

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 413



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

RECENT REPORTS NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 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.

Waxwing by Ben Green



November was a month of contrasting weather, with a switch from a rather warm start to a very cold and icy period at the month's end with some snow. December started very cold and icy, with frozen fields in many areas, and there was a slightly warmer lull (above 0°C!) for just a few days, before very cold conditions resumed. This caused further freezing of many ditches and water-bodies, especially those of small or moderate size. Arable fields became unsuitable feeding grounds for a range of birds, especially winter thrushes and plovers. The conditions resulted in cold-weather movements of some of our usual species away to the south and west or to the coast, but also displacements of some continental birds into the County. A thaw set in post-Christmas.

Triple digit figures of **Mute Swans** (WeBS counts) were reached at Fen Drayton Lakes (159 on 14th Nov), at Ouse Washes (275 on 15th Nov) and at Ouse Fen (128 on 15th Dec). November counts of **Bewick's Swan** as received to date ranged from 4 to 8 birds at four sites, and WeBS recorded a peak of 460 at Ouse Washes on 21st Dec. WeBS' dawn roost counts of **Whooper Swan** at Ouse Washes were (1963, 3281). Elsewhere, small numbers roosted at Kingfishers Bridge and Nene Washes, and a young bird flew over Fowlmere with two mute swans on 23rd Nov.

Mainly single birds, or small flocks, of **Pink-footed Geese** were encountered with 8 at Grafham Water on 16th Nov and 1–4 at Fen Drayton in Dec. At nearby Ouse Fen, 80+ were present on 31st Dec – perhaps to portend a future build-up in numbers in the area? The county did not miss out on the large influx of **Greater White-fronted Geese** into the UK during December. Core sightings were at Fen Drayton Lakes from the 4th Dec (with a maximum of 69 on 24th), also at Mare Fen and Holywell, with 8 additionally found at Buckden GP on 28th.

Feral geese continue to aggregate in large numbers at this time of year. **Greylag Geese** peaked in November at 770 at Kingfishers Bridge, and in December at 355 at Ouse Washes. The maximum count of **Canada Geese** was even higher – 1081 at Ouse Washes on 15th Nov. Two **Barnacle Geese** at the Ouse Washes on 15th Nov gave no clue as to their origins; a **Brent Goose** was present at Black Drove on 7th Dec; and **Egyptian Geese** were seen at 5 sites up to 10th Dec, with a peak of 11 birds on the Ouse Washes.

Up to 37 **Mandarin Ducks** crowded into an ice-free part of the ornamental lake at Wimpole Hall in December, and a single bird was reported from Waterbeach Pits. Counts of **Eurasian Wigeon** revealed some significant movements between sites; for instance, at Fen Drayton Lakes numbers rose from 1067 to 3000+ on 22nd Dec, in just 3 days. WeBS peak counts at Ouse Washes were (9482, 9288), with 8835 still present on 20th Dec, suggesting a fairly static situation at that site. Peak WeBS numbers of Gadwall at Fen Drayton Lakes were (254, 303), and for **Eurasian Teal** at Ouse Washes (2308, 52). A peak of 1308 **Mallards** was noted at Ouse Washes on 15th Nov; and 269 **Northern Pintail** on the same date, with 1–2 at 5 other sites.

The 2 **Red-crested Pochards** present at Fen Drayton Lakes since October finally departed around 18th Nov. Also present at 5 other sites, numbers peaked at 9 birds at Orton BP on 3rd Dec. Numbers of **Common Pochards** were consistently high in each month at Fen Drayton Lakes in WeBS counts (155, 167), surpassed only by the 217 present at Grafham Water on 18th Dec. **Tufted Ducks** were more abundant than Pochard, by a ratio of about 2 or 3 times at Fen Drayton Lakes – and peaking at 1815 at Grafham Water on 18th Dec. Single **Greater Scaup** were seen at Ely BP, Fen Drayton Lakes and Grafham Water in November but only at Grafham Water in December, where up to 4 birds were present.

A single immature male **Long-tailed Duck** stayed at Fen Drayton Lakes from 16th Nov–6th Dec. Only 2 **Common Scoters** were recorded at Grafham Water, on 17th Nov – still the county's hot spot for this species. **Goldeneye** numbers reached triple digit numbers at Grafham Water (WeBS–128,220), and only Fen Drayton Lakes and Bainton GP held 10 or more. The first **Smew** was recorded at Fen Drayton Lakes on 13th Nov; thereafter, mostly low numbers were present at 7 sites, with a peak of 15 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 15th Dec – 2 drakes and 13 "redheads". A single redhead **Red-breasted Merganser** was present at Grafham Water on 3rd Nov. **Goosanders** are regularly present in both months at Grafham Water, and this period was no exception with up to 18 being seen at any one time. Single digit numbers were counted at several other sites but at Bainton GP and Maxey GP there were as many as 18 and 24 respectively on 5th Dec. **Ruddy Ducks**

were recorded at 2 sites, with an estimated total of just 10 birds.

