

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

**Bulletin** No. 415



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

## Welcome to the March / April 2011 Edition

Inside this edition you will find the usual systematic listing of birds seen in the period March to April, in the "Recent Bird Reports", written by David Heath. If however, you have become used to our birds listed in a certain order, you will notice some changes in this and forthcoming Bulletins. The Bulletin is adopting the revised British List which was introduced into the Cambridgeshire Bird Report 2009 edition (for further details, see BOURC's 38th Report in *Ibis* (2010) 152: 180-186 and 199-204), and so the changes will now align the Bulletin with the Bird Report. Some passerines have taken a quick hop to far off places within the listings, but with time we should become used to the changes.

With unsurpassed observational quality, we have Dr Daniel Duff's paper on "*Aberrantly calling Common Chiffchaffs in Houghton (Cambridgeshire) and beyond*"; our Chairman's Address; and dates of the summer outdoor meetings, including some of the RSPB Cambridge Group. Field work for the Atlas will have been completed before the next edition of the Bulletin is published in August, so now is the time to read Louise Bacon's request to fill the gaps in various parts of the county.

*From the Editor*

*Common Whitethroat by Ben Green*



## RECENT BIRD REPORTS – MARCH / APRIL 2011

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

The months of March and April can be very rewarding times for bird watching. It is a time of change with early summer arrivals, late winter departures and birds moving through to their breeding grounds. The weather during the period this year was generally cloudy but predominantly dry with above average temperatures. Easterly winds towards the end of April were the precursor to an interesting wader movement across the county.

The numbers of wild swans started to diminish but 45 **Bewick's Swans** remained at Kingfishers Bridge on March 15th. **Whooper Swans** were more numerous with 450 at the Ouse Washes during the March WeBS count. Wild geese continued into March too, with 8 **Greater White-fronted Geese** seen at the Ouse Washes on the 19th and, very unusually, a single **Brent Goose** being reported from Tubney Fen on the same day.

An escape **Ruddy Shelduck** appeared at the Cam Washes on Mar 5th with perhaps the same bird being reported from Fen Drayton Lakes and the Ouse Washes during April. Two pairs of **Mandarin Duck** were observed displaying at the Wimpole Estate on Apr 3rd and a further pair were also seen prospecting for a possible nest site at Larkrise Farm, Barton. The spring arrival of **Garganey** started with the first report from Kingfishers Bridge of a drake on Mar 11th but although further reports came from other sites during the period the peak count remained at two birds. An unringed **Blue-winged Teal** turned up at the Ouse Washes on Apr 1st and could often be seen from the Welches Dam Hide vying with drakes for the attention of a female **Shoveler**. A pair of **Red-crested Pochards** was seen at Ferry Meadows CP on Mar 11th and two drakes were at Fen Drayton Lakes during March. **Greater Scaup** still remained at Grafham Water during the period with 6 being the peak count on Mar 23<sup>rd</sup>. Also at the same site, 5 **Common Scoter** were reported on Apr 19th. A few **Smew** lingered into March with reports from 4 sites, with peak numbers at Needingworth GP which hosted 11 birds on Mar 1st. **Goosanders** also remained into April with 12 birds reported from Grafham Water on Mar 13th and a pair was seen displaying and

mating at Fen Drayton Lakes on the same day. **Ruddy Duck** were just holding on with a report of only 3 birds from a single site.

**Grey Partridges** began to disperse and to pair up, with reports received from five sites, and an early **Common Quail** was recorded from Soham Mere on Apr 26th.

After last year's 'Diver Fest' at Grafham Water just one **Great Northern Diver** was seen during the period. **Great Bitterns** started to get their act together with a few 'booming' birds being heard at Wicken Fen, Kingfishers Bridge and the Nene Washes. **Little Egrets** were widely reported but surprisingly the peak count was just 7+ at the Ouse Washes. This site also turned up a **Great Egret** on Apr 16th and again on Apr 20th and a **Glossy Ibis** was reported flying north over King Dyke NR on Apr 23rd. A **Red-necked Grebe** was reported from Grafham Water and Prior's Fen GP during the period. A beautifully summer-plumaged male **Slavonian Grebe** was also at Grafham Water until Apr 16th which equals the latest county departure date, and a **Black-necked Grebe** was seen from the Cadbury Hide on the Ouse Washes on Mar 16th.

