Egyptian Vultures had also found it, and more and more glided in, circling over the dump as though it were some huge carcass ready to be plundered. Among the rocks a beautiful cock Black-eared Wheatear stood bolt upright, all glossy black and fine sand.

Birds of prey dominated the skies, and we stared to see more and more Common Buzzards and Red Kites among the now familiar Black Kites and Vultures. A Goshawk flew overhead with purpose, miles away from the nearest pine plantation. By the afternoon we had reached the outer wall of the Pyrenees, and the road started to wind through narrow passes, climbing steadily up. Then, without warning, two unmistakable silhouettes sailed around a conifer clad outcrop that had forced the road into a tight bend. We couldn't stop, as the hard shoulder was about one hundred metres below us, but it doesn't take long to sear the image of a pair of Lammergeiers into the memory. There are many birds that can cause identification dilemmas- Lammergeiers do not fall into that category.



Lammergeiers

We took the road north of Jaca up towards the French border, stopping briefly to admire a pair of Short-toed Eagles deal with an intruder to their territory. As one of the pair looked on from the crown of a pine tree, the other bird tussled with a rival, interlocking talons and helicoptering down, seemingly oblivious to the onrushing ground. After the intruder was vanquished it headed on up the valley, and we followed suit to explore the ski slopes at Astun. The season was coming to an end, the snow was receding but the almost deserted hotel at the head of the valley still showed signs of life in the form of Yellowhammers, Water Pipits and Alpine Choughs. Next morning, while we pondered our best means of getting home, we spent a few hours in the Hecho valley, searching for Wallcreepers. We failed to see any, but you can't have everything. The scenery was fantastic, and was accented with Black Woodpecker, Firecrest, Raven and Common Redstart. From here we travelled north up to the coast, where we would cross into France the next day.

We found a scrub covered hill that overlooked the Bay of Biscay where, just like us, dozens of familiar species were gathering for the last leg of their northward journey. Meadow and Tree Pipits impatiently hurried east towards France while Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Whitethroats and a Whinchat fed in the low brambles. In a stand of pines a Pied Flycatcher and Redstart flicked through the gathering dusk. Thirty-six hours and a ten hour drive later we were waiting to board the ferry at Calais. We hadn't expected to end our trip with a plethora of Little Gulls and a seawatch, but in a way our journey had given us a complete experience that mirrored that of the birds we had been watching. From the plains of Extremadura we had followed the path of the Wheatears and leaf warblers as they passed through the Bustard display grounds, the Serin-filled oak orchards and the Spring-sweet mountain passes, constantly pulled northwards by the urge to reach Albion. And you know you have to go back one day.