A single **Red-throated Diver** was reported, an adult, at Grafham Water on 15th Dec. Numbers of **Little Grebes** were well down at some usual haunts because of iced surfaces, with counts of 20 or more coming only from Grafham Water, Fen Drayton Lakes and Ouse Washes. As usual, records from WeBS of **Great Crested Grebes** showed Grafham Water to hold the highest numbers by far in both months (300, 486), with Fen Drayton Lakes in second place (67, 18). Rarer grebes included a single **Red-necked Grebe** at Grafham Water on 11th Dec, and an adult **Slavonian Grebe** there from 13th - 21st Nov. The **Black-necked Grebe** present at Ouse Fen on 14th Nov was probably the same individual seen at Fen Drayton from 18th–21st.

Unsurprisingly, the frozen conditions forced normally reclusive **Bitterns** into the open, and reports came from as many as 13 sites. Most records were of 1-3 birds, mainly during December, but 8 were seen at Fen Drayton Lakes on 8th Dec. It is likely that some of the increase in numbers resulted from further influxes of continental birds.

A **Black-crowned Night Heron** seen at Guyhirn on 6th Dec was unfortunately just a fly-over. A **Cattle Egret** at Nene Washes was reported from 2nd to 13th Nov, and then apparently relocated to Ouse Washes as one was seen there on 15th. **Little Egrets** were recorded at wide-ranging sites, 1 or 2 birds being the norm, but with repeated sightings of 4 together at Cam Washes. An individual graced the private garden in Fordham. Peak counts of **Grey Herons** at Fen Drayton lakes were (18, 15) and at Ouse Washes (14, 4).

Red Kites were seen in small groups of 1–3 birds and continue to be most common in the north and west. Still uncommon in winter, **Marsh Harriers** are more often seen at sites such as Kingfishers Bridge, Wicken Fen and Woodwalton Fen, but any suitable habitat might yield a wandering bird. Records of **Hen Harrier** remained concentrated in the fens, with just a few from elsewhere, such as Grafham Water. Most reports referred to single birds although the Wicken Fen roosts sometimes held up to 3 birds.

The only record of a **Northern Goshawk** was a male reported from Doddington on 2nd Dec. **Common Buzzards** were seen in groups of up

to 4. The sightings of a **Rough-legged Buzzard** at Kingfishers Bridge on 10th and 18th Nov were probably of the same bird; and the same or another was reported from Holme Fen on 19th Dec. **Merlins** were reported from 14 sites, including several sightings of an adult male and a female at Fowlmere Nature Reserve, and 1–2 **Peregrine Falcons** were viewed at 16 sites. At Kingfishers Bridge, a female gorging on a dead bird on the frozen water successfully withstood an attack by a Marsh Harrier and assorted corvids.

Records of **Water Rails** were plentiful from a variety of sites, with regular, larger numbers at Wicken Fen (4), Fowlmere Nature Reserve (6), and Fen Drayton Lakes (8). Numbers at Woodwalton Fen held up until early December and then no records were received for the rest of the month. Counts of **Common Moorhens** seemed depressed at several sites, e.g. WeBS counts at Ouse Washes (63, 39) and at Grafham Water (17, 6). WeBS counts of **Common Coots** for the 2 months showed that Fen Drayton Lakes (1546, 1557) and Grafham Water (1641, 1586) continue to be the main strongholds, with good numbers also at Needingworth GP and Orton BP (612 on 21st Dec). Reports of 2–3 **Common Cranes** were received through November and up to 11th Dec from Woodwalton Fen and Nene Washes.

Two **Pied Avocets** visited Fen Drayton Lakes briefly on 18 Nov. One observer noted that they swam in deep water for 30 minutes and were apparently not feeding (Avocets are known to swim occasionally and have webbed feet that would aid that action). The weather-induced decline in numbers of **Golden Plovers** was notable by its rapidity: a peak of 40 at Newton on 18th December contrasted sharply with the November records of triple digit numbers from 7 sites, and 1245 at the Ouse Washes on 15th Nov. Few **Grey Plovers** were seen – only 3 at Ouse Washes and 1 at Nene Washes, all in early November. Counts of **Northern Lapwings** also revealed an exodus as might be expected for this species due to the cold conditions: numbers which had been as high as 3834 at Ouse Washes and 1500 at Wicken Fen up to 22nd Nov quickly diminished to only a single bird at the Ouse Washes on 6th Dec.