There were many reports of **Red Kites** during this period from various sites peaking with 6 birds at Monk's Wood and Bottisham, and a single **Black Kite** was seen going West over St Neots on Apr 29th. **Marsh Harriers** began to pair up and displaying could be seen from favoured sites. Both Little Wilbraham Fen and Wicken Fen had 3 ringtail **Hen Harriers** coming into roost but the only adult male was reported from the Wardy Hill area on Apr 21st. An impressive male **Montagu's Harrier** was recorded over Ely BF on Apr 22nd with a ringtail probably of this species sighted at Fleam Dyke five days earlier. A few **Goshawk** sightings were received in mid April but no bird seemed to linger. Returning **Ospreys** were first seen at Grafham Water on Apr 4th with further reports coming from Kingfishers Bridge, Fen Drayton Lakes, Huntingdon and Cambridge. A smattering of **Merlins** remained throughout the period, whilst **Hobbies** started to reappear from Apr 5th. **Peregrine Falcons** were

reported from many sites with the peak count of 3 coming from Fowlmere NR on Apr 4th.

**Water Rails** could be heard 'squealing' with 4 birds being heard at Little Wilbraham Fen and Kingfishers Bridge, and at least a dozen at Fowlmere NR. **Common Cranes** were reported from three sites with the Nene Washes welcoming a returning adult and juvenile from the previous year.

Passage wader numbers started to build up during the period after a slow start. **Oystercatcher** numbers peaked at Foul Anchor, Wisbech with 23 being present on Apr 26th, whilst at Isleham Water Meadows **Avocet** numbers reached 37 on Mar 26th. **Little Ringed Plover** numbers reached just 5 at Grafham Water on Apr 8th and **Ringed Plovers**, possibly including some *tundrae* birds, peaked at 7 from Paxton Pits and Ouse Fen during March. The only record of **Dotterel** came from the Wardy Hill area where 2 birds were seen and photographed on Apr 21st. A passage of waders towards the end of April saw Wicken Fen hosting, amongst other waders, **Grey Plover**, 6 **Wood Sandpipers**, a summer plumaged **Spotted Redshank**, 4 **Greenshanks**, **Whimbrel** and 3 **Ruff**, including a very striking bird in full breeding plumage. **Ruff** were reported from a further 4 sites (including the first site record at Fowlmere NR), with the Ouse Washes holding the peak count of 22 on Mar 6th, and a further four **Whimbrel** were seen over Grafham Water during the late April passage. A single **Knot** and **Turnstone** was reported at Grafham Water and Beeby's Pit (Yaxley) whilst Ouse Fen recorded 35 **Dunlin** on Mar 16th. Roding **Eurasian Woodcock** were reported from Wicken Fen on Apr 14th. Single **Jack Snipes** were recorded at Kingfishers Bridge (Mar 1st) and Fowlmere NR (Apr 17th). A large flock of 690 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at the Ouse Washes on Apr 4th. However the most notable movement was that of **Bar-tailed Godwits** with birds being seen moving throughout the County. The peak count was c.35 from Buckden GP but many hundreds must have passed through. The peak count of **Curlews** at Foul Anchor, Wisbech was 46+, just beating the count of 42+ from the tidal Nene at Ferry Lane.

Numbers of **Green Sandpipers** outscored **Common Sandpipers** threefold. Another **Spotted Redshank** was seen at Isleham Water Meadows on Apr 15th and 6

**Greenshanks** were at Ouse Washes on Apr 19<sup>th</sup>. The only other report received of a **Wood Sandpiper** other than those at Wicken Fen was a single bird at Maxey GP on Apr 27th.