Little Bustard

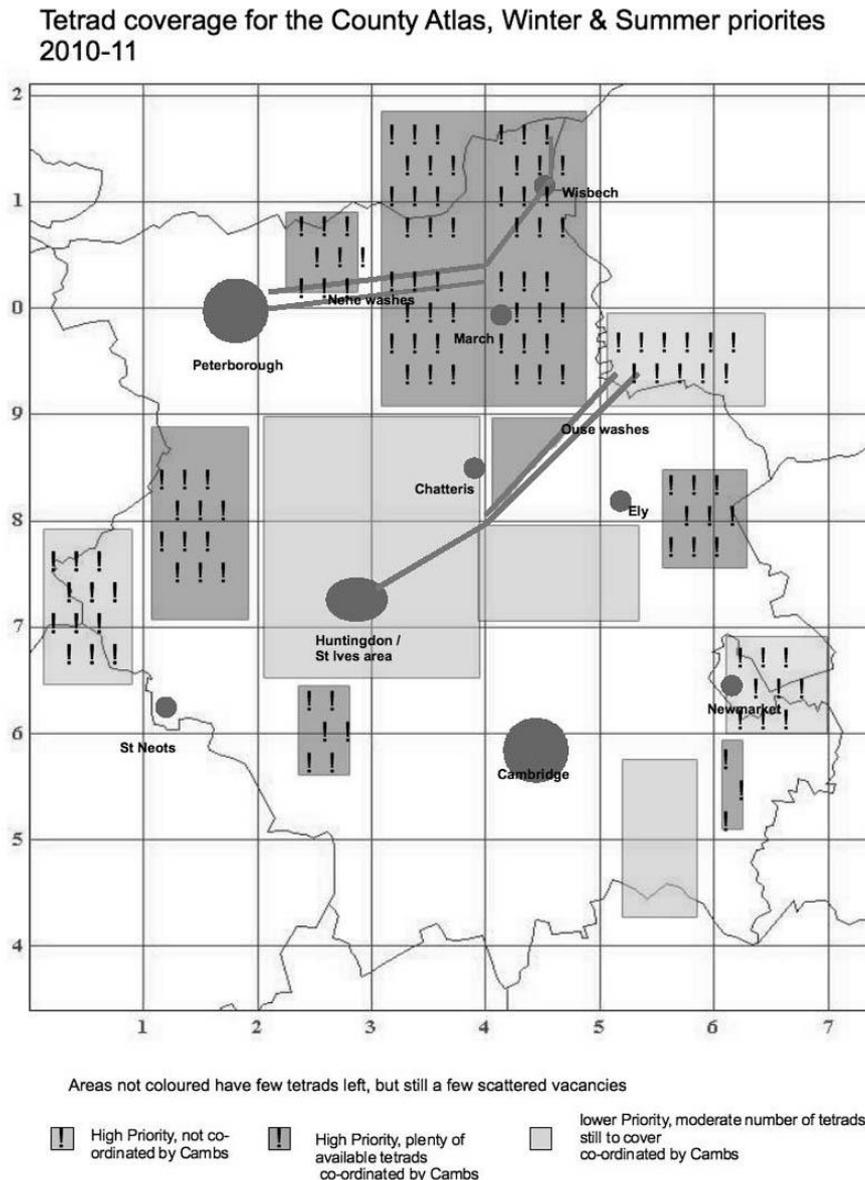
Cambridgeshire Breeding & Wintering Atlas – the Final Season

Louise Bacon and the Research Committee

November sees the start of the final season for the county atlas. Whilst excellent progress has been made, there are still two significant areas of the county with VERY POOR coverage, and scattered gaps across much of the county.

Atlas work is for most an enjoyable experience – all it takes, as a minimum, is a single hour four times through the year, one in Nov-Dec, one Jan-Feb, then for the breeding season one visit Apr-May and then Jun-Jul. How many birds can one see in an hour? It varies, depending on where in the county you are, but expect about 20-30 species in average farmland with maybe a small wood or a few houses.

The map below shows the priority areas, some of which are in Cambridgeshire but are administered by neighbouring counties – the BTO organises this National / County atlas project on 10km squares, and those which cross borders have to go to one or other. It would be excellent to pay particular attention to these areas, for which you would have to contact the relevant neighbouring county – Norfolk, Suffolk, Northamptonshire etc. The BTO website has details of who to contact for any tetrad.



“.....but all of these squares are a long way from home” is an understandable response after having looked at the coverage map here and on the BTO website. Well, as each tetrad square only needs one hour, and you're going to travel all that way to March or Chatteris to cover a square, why not take three or four in a block – it will make a nice walk whilst you're out that way?

“.....I need a bit of stimulus to go out that far” so why not take a friend, and work a set of three squares each, and see who has got the best list at the end of it? This approach adds that extra bit of incentive to cover the range of habitats available in an hour.

“.....all the areas left are really boring” - really? On winter trips in the last two years to fenland arable, various atlas surveyors have come across Firecrests, Tree Sparrow colonies, Goshawk, Merlin, Peregrine, Black Redstart, Great White Egret and Hen Harriers. In central Huntingdonshire, there are Red Kites, Owls, and with lots of public footpaths through small woods peppered within rolling fields, this is an interesting area and who knows what is spending the winter there (we'll have a better idea when we've got some more of these tetrads covered!). So, please consider covering one or more atlas squares this winter and in the final breeding season, and even better, take a colleague and make a contest of it.