A **Curlew Sandpiper** at the Ouse Washes on 15th Nov was the only record. **Dunlin** numbers at various sites were 1–5 except at Ouse Washes, where 58 were present on 15th Nov. Counts of **Ruff** were confined solely to the

Ouse Washes: 168 on 15th Nov, and down to 40 on 14th Dec. Single **Jack Snipe** were seen at 4 sites and 2 at Maxey GP. Fairly good numbers of **Common Snipe** were recorded up to mid-November, including 42 at Ouse Fen on 14th; thereafter generally smaller numbers were recorded. Snipe did not, however, leave frozen feeding grounds en masse as shown by the presence of 32 at Ouse Fen on 19th Dec and 25 at Barton on Christmas Day. **Woodcocks** were reported widely with a maximum of 8 at Woodwalton Fen on 9th Dec. Some birds were found away from normal habitats such as private gardens, a supermarket at Milton, and a Cambridge suburban road.

Just 3 **Black-tailed Godwits** were noted in the Ouse Washes WeBS count on 3rd Nov, and up to 40 frequented Fen Drayton Lakes, though none were seen there after 13th Dec. **Curlews** were seen at 13 sites with a peak of birds on the ground of 5 at Ouse Fen on 11th Dec; most records were fly-overs. A solitary Spotted Redshank was noted on the Nene Washes on 8th–9th Nov. Some other *Tringa* species included **Common Redshanks** peaking at 88 on Nene Washes and 65 at Ouse Washes on 15th Nov, and 1–3 **Green Sandpipers** present at 13 sites. 1–2 **Common Sandpipers** were reported from the tidal Nene near Wisbech on various dates.

Skuas were represented by a single **Great Skua** over Woodwalton on 6th Nov. Single **Mediterranean Gulls**, all adults, were present at Ferry Meadow CP on 1st Nov and Grafham Water on 24th Nov and 18th Dec. Winter records of **Little Gulls** continue to be thin on the ground, with single birds at Grafham Water on 12th Nov (an adult) and 1st Dec, and at Barleycroft GP on 13th Nov (a 1st-winter). A maximum build up in numbers of **Black-headed Gulls** occurred at Fen Drayton Lakes with 450 on 19th Dec.

Lesser Black-backed Gulls peaked at 250 on 5th Nov at Milton tip, and for **Herring Gull** it was 100 at the same site. **Common Gulls** were probably under-recorded: the only were around 20 at Fen Drayton Lakes on 3 dates. Small numbers of **Yellow-legged Gulls** were recorded at the Milton tip and surrounding area, and also at Duxford, Stuntney and Grafham Water. Single **Caspian Gulls** were located at the tips at Dogsthorpe and Milton, and at Fen Drayton Lakes, and were aged as 1st-winter up to full adult. White-winged gulls were infrequently found this winter, perhaps because the far north was warmer than usual and birds

were not forced to move so far south. Just 2 reports of **Glaucous Gulls** were received, both of single birds, at Dogsthorpe tip on 17th Dec and at Fletton BP on 19th Dec.

Flocks of **Stock Doves** were small side, the largest being 60 at Waterbeach Pits on 17th Dec, with no significant numbers reported from more southerly areas. Counts of 1000+ **Woodpigeons** were reported from Comberton, and an impressively large flock of 120 **Eurasian Collared Doves** was seen at Duxford on 1st Nov.

Barn Owls were widely recorded despite of – or perhaps because of – adverse conditions for finding and catching prey. The weather undoubtedly took its toll on Barn Owls: for the whole month of December, the Ringing Office at the BTO has reported that it received over 100 recoveries of dead **Barn Owls** –far more than usual– and nearly all attributed to the cold. A final examination of the effects of the cold weather will be grim reading. Both **Tawny Owls** and **Little Owls** were seen or heard at 9 sites. Sightings of **Short-eared Owls** were more frequent than usual, from 16 sites with up to 4 birds seen together.

Kingfishers were present at various sites, with 3 seen at Ouse Fen in November, but records dropped off from mid-December. None was seen at Kingfishers Bridge throughout December which is unusual, and there were no sightings at Fowlmere after 17th Dec. A single **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was reported from Swaffham Prior on 1st Dec. **Skylarks** were seen in double digit numbers at 10 sites, and huge congregations amounting to 1600 were recorded at the Woodwalton Fen / Great Fen on 23rd Dec. One **Barn Swallow** flitted through Ouse Fen on 1st Nov.

The largest group of **Meadow Pipits** consisted of 93 on Ouse Washes. A **Rock Pipit** was found at Grafham Water on 6th Nov, and single **Water Pipits** were present at Ely BF and Ouse Fen, with 3 also present at Ouse Washes (Welches Dam). Reports of **Grey Wagtails** were usually of single birds, but a group of 4 was found at Foxton sewage works. The long-lived roost of **Pied Wagtails** at the Addenbrookes complex in south Cambridge rose to 243 on 1st Nov. Elsewhere notable numbers were present at Ouse Washes (65), Ely Tesco's car park (24) and Foxton sewage works (35). Interestingly, no other sewage works featured as feeding sites for wagtails in the period.