A **Great Skua** was briefly at Grafham Water on Mar 30th and **Mediterranean Gulls** were picked out from flocks of **Black-headed Gulls** at eight sites, including a pair displaying briefly at Beeby's Pit on Apr 9th. A few **Little Gulls** passed through during April, with 4 birds noted at Fen Drayton on Apr 9th and 3 adults recorded at Grafham Water the day after. A possible 'fuscus' **Baltic Gull** was found at Grafham Water on Mar 13th and at the same site two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported on Apr 23rd, and also at Fen Drayton Lakes (Mar 16th) and Tanholt GP (Mar 18th). A single **Caspian Gull** was found at Long Drove, Cottenham and at Tanholt GP during March, and Grafham Water held both **Iceland Gull** and **Glaucous Gull** during the period. An early **Sandwich Tern** was reported from the Ouse Washes on Mar 19th, easily beating the first **Common Tern** at Fen Drayton Lakes by 12 days! **Arctic Terns** moved through in April with 6 reported at Ely BF and over St Neots. **Black Terns** peaked at Grafham Water at 21 on the evening of Apr 22nd, and 2 were present briefly at Fen Drayton Lakes and Godmanchester GPs during the same period.

The first **Turtle Dove** of the year was seen at Wicken Fen on Apr 13th. Reports of single **Rose-ringed Parakeets** came from four sites but one seemed to linger around Waterbeach. The first **Cuckoo** was reported at Woodwalton Fen on Apr 6th. Owl numbers must have been hit by the hard winter but four **Barn Owls** were seen at Wicken Fen on Mar 13th. A report of a pair of **Little Owls** was received from Comberton on Mar 16th and **Tawny Owls** were busy feeding young or noted on nests throughout the County. **Long-eared Owl** reports came from just two sites, including news of a road kill at Comberton, whilst **Short-eared Owls** fared only slightly better with records received from three sites.

**Common Swifts** made a welcome return in April with the first record from Longstanton on Apr 11th. **Kingfishers** were reported from a number of sites including encouraging news of breeding birds too. Reports of single **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were received from five sites but they still remain very scarce in the County. Nine **Goldcrests** were reported from

Upton Wood on Mar 6th whilst reports of single **Firecrests** came from two sites. The majority of the reports of **Marsh Tit** came from Wennington Wood or Aversley Wood, and a possible **Willow Tit** was reported from Wicken Fen on Mar 6th. There's no doubt that **Bearded Tits** have been hit by the harsh weather with only four sites reporting up to 2 birds. Hirundines started arriving in March with **Sand Martins** being followed in by **Barn Swallows** and **House Martins**. **Cetti's Warblers** continue their march through the County, turning up at increasing numbers of sites. Summer visiting warblers started returning in earnest during the period with the song of **Lesser Whitethroats** rattling out at several sites, and **Common Whitethroats** seemingly everywhere. The first **Grasshopper Warbler** could be heard 'reeling' at Wicken Fen on Apr 6th.

The Bohemian **Waxwing** invasion continued unabated but their favoured food must have been getting scarce. The peak count was the strange sight of 180 birds going to roost in reed beds at Wicken Fen on Apr 14th. **Nuthatch** numbers appear to be rising with many woodland sites holding increasing numbers of birds. A few **Ring Ouzels** passed through the county during late March and April, mostly involving single birds, but two were found at Witcham on Apr 18th. **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** hung around into April but most had moved on. The first returning **Spotted Flycatcher** was recorded at Grafham Water on Apr 29th and the first **Nightingale** appeared at Paxton Pits on Apr 6th. Reports of single **Black Redstarts** came from four sites and **Common Redstarts** were recorded at just three, including at least 6 different birds at Fowlmere NR during April. **Whinchats** were reported from Grunty Fen and also Pymoor in April and **Stonechats** remained at Wicken Fen and Fen Drayton Lakes until Mar 11th. The passage of **Northern Wheatears**, including several Greenland-type birds, peaked with 16 birds at Hampton NR on Apr 19th. The earliest ever County record of a **Pied Flycatcher** was captured on film at Morborne on Apr 11th whilst a further bird was found at Maxey two weeks later.