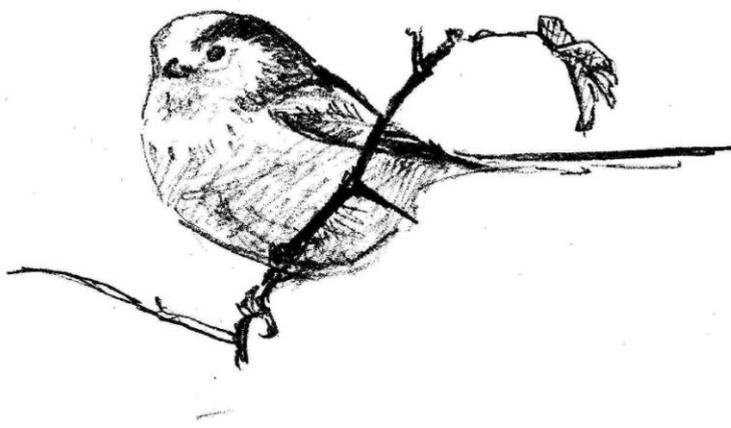
We would like to organise a 'blitzing' trip to some of the poorly covered areas twice in each season, cars containing three or four people, each person covering their own little patch of tetrads. If you are interested in being part of a group covering some of the under-worked parts of the county but don't drive, then this is for you.

Some of our main Cambs-administered target areas are:

- Wisbech west towards Peterborough, north of the Nene Washes
- Wisbech south to March, west to Chatteris, south of the Nene Washes
- Stilton south through Alconbury down towards Huntingdon, across to the Northamptonshire border
- The area south of Newmarket and the areas around Stuntney and Soham

Around Newmarket, there are tetrads administered by Suffolk which are significantly in Cambs, as is the northern part of the county east of the Ouse Washes, towards Brandon Creek. The very far west of the county is administered by Northamptonshire and there appears to be very few birdwatchers in that area. We rarely get records from this part of the county, and we do need more data about the birds there.

If I've managed to convince you to take on some atlas work for the final season please get in touch via Cambsbirdatlas@btinternet.com or to Louise Bacon on 01223 263962. Better still is to sign up via the BTO atlas website, where you can browse around for vacant tetrads to cover.



Long-tailed Tit

From the Chairman

Peter Herkenrath

During my first months as Chairman, I have met a number of Club members and have realised more than before how much our Club depends on helping hands. It is estimated that one third of all people in the UK do some kind of volunteering work, and the RSPB has more than 14,000 volunteers. Our Club is of course run by a much smaller 'work force' made up entirely by volunteers. There are those that are perhaps more in the spotlight and those that work in the background. We have those that hold positions in the Club, from the President and the Vice-Presidents to Council members and other officers, some of them running Club committees, organising bird ringing in the county or keeping our finances and our records and membership databases in order. They all do an enormous amount of work. There are those that organise our monthly indoor meetings, our outdoor meetings in summer and the annual barbecue, those that manage our website and its blogs.

The editorials to our Annual Reports give a good overview of the many helping hands that make the report possible, by writing articles, entering data into our database, drafting the species accounts, providing and organising all the beautiful drawings and photographs, and assembling, proof-reading and designing the report. There are those that help with the production of the bimonthly Bulletin, including assembling or writing the contributions, proof-reading and producing the drawings.

Others help through serving on our committees or through organising the refreshments at the indoor meetings. This is not a complete list of all the activities that keep our Club running. But I am impressed by all the effort put forward to the Club, often outside of any spotlight. Importantly, many members support the Club through participating in our surveys – in particular the field work for the Atlas, sending in their records to the Club's database, attending our indoor and outdoor meetings and our conferences, or simply paying their subscription. It is obvious that you don't need to be an experienced and knowledgeable birder to support the Club. I would like to thank all of you. Without you, there would be no Cambridgeshire Bird Club and we would know so much less about the avifauna in our county.

Elsewhere in this Bulletin, you will find information about the status of our Atlas work. We have the final year of field work before us; one winter and one breeding season are left. I would be very happy if we manage to fill many of the remaining gaps so that we can produce a comprehensive atlas of the breeding and wintering birds of Cambridgeshire. Please consider taking on atlas field work – this is a great way to support the Club and perhaps to discover some areas of our county that you have never been to.