The large irruption of **Bohemian Waxwings** into the county ensured that this was a year when many more birders than usual would successfully connect with these delightful birds. The first visitor was seen on 5th Nov, in Cambridge, and sightings were being reported almost daily from various sites. The largest flock from data received so far was 128 birds on 21st Dec at Cherry Hinton. It quickly became evident that some types of berries were preferred to others, and the favoured bushes could be stripped of their fruit in a day or two, with other bushes nearby remaining heavily laden. One of the exciting aspects of this invasion was that a bird or two could likely turn up just about anywhere where a food source was present. And if there are *Sorbus* laden with white or pink berries still, these will be prime targets for Waxwings on their return to Scandinavia. We may yet see more sizeable flocks but it is doubtful that we will experience a flock of 1400+ birds which built up in Kent on one day in December! A fuller review of the Waxwing invasion will be presented when the birds have finally left our shores.

Single **Black Redstarts** were present at Cambridge on 3rd Nov, and in Ely on the 4th and 20th Nov. **Stonechats** were reported from 7 sites but numbers of birds seen at the key sites of Fen Drayton Lakes, Ouse Washes, Ouse Fen and Wicken Fen remained low with 3 as the maximum count. There were some pronounced cold-weather movements of overwintering thrushes with birds deserting many snow-covered or frozen arable or grassed fields to take advantage of orchards and berried hedgerows. Some larger flocks of **Fieldfare** included 2000+ at Elm, 2000 at Wisbech St Mary across several orchards, 500 at Southoe, 400 at Comberton and 300 at Wicken Fen. **Redwings** were recorded generally at lower numbers, some large flocks including 400+ at Grafham Water, 400+ at Elm on 31st Dec (returning birds after many had departed earlier in the month), 300+ at Wicken Fen and 250 at Bar Hill. In orchards at Wisbech St Mary, Fieldfares and Redwing were said to be present at a ratio of about 10:1 with a few Song Thrushes and Blackbirds mixed in.

Some **Cetti's Warblers** managed to brave the cold and could be found at as many as 10 sites, with 9+ birds at Wicken Fen being the highest count. At least one bird has been present at Fowlmere Nature Reserve since last winter, a relatively new site. **Blackcaps** were seen at 12 sites including several gardens, but **Chiffchaffs** were found at only 8 sites and none reported

after 9th Dec. **Goldcrests** were noted at several sites and the presence of 6 at Woodwalton Fen on 28th Dec shows that at least some of these highly susceptible birds survived the big freeze. The importance of heavy ivy cladding on trees as being beneficial for both roosting and feeding sites should not be underestimated in these conditions.

Bearded Tits were encountered at 6 sites and in double digit numbers at Wicken Fen and Ely BF. **Marsh Tits** were present in the traditional woods and even singing at one site. They were also recorded at Holme Fen, Grafham Water, and Woodwalton Fen, 10 birds at this latter site being the highest count received. **Wood Nuthatch** was reported from 4 sites including the Cambridge Botanic Garden. Single **Great Grey Shrikes** were all too briefly encountered at Ferry Meadows CP (11th Nov) and Fen Ditton (29th Dec). Two "**Nordic**" **Jackdaws**, *monedula*, were identified in a large mixed flock of corvids at Cambridge on 16th Dec, and a Jackdaw with features resembling those of the eastern race *soemmerringii* was recorded from 5th Nov near Ely.

Major **Starling** roosts for this period included up to 10000 at Fen Drayton Lakes during November, and 1500 to 2000 at Wicken Fen also in November. **Tree Sparrows** were seen at 15 sites, with c.25 recorded at Grantchester, 12 at Ouse Washes and 70 at Woodhurst. Higher counts of some finches included 70+ **Chaffinches** at Coploe Hill, 36 **Greenfinches** in Cambridge, and 105 **Goldfinches** at Ouse Washes. Greenfinches were reported from only 7 sites, perhaps reflecting the continuing effects of the widespread and severe outbreak of trichomonosis which has been plaguing the population since 2005. The large-scale movement of **Bramblings** in the autumn resulted in some birds settling down for the winter – up to 4 birds were reported from 19 sites.

Siskins were widespread and numbers peaked at 200 at Woodwalton Fen on 30th Nov. **Twite** was reported from 2 sites, Ely BF (20th Nov) and Grafham Water (5th Dec). Peak numbers of **Lesser Redpolls** included 140 at Woodwalton Fen, 90 at Southoe, 25 at Wicken Fen, and 20 at Old Weston. **Common (Mealy) Redpolls** were seen at 5 sites, in numbers ranging from 1–5. Single **Arctic Redpolls** were seen at Woodwalton Fen (27th Nov–4th Dec) and at Holme Fen (12th Dec). The single birds seen at

Woodwalton Fen on 27th and 29th were more precisely attributed to the race *exilipes* (Coues's).