**Tree Sparrows** were reported from a few more sites than usual, but the largest count still remained at the Ouse Washes with 10+ on Mar 6th. **Yellow Wagtails** started arriving in late March and a **Blue-headed Wagtail** was found on Wicken Fen on Apr 17th. A **Tree Pipit** was reported from Waresley Woods on Apr 23rd and an impressive 14-20 **Water Pipits** roosted at the Ouse Washes at Sutton Gault on Mar 13th. **Brambling** reports were thin on the ground but 25 birds were seen at Southorpe on Mar 26th, however **Siskin** numbers held up into the first week of March with 200 birds at Ferry Meadows CP and 150 at Woodwalton Fen. Four **Mealy Redpolls** were trapped and ringed in Gamlingay on Mar 12th among a large flock of **Lesser Redpolls**. Another bird trapped was considered to be a 'Greenland' Redpoll (*rostrata*) which, if confirmed, would be the first County record. **Corn Buntings** were reported in small numbers with the largest flock being just 10 birds at Colne on Mar 21st. And finally...an escaped **Great Horned Owl** was still present at Grafham Water on Mar 17th.

*The Recent Reports section was compiled and written by David Heath, assisted by Doug Radford.*

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Thanks to the contributors to the CBC database Mar-Apr 2011

## Aberrantly calling Common Chiffchaffs in Houghton (Cambridgeshire) and beyond

Daniel G. Duff

On the morning of 26th April 2011 my wife, Cathy Morton, and I saw a small warbler, rather flighty and difficult to 'get onto', in a tall, overgrown hedge near the river meadows at Houghton, near St. Ives, on the Thicket road/path. The Google coordinates were approximately 52.329045,-0.104392.

This was almost certainly a Chiffchaff, sombrely coloured and small, and once seen to be carrying grass stems or similar and once observed disappearing into a bed of nettles and brambles or similar at the path side and reemerging a few seconds later. I presume it was a nest-building female. It was repeatedly giving an unusual call, presumably an alarm call owing to our proximity to the new nest site. A different bird giving normal-sounding chiffchaff song could be heard 10–20 m further down the lane. However, the nest-building bird was so flighty and adept at perching behind leaf clumps in the gloomy hedgerow, I only got very brief glimpses through binoculars, and we didn't have time to stay long. Nevertheless, everything I saw seemed to fit well with it being a (not strongly yellow) Chiffchaff. The bird was giving the strange call very frequently, never once switching to the standard Chiffchaff call, and Cathy managed to make a couple of video recordings with her digital camera, from which I have extracted the sound files. We must have heard this unusual call 50+ times, and it was in fact this that had first drawn my attention to the bird. The call was a bit lost-chick-like, being a high, brief and sharp 'swee' rather than the usual, lower pitched, slightly more drawn-out 'hweet'/'bui' given by British Chiffchaffs (in my experience often/usually in a context of alarm or agitation/excitement, but it may also have a second function as a contact call). I don't recall hearing such aberrant calls from Chiffchaff during 30 years birding in the UK and Europe, including 15 years breeding bird surveying in a German heath/forest from 1995-2009. Sonograms [Fig. 1] made using RavenLite software show a similarity to the *abietinus* call sonogram in Dean et al. 2010 [1], in fact not being perfectly level in pitch like the classic 'lost chick' call of *tristis* Chiffchaff, but instead resembling a 180°-rotated 'tick'-symbol and thus being better described as 'sweeu'. Note that Dean et al. also discuss alternative calls from *collybita* and other races (including the well-known late-summer calls I often hear from *collybita* in the German suburbs and forests, rather similar to the new aberrant calls but traditionally restricted to late summer/autumn and maybe also given mostly or entirely by young birds), and anyone interested in a more detailed discussion of the usual vocal differences between the various Chiffchaff subspecies should refer to that article.