If you think you could help the Club in any way, please get in touch with me (see my contact details at the end of this Bulletin). And if you haven't registered for our conference on farming and bird conservation on Oct 16th and 17th, please consider doing so – it promises to be an exciting weekend.

Extraordinary General Meeting

At an Extraordinary General Meeting held on Friday September 10, it was resolved to change the first sentence of the Constitution by the addition of the phrase marked in bold:

'The object of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club is to advance the education of the public in the study and conservation of the avifauna of, primarily but not exclusively, the county of Cambridge'.

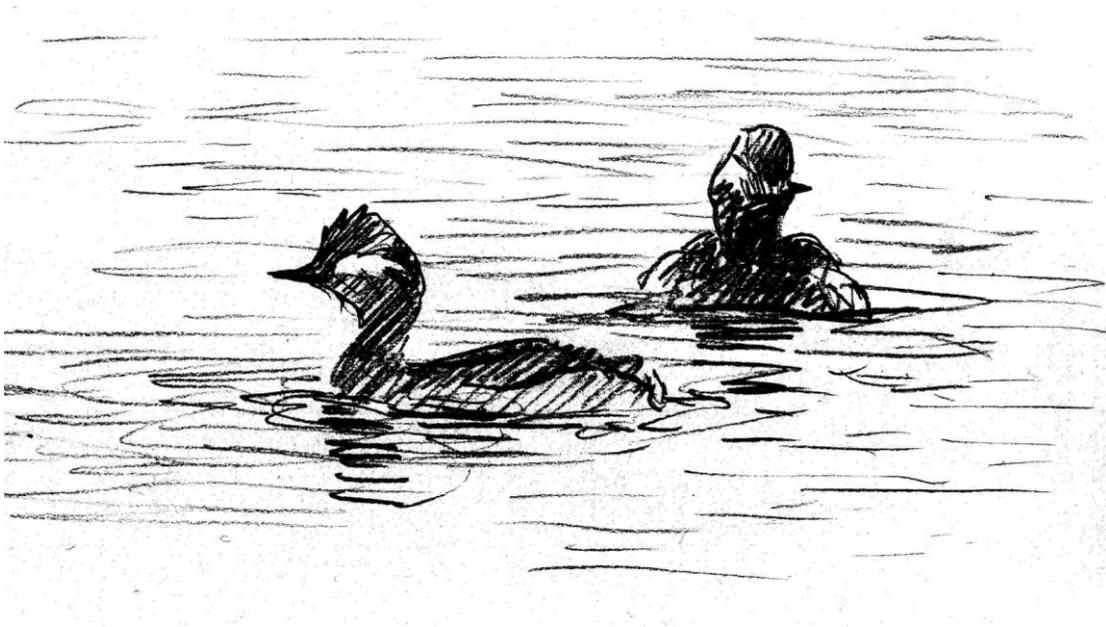
Atlas Blitz

As a start to the final season of atlas work for the county and the national atlas, we are having a day where we hope that people will join up with others and take a group of birders out to less well-covered areas of the county. The aim is to spend about 4 hours with each person covering their tetrads, with a colleague in nearby tetrads. The first date will be Sunday 28th November, and we will have another in January (or possibly February). Anyone wanting to participate, either as a driver or part of a team with others, please contact Louise Bacon on cambsbirdatlas@btinternet.com or by telephone on 01223 263962 and we can assign you some tetrads.

If anyone is interested in this concept but cannot make that date, please still contact Louise as she hopes to do some similar field days during the week throughout the winter and the more people who can join in the more ground we can cover.

Volunteers at indoor meetings

Do you enjoy the chance to socialise with other members during the refreshment breaks at indoor meetings? Please help to make the refreshment break go well by volunteering to help with making tea, coffee, serving refreshments and washing up. If you can help at one or two meetings please contact Vicki Harley (vicki.harley@care4free.net).



Black-necked Grebes

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2010

CBC CONFERENCE: FARMING AND BIRD CONSERVATION

in collaboration with the British Trust for Ornithology and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Saturday 16th October: Cottenham Village College

Sunday 17th October: Farm visits in Cambridgeshire

Farming is of fundamental importance to us all for food production. In the UK, 75% of land is farmed, so farming practices have major impacts on birds and other wildlife. Our conference will provide an opportunity for birders and farmers to meet and hear about the present situation of farmland birds and their conservation.