Just 3 **Lapland Buntings** were reported, from Aldreth, Coveney and Gamlingay, and all in flight. As it is notoriously difficult to pick out these birds feeding in stubble fields; just how many birds are still present in the county remains uncertain. Hotspots for **Yellowhammer** flocks included Melbourn (160+), Grantchester (130+, all associated with a one game cover-strip), Grafham Water (70+) and Barton (62). **Reed Buntings** were in triple digit numbers at Melbourn (450+) and Barton (100+ in game cover-strips and into roost). From Atlas surveying this winter it quickly became evident just how beneficial are well-structured game cover-strips for a range of the smaller, seed-eating birds, in the depths of winter. Good numbers of **Corn Buntings** were present on chalk sites such as Fowlmere (250 on 13th Nov), Duxford and Great Chishill, but fen sites such as Woodwalton Fen, Wicken Fen and Ouse Fen also had significant numbers.

And finally in the more exotic section: the resident **Black Swan** on the Cam in Cambridge was seen regularly, as was a **Wood Duck** in the same area. A **Ross's Goose** was noted several times in November in the Upware / Wicken Fen locality, and a **Chestnut Teal** was at Fen Drayton Lakes on 14th Nov. A **Crested Duck** was at St Ives – perhaps a feather-cut trim would make it look less ragged! A **Yellow-billed Duck** turned up at Grafham Water on 4th Dec, and a **Baikal Teal**-type – possible a Wigeon / Pintail cross, was at Cambourne on 28th Nov.

The Recent Reports were compiled and written by Mike Foley, assisted by Doug Radford.

Thanks to the contributors to the CBC database Nov-Dec 2010

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Christmas Quiz Answers

The Venerable P Witt

1. *Of whom was it written: "make the boy interested in natural history if you can, it's better than games."?*

Sir Peter Scott: the quotation is from the last letter written by his father Captain Robert Falcon Scott, as he lay marooned by a blizzard in Antarctica. Peter Scott was a Cambridge graduate who explored the area while a student here. One of his early paintings is of Mallards taking flight at Fulbourn Fen.

2. *Which naturalist, with a statue in Cambridge, had twenty species named after him?*

Charles Darwin: the fine sculpture of him can be seen in the grounds of Christ's College. Most of the birds named after him were ones he observed and collected in the Galapagos.

3. *Which athletics blue, with a taste for birds, catalogued the bird collection at the Zoology Museum?*

C.W. (Con) Benson: he studied in Cambridge before embarking on a career with the Colonial Service. He spent his career in Africa and later published the birds of Zambia and Birds of Malawi. He is said to have tasted all the specimens he collected – apparently turacos tasted the best and owls the worst.

4. *Which Swiss born Professor of Zoology had four species named after him, two of which are now extinct?*

Alfred Newton: as a young man he travelled widely, later becoming Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy, a post he held from 1866 until his death in 1907. He was a co-founder of the BOU and editor of this and was also influential in the early bird protection movement. The extinct species referred to are Newton's Owl and Newton's Parakeet.

5. *Which avid collector donated his fossil collection to the Sedgwick Museum and his bird collection to the Zoology Museum?*

Hugh Strickland: a respected naturalist who collected fossils and birds, his home was described as 'quite a museum of ornithology.' Although an Oxford man he left the bulk of his collection to Cambridge. In 1842 he created the Strickland Code which attempted (unfortunately in vain) to standardise Zoological nomenclature. He was killed when struck by a train in a railway cutting while sketching the rock strata.

6. *Which botanist and geologist had an American species named after him, although he never saw the bird, nor even visited the USA?*

The Rev. John Stevens Henslow: a curate who was both a botanist and geologist, he was appointed Professor of Botany. Audubon named a sparrow in honour of him for suggesting booksellers for his monumental Birds of America. In 1831 Henslow was asked by Captain Fitzroy of the Beagle to recommend a naturalist to join an expedition around the world without pay. He chose the young Charles Darwin. It was to Henslow that Darwin shipped all the specimens he collected and to whom he first expounded his theory of evolution.

7. *Who visited the city to promote his book, and wrote: “Cambridge on a Sunday is a place where I would suppose the basest mind must relax.....all is calm, silent, solemn, almost sublime”? (Obviously in the days before Sunday trading!)*

John James Audubon: plans for his Birds of America received little support in the USA. As a result he spent eight years over four visits to Britain to promote his work. To mark his gratitude he names several American species after Britons who assisted him, most notably Bewick, Henslow, MacGillivray and Traill. All the birds were depicted life size: the 435 hand-coloured plates measures 76 x 69cm and even then some of the larger species had to assume unnatural poses to fit on the page. A recently sold volume fetched £7.3m including commission – of him it was written: ‘Some men live for fame, some for women’s words. John James Audubon lived to look at birds.’

8. *Which Cambridge graduate, on observing a Resplendent Quetzal, pronounced it “Unequaled for splendour among the birds of the New World” – and promptly shot it?*

Osbert Salvin: a mathematics graduate turned naturalist and author. In 1861 he wrote that he was ‘determined, rain or no rain, to be off to the mountain forests in search of quetzels, to see and to shoot...’ Such was the fascination for these birds that during the next three decades thousands of quetzal plumes crossed the Atlantic to fill the specimen cabinets of European collectors and adorn the fashionable milliners’ shops of Paris, Amsterdam and London.