After informing other birding friends about this observation, I then learnt that some of them had recently noticed and been puzzled by the same sort of calls from (better seen) British Chiffchaffs earlier this April (e.g. D.H. Hatton at Fowlmere (Cambs) and Royston (Herts), A.M. Stoddart in Norfolk, P. Herkenrath at Little Paxton and Fen Drayton Lakes (Cambs). Andy Stoddart directed me to a Surfbirds thread (<http://www.surfbirds.com/forum/showthread.php?t=8612>) where the phenomenon revealed itself to be a nationwide one, apparently and almost unbelievably involving a shift in the calling habits of a large proportion of British-breeding Chiffchaffs, the traditional 'hweet' call being replaced by 'sweeu' over the period of the last few years, as if the late-summer juvenile calls are newly starting to be used year-round or as if Eastern European-type Chiffchaff calls are being used in place of the usual Western European ones. According to the entries in the above-mentioned Surfbirds thread (see particularly the contribution of Keith Vinicombe), the plumage characters of the birds in question rule out the possibility that Eastern *abietinus* Chiffchaffs have colonised the UK, but suggest, rather, that many native, Western *collybita* Chiffchaffs really have started calling differently. The contributors to the thread also dismiss the possibility that the supposedly aberrant calls have been an always present but previously overlooked part of the species spring repertoire in the UK.

Some potential explanations for this phenomenon are proposed and discussed on the Surfbirds thread. One possibility is that young Chiffchaffs learn their adult-type (alarm/excitement/contact?) calls from congeners on the wintering grounds or on migration, rather than on the breeding grounds, and that there has recently been an increase in eastern Chiffchaffs wintering further west than usual. The result would then be that some *collybita* Chiffchaffs have been learning their adult-type calls from *abietinus* individuals, their calls then rather resembling (coincidentally) the late-summer (presumed juvenile) calls. Last autumn, in late September and early October, both Heligoland (<http://www.oag-heligoland.de/beob/aktuell.html>) and Blakeney Point (A.M. Stoddart pers. comm.) had falls of unusually large numbers of Chiffchaffs (on Heligoland this involved "very many" on 28th September and the highest-ever count of 1650 on 8th October). This suggests that unusually high numbers of Scandinavian/north-eastern Chiffchaffs were in the North Sea area at this time and presumably west

of their normal migration routes. They may thus have wintered further west than normal and, I suggest, influenced the calls of wintering first-winter Chiffchaffs of British origin.

Interestingly, year-to-year variability in the calls of autumn migrants through Britain has already been noted, and in this case it has been ascribed to the timing of migration determining whether young Chiffchaffs are still using the late-summer call or whether they have already learnt the adult-type calls by the time they migrate [2]. Additionally, A. Forsten and A. Lindholm in Finland already documented an annual and regional variation in the autumn and spring calls of Eastern European Chiffchaffs several years ago (<http://www.elisanet.fi/antero.lindholm/Linnut/Phylloscopus/Phycolhily.html>). M. Hoffmann describes the persistence of juvenile calls during the breeding season and the new occurrence of different disyllabic calls (e.g. “ziwee”) given by certain individual Chiffchaffs breeding in various parts of southern Germany and Austria in 2008/9 [3].

Whatever the underlying explanation, this would seem to be a fascinating phenomenon, which underlines the dynamic and cultural nature of certain aspects, such as diagnostic calls, that have traditionally been presumed to be ‘hard-wired’ and thus much more slowly changing and then only by means of evolution and natural selection. According to the Surfbirds thread, Öland in the Baltic has also had some birds giving the ‘sweeu’ call this spring. My fear that the traditional ‘hweet’ call of Western European Chiffchaffs might be lost altogether within a few years was partly assuaged by confirming on 1st May 2011 (and since) that Chiffchaffs in Leverkusen, Germany, still use more or less exclusively this traditional call<sup>1</sup>. It would be interesting to see whether this population-level shift in calling habits turns out to be a temporary blip or whether the surmised process of replacement of ‘hweet’-callers by ‘sweeu’-callers continues.