Over three sessions on Saturday 16th October we will be informed and entertained by speakers from the British Trust for Ornithology, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and other organisations. Our speakers will cover the historical background to the present state of farming and farmland birds and other wildlife, research on farmland bird populations, and how farmers and others are working to conserve farmland birds.

On Sunday 17th October there will be an opportunity to visit several working farms in the county to learn how the land is managed for both agriculture and to enhance its value for wildlife. The farms have been chosen to reflect the varied nature of farming in the county. Information on the sites can be found on their websites:

Countryside Restoration Trust Farm, Barton – www.livingcountryside.org.uk/larkrise.htm

RSPB Hope Farm, Knapwell – www.rspb.org.uk/community/blogs/hopefarm

Park Farm, Thorney – www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/spotlight/michaelsly.asp

Shropshire Group, Hainey Farm, Soham - www.gs-growers.co.uk/ukgrowers/detail.asp?ItemID=14

For details of how to register see previous bulletin, www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk or contact Vicki Harley (see last page for contact details).

INDOOR MEETINGS

Friday 8th October Cottenham Village College

The Rutland Water Osprey Reintroduction Project by Tim Mackrill

Tim has managed the project since 2005. This talk will cover the full story of the project – from the translocation of young Ospreys from Scotland to satellite tracking of migration and the first successful nests in central England for more than 150 years.

Friday 12th November St John's Church Hall

A Day Trip to the Farne Islands by Andy Cotton

Andy Cotton started his career in conservation as Assistant, then Chief, Warden for the National Trust on the Farne Islands, Northumberland, in 1989 and 1990. Living & working on the outer group of islands, he was responsible for visiting arrangements on Staple Island, bird & wildlife surveys and estate & habitat management. Andy is now the Senior Site Manager of the RSPB's Ouse Valley nature reserves, in Cambridgeshire.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We welcome the following new members – Per-Willy Fergestad of Cherry Hinton (in Cambridge for a year from Norway), Eoin Jennings of Stamford and John Tookey from Barrington.

Bruce Martin

CLUB CONTACTS

Chairman

Peter Herkenrath

19b Pepys Way, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PA
Tel: 01223 276553
Email: peterherkenrath@yahoo.co.uk

Secretary

John Harding

3 Cotton's Field, Dry Drayton, CB23 8DG
Tel: 01954 780777
Email: johnharding44@googlemail.com

Treasurer

Kevin Harris

37 Vicarage Meadow, Stow-cum-Quy,
Cambridge, CB25 9AL
Tel: 01223 813085
Email: kevin.harris1@mypostoffice.co.uk

County Recorder (Old Cambs)

Mark Hawkes

7 Cook Drive, Eynesbury, St. Neots, PE19 2JU
Tel: 01480 215305
Email: markhawkes@yahoo.co.uk

Cambridgeshire Bird Report Editor

John Clark

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

Indoor Meetings Secretary

Vicki Harley

30 Margett Street, Cottenham, Cambs, CB24
8QY
Tel: 01954 250340
Email: vicki.harley@care4free.net

Bulletin Editor

Duncan Poyser

1 Hallfield Terrace, Stuntney, Ely
01353 662157
Email: cbcbulletin@googlemail.com

Other Council Members

Ken Hook

The Coach House, Scotland Road, Dry Drayton,
Cambs, CB3 8BX
Tel: 01954 782407
Email: kahook@aol.com

Research Officer

Louise Bacon

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

Membership Secretary

Bruce Martin

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

Website

Chris Quy

5 Guyatt Court
Burwell, Cambridge, CB25 0DP
Tel: 01638 743204
webmaster@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk

Ringling Secretary

Michael Holdsworth

4(a) Cavendish Avenue, Cambridge, CB1 7US
Tel: 01223 476643
Email: m.holdsworth@ntlworld.com

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 early December 2010, covering Sept/Oct 2010

GOOD BIRDING!