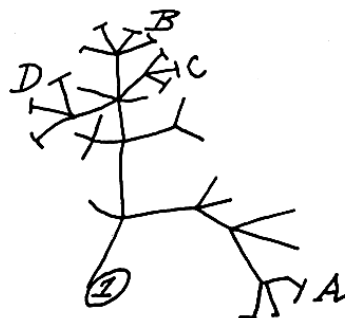
9. *Another graduate, who was so wealthy he had no need to earn a living but travelled widely collecting birds and has a medal jointly named after him?*

Frederick Godman: with his friend Salvin, whom he met while at Cambridge, he wrote the ‘Biologica Centrali America’, issued in parts from 1888 until 1904. They collected in many countries and eventually donated their huge collection to the Natural History Museum in London. The Godman-Salvin Medal, a prestigious award of the BOU, is named after them.

10. *Who attended the Cambridge High School, was Curator of Ornithology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and has a hybrid warbler named after him?*

William Brewster: born in South Reading, he studied ornithology and became a museum curator. However this is a trick question – the clue lies in the fact that there was never a Museum of Comparative Zoology here. The Cambridge referred to is in Massachusetts, USA! Brewster’s Warbler, at first thought to be a true species, was later proved to be a hybrid Blue Winged x Golden Winged Warbler.

I trust you enjoyed the quiz, even if you found it a trifle difficult, for indeed there is little merit in attempting questions which can be answered all too easily. Most of the biographical details are to be found in ‘Whose Bird?’ by Beolens and Watkins, with additional information in ‘Audobon to Xantus’ by Mearns and Mearns. Both volumes are worthy of a place on the bookshelves of the true ornithologist.



Darwin’s first illustration of an evolutionary tree from a notebook – 1837

CBC Donation to the Bob Scott appeal – a letter of thanks

Ann Scott.

It is with deep sadness but grateful thanks that I write to acknowledge the wonderful donation to my husband's memory. The money will be put to the best use possible to ensure the survival of our Trans-Saharan migrants.

Bob had a deep love for all birds and travelled to several continents in his lifetime. To him Africa was special. Our first trip there was to The Gambia in 1980. He was delighted on our first day to find 89 new species plus a number of our overwintering summer visitors.

In the mid-80's he was sent to Ghana on a project to save the Roseate Tern. Several years later he went back with several other RSPB staff, including me, to run a course at Accra University for wardens from West Africa. This was to teach them about birds and their needs plus the importance of habitat management and water. It proved highly successful but there is still so much to be done. Whenever he came back from Africa Bob was despondent. When I asked why he was always so down, after visiting such a wonderful country, his reply was always the same 'There is so much to do and so little in the way of resources to do it.'

It is because of that remark and because I feel cheated in that he died at 70, when he was still such a vital part of this world that I came up with the idea of a quiz in his memory and that in turn became an Appeal as well. At the moment I cannot tell you what your £639 will be specifically put towards because there are many discussions going on with Birdlife and its Partners to come up with just the right project for the Sahel Area.

If you would like to learn more about the difficulties our birds are now encountering in Africa please read: **LIVING ON THE EDGE: Wetlands and birds in a changing Sahel.** By Leo Zwarts, Rob G.Bijlsma, Jan van der Kamp, Eddy Wymenga (2009) KNNV Publishing, Zeist. ISBN 978-90-50 1 1-280-2. I have in-depth leaflets about the book which I am happy to send to anyone on request.

If you read the book or learn more about it from friends you will understand that we can no longer stand still hoping that something will happen — we are the people who can make it happen and I am hoping that the Appeal and Quiz (the latter now finished) will achieve enough money and create enough interest and awareness, to really aid our birds.

I can only thank you again for giving such a wonderful gift. We can only move forward when we receive support from fantastic people like you.

Yours sincerely,



From the Chairman

Peter Herkenrath

I hope that all Club members enjoyed a wonderful Christmas. Of course, it was a time of major weather-related traffic and travel disruptions. However, the severe winter allowed us to enjoy some special birds. Many of you will have seen Waxwings, perhaps even sitting on the aerial of your own house. I was lucky when a single Waxwing flew over my place when I was out to feed the birds in the garden. In December, I saw a Common Snipe and a Woodcock flying past my office window. Fen Drayton and the adjacent river gave me some great views of Smew and White-fronted Geese as well as three Bittern dropping into roost on one cold late December afternoon. The RSPB have done a great job in improving habitats at Fen Drayton, much to the joy of many Club members and other birdwatchers.