### Appendix: detailed comparisons of calls

D.H. Hatton had made recordings of some of the Chiffchaffs he heard at Fowlmere, and a representative sonogram (via RavenLite) from these recordings was generated and is shown in Fig. 2. A recording of a Chiffchaff that my wife and I heard on Heligoland (Helgoland) on 24th October 2010 was also converted into a sonogram [Fig. 3] as was one of a ‘normally calling’ Chiffchaff from Leverkusen on 1st May 2011 [Fig. 4]. These sonograms from Houghton, Fowlmere and Heligoland were then compared with Figure 2 from Dean et al. 2010 [1], with the Leverkusen recording/sonogram and with recordings/sonograms posted on the xeno-canto site (<http://www.xeno-canto.org/europe/browse.php?query=chiffchaff>) described but not reproduced here. These last mentioned xeno-canto recordings are denoted by the letters ‘XC’ followed by a number. Further discussion of the current UK phenomenon and some detailed sonogram analysis, including that of a further call variant, namely a more clearly disyllabic ‘swee-oo’, can be found on A. Dean’s website: <http://www.deanar.btinternet.co.uk/general/articles/chiffchaffcalls.htm>.

### To sum up:

- 1) XC29755-*collybita* and Leverkusen [Fig. 4]: monosyllabic, shallowly rising ‘hweet’, this rising syllable being 0.15–0.2 s long. Base tone relatively low pitched at 2.5–4.5 kHz, with well-developed harmonics. The ‘standard’ British Chiffchaff call. A slightly squeakier version from a different bird in Leverkusen is given in Fig. 5.
- 2) XC26764-eastern, presumed *abietinus* but an autumn bird, and Heligoland 2010 [Fig. 3]: poss. monosyllabic, steeply rising ‘swee’, rising syllable 0.075–0.1 s long (approx. half the duration of collybita), a second syllable not/hardly detectable. Call relatively high pitched at 3–5.5 kHz.
- 3) Dean et al. 2010-*abietinus*[1], Fowlmere [Fig. 2] and Houghton [Fig. 1]: disyllabic, with short rising ‘swee’ syllable 0.075–0.1 s long, steepest in the Fowlmere bird (slope as in the Heligoland 2010 and

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<sup>1</sup> one bird near Cologne, Germany, a bird seen carrying food near a singing male, thus presumed to be a female, was observed on two different days (28th and 30th May 2011) repeatedly giving a different call once again, possibly induced by our presumed proximity to its nest. This was a level, medium-length, insistent, high (4.5 kHz) ‘seee’, similar to *tristis* Chiffchaff but without the subtle downturn at the end typically given by that subspecies. Whether food-carrying itself can on occasion influence the call quality is not known, but it was not obvious that the bird was carrying food on the second day it was observed. For sake of completeness, the sonogram is included here [Fig. 6]. I have not knowingly observed spring Chiffchaffs making this call before, even in similar warning situations, and have/must have been close to Chiffchaff nests on numerous previous occasions. However, it cannot be excluded that this call may be an already known one reserved for occasions of special alarm, although most other species seem to use their usual alarm calls, in varying degrees of intensity, in case of nest danger (e.g. as represented by people, Magpies, Jays or cats). The widespread ‘sweeu’ calls discussed in the main text have been not only observed in occasions of assumed medium-high intensity alarm, as was the case in Houghton, but also in apparently lower-intensity situations.



XC26764-eastern, presumed *abietinus*, calls) and flattest in the Dean et al. 2010 sonogram [1], followed by rapid downturned 'u' to give 'swee-u' or 'sweeu', the second syllable being varyingly prominent. Sonogram looks like a tilted/asymmetric upturned 'V'. Call relatively high pitched at 3–5.5 kHz.