At the time of writing (early January), Fieldfares and Redwings seem to be everywhere allowing for some great views of these northern beauties. And this is what I like most with birdwatching: to see birds, I do not need to travel far or wander around a distant reserve for many hours (as much as I enjoy these): birds are everywhere, even in our villages and towns and in our gardens. And there is always something interesting to watch. Be it the Robin that constantly chases away other birds that want to visit the feeder; be it the gulls, Rooks and Jackdaws that fly past on their way to the evening roost, be it the flock of Goldfinches in neighbour's tree tops. With observations on common birds, we can easily contribute to the Club's database and the Annual Report. We have, for example, few counts of common species such as Woodpigeons, gulls or corvids. Checking a pre-roost gathering of Jackdaws in Cambridge, I recently noted two with obvious pale neck side bands, indicating the northern subspecies *monedula* – something I happily reported to our database. The same applies to a Rook with plenty of white in the wings, something I had before only observed in Carrion Crows, where it is known to indicate malnutrition.

We are in the last year of fieldwork for the national and the Cambridgeshire atlas. Several Club members enjoyed an atlas 'blitzing day' in late November when we split into a few small teams and covered many tetrads in Huntingdonshire that had not seen many observers before. It was a crisp but sunny day and, having expected to see very few birds, I was surprised of the variety of species I found in rather boring-looking habitat, including Tree Sparrow, Golden Plover, Common Snipe and Red Kite.' Atlassing', i.e. timed tetrad visits for the atlas, has given me great pleasure over the years and I already look forward to the printed national and Cambridgeshire atlas. The latter is a priority for the Club and there will be calls for volunteers to help with producing the publication in due course. Meanwhile I would like to encourage you to help with filling the remaining gaps by visiting poorly-recorded squares (see the atlas update in this bulletin for how best to find those squares with fewer than 10 species recorded so far) and submitting roving records. Our website as well as the BTO website provides the information you need for taking part; or contact Louise Bacon (see contact details on the last page).



Atlas Update

Looking for somewhere new to go birding?

Why not spend a day discovering a new part of Cambridgeshire and gather some roving records for the atlas?

Half way through the final winter of fieldwork, and whilst we have many squares (tetrads, 2kmx2km) covered across the county, we have not been able to do timed counts everywhere. There are still about 20 tetrads which have not got a single species recorded in them, and double that with less than 10 species recorded (out of 950 tetrads across the county that's not too bad!). Whilst some of these are in the arable fenland north of the county, other tetrads are probably closer to home for some, and even a half-hour visit to a square can result in a species list of a dozen – valuable data for the atlas. Take a look at the maps in the links below for blank, white or yellow squares and give it a go.

The BTO atlas system has an excellent set of pages which show coverage and species richness across most of our county – the two links below take you to the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire & Peterborough halves of the county.

<http://blx1.bto.org/atlas-results/mapscamb.html>

<http://blx1.bto.org/atlas-results/mapshunt.html>

Within these maps, you can see tetrads covered, species richness per tetrad or per 10km square, and label the 10km squares over a googlemap so that you can keep track of where you are, and switch between summer and winter.

If you want me to give you a few pointers to an area you could go roving for a few hours, then please contact me, and a big thank you in advance to the RSPB fenland farming team who are going to use their planned farm visits over then next two months to help fill some of these gaps.

You never know what roving might bring you – a Jack Snipe in a field drain, a Merlin hunting across farmland, some Tree Sparrows in a small village, or yet more waxwings for those who haven't had enough yet!

Louise Bacon

From the County Recorder

With 2010 now closed for business, the latest Work-in-Progress has been added to the CBC website, and can be downloaded here: <http://cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/Records/WIP2010.xls>

To date 89 records have been circulated (many thanks to those who have taken the time to submit these records). However, some 78 records have yet to be submitted (these are just the ones that have been reported to me so far for 2010 - no doubt a few more are lurking in peoples notes books!). Again, a number of multi-observed and/or photographed rare birds have yet to be submitted. The CBCRC is happy to take details from other observers if the "finders" have not submitted these records. Please use the official CBCRC form, which can be downloaded here:

<http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/records.htm>

You can help make sure these records make it into the next Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Bird Reports by contacting me (see contact details on back page)

Mark Hawkes

Meetings of the RSPB Cambridge Local Group

Saturday February 5th, Field Trip: WWT Welney & RSPB Ouse Washes, meet at Welney, 9.45am (Ouse Washes, 1pm), infos: Andrew Camps, tel 01638 741018

Wednesday February 16th, Indoor Meeting: Ethiopia, Its Landscapes, People and Wildlife, Martin Davies, Chemical Labs, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, 8pm

Sunday March 6th, Field Trip: Lyndford Arboretum & Santon Downham, Meet at Lyndford car park, 9.15am, infos: Andrew Camps, tel 01638 741018

Wednesday March 16th, Indoor Meeting: Moroccan Experience, Richard Pople, Chemical Labs, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, 8pm

Saturday April 16th, Field Trip: Redgrave & Lopham Fen, and Knettishall Heath, Meet at Redgrave car park, 9.45am, infos: Andrew Camps, tel 01638 741018

Wednesday April 20th, Indoor Meeting: Wildlife of Central Portugal, Rob Macklin, St John's Hall, Hills Road, 8pm

Archaeology and History on RSPB Reserves

The Fen Edge Archaeology Group would like to invite members of Cambridgeshire Bird Club to a talk by Robin Standring, Reserves Archaeologist at the RSPB.

Thursday 17 March, 7.30 pm, Cottenham Village College
"Bumps, bombs and birds: the Historic Environment of RSPB Reserves"

The RSPB is a guardian of a surprising variety of archaeological and historical remains on its reserves – ranging from discrete sites to entire ancient landscapes. There are 80 Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the RSPB's English reserves (about half the UK total), ranging from prehistoric burial mounds and hill forts to 19th century duck decoys and World War II defences. There are important links and benefits between habitat and historic environment protection. For instance, the reserve at Arne in Dorset is rich in prehistoric remains, including 11 Late Neolithic/Bronze Age barrows (burial mounds from around 3500 years ago). Restoring of heathland on the reserve involves removal of gorse scrub and conifer stands, which also helps to prevent long-term damage to the monuments caused by roots and "heave" from falling trees. Robin Standring will talk about his work advising the RSPB about such conservation measures and others, which help to conserve the monuments and other archaeological and historic features for perpetuity. His work was featured in a recent issue of RSPB *Birds* magazine.

For further details contact Vicki Harley (see contact details on back page)

BTO Jubilee Medal for Chris Thorne

At the annual BTO conference in December, past Cambridge Bird Club Chairman Chris Thorne received the BTO Jubilee Medal 'for committed devotion to the Trust'. Since his school days, for over 60 years, Chris has been an active member of the BTO Ringing Scheme. He co-founded the Wicken Fen Group in 1968 and has played a key part in the group ever since. Since 1970, he has been Group Secretary and he has taught around 200 trainees. Our congratulations go to Chris.

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)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2011

OUTDOOR MEETINGS

Birdsong workshop at Fowlmere NR on 14 May (6.30am)

As in previous years, the Club is organising a birdsong workshop at Fowlmere Nature Reserve in collaboration with the RSPB. The aim is to help interested birdwatchers to learn how to identify various songbirds by sound. Members and non-members of the Club and the RSPB are welcome. There is no formal charge, but a donation in the reserve collecting box would be appreciated. Meet at 6.30am on Saturday 14 May 2011 in the car park at Fowlmere NR (directions and reserve information can be found at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/f/fowlmere/index.asp>). Please bring binoculars, a pen and paper. The workshop will take place regardless of the weather and is expected to last approximately 4 hours. As numbers will be limited, it is essential to register with Peter Herkenrath (see contact details on back page).

INDOOR MEETINGS

Friday 11th February St John's Church Hall, Cambridge

Extreme Mothing by Paul Waring

Paul Waring will be speaking about some of his more extreme adventures with moths around the world. Paul is a well-known moth specialist, for whom moths are both a hobby and a profession. He has enjoyed a 30-year career involved with moths, working directly for government agencies such as the Nature Conservancy Council and the JNCC, and as a freelancer for Butterfly Conservation and many other organisations. Paul is perhaps most familiar to general wildlife enthusiasts in the UK for his regular column on moths in British Wildlife magazine and as senior author of the widely used Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland. He has appeared at many conferences, exhibitions, club meetings and field trips, and has written many hundreds of publications in specialist journals, but tonight you will see the lighter side of all that!

Friday 11th March St Johns Church Hall, Cambridge

Annual General Meeting followed by The Spoon-billed Sandpiper – on the Brink of Extinction? by Christopher Zockler

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeds only in remote Arctic regions of north-eastern Russia, and winters mainly in Southeast Asia. Its population has declined precipitously over the past 30 years and it is now regarded as critically endangered. Threats on its breeding grounds may come from heavy nest predation and egg collectors. Habitat change following climate change may have impacted areas in the south. But the major threats are considered to be on the wintering grounds. Hunting and trapping birds at a large scale affects Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other species. Through its Preventing Extinction Programme, BirdLife International is supporting an array of conservation efforts to save this species. Christoph Zockler has been studying Spoon-billed Sandpiper in collaboration with Russian colleagues for more than 10 years and will bring us up to date with news of the conservation efforts and latest surveys of Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

New Members

We welcome the following new members – Colin Brown Of Willingham, Chris Childs of Bluntisham, Pauline Cozens of Hemingford Grey, Carole Davis of Stow-cum-Quy, David Elliott of Reach, Sue Holgate of Ely, Malvika Onial of Cambridge University, Philip Pitelen of Longstanton, Marilyn Pledger of Ely and Peter Wells of Lode.

Bruce Martin

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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 March 7th 2011

Please send records by post to: Mike Foley by March 7th 2011

Next Bulletin due out early April 2010, covering Jan/Feb 2010

GOOD BIRDING!