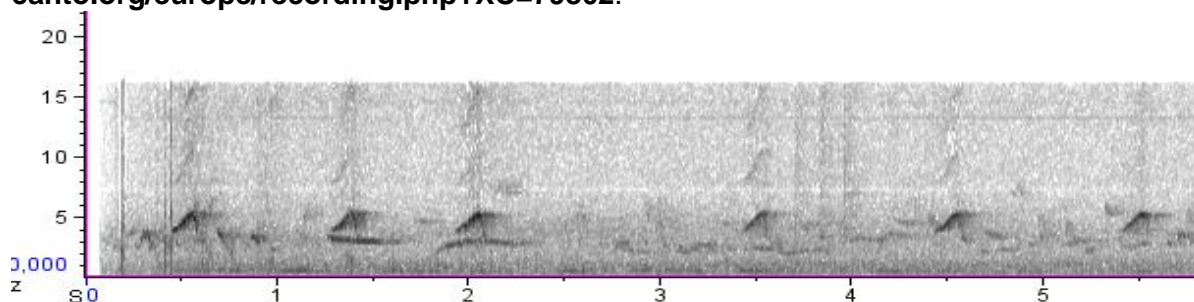
### Bibliography:

[1] A. Dean, C. Bradshaw, J. Martin, A. Stoddart, G. Wallbridge 2010 "From the Rarities Committee's files: the status in Britain of 'Siberian Chiffchaff'", *British Birds* 103: 320-338.

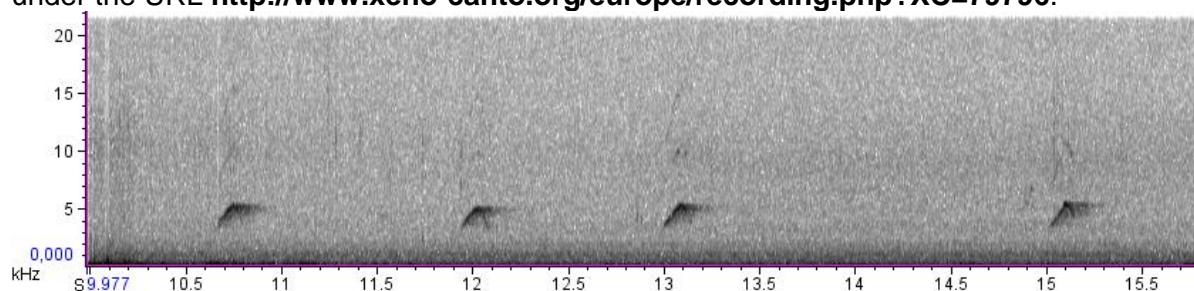
[2] M. Constantine and the Sound Approach 2006 "The Sound Approach to birding", The Sound Approach, Poole, UK.

[3] M. Hofmann 2010 "Nicht nur einsilbig und einfach: Entwicklungstendenzen und Fragestellungen zum Ruf des Zilpzalps *Phylloscopus c. Collybita*". *Die Vogelwelt: Beitrage zur Vogelkunde* 2010 (1).

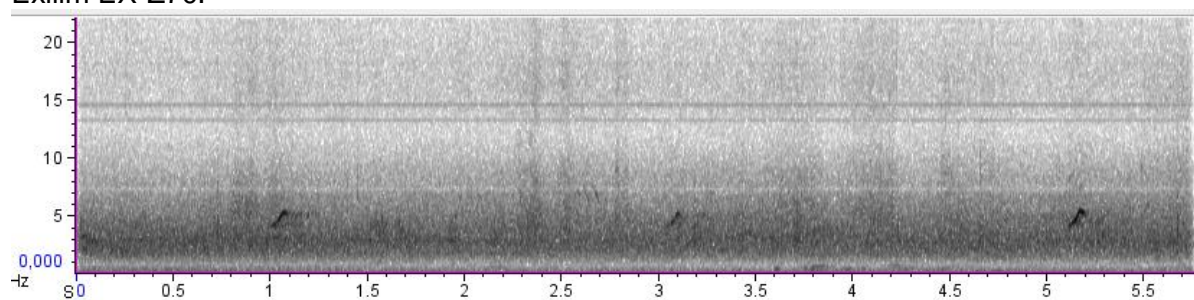
**Fig. 1:** Sonogram of Chiffchaff calls from Houghton, 26.04.2011, recorded using a Casio Exilim EX-Z70. The second and third calls are partly overlaid by those of another species. This recording has been uploaded to the xeno-canto website and can be accessed under the URL <http://www.xeno-canto.org/europe/recording.php?XC=79802>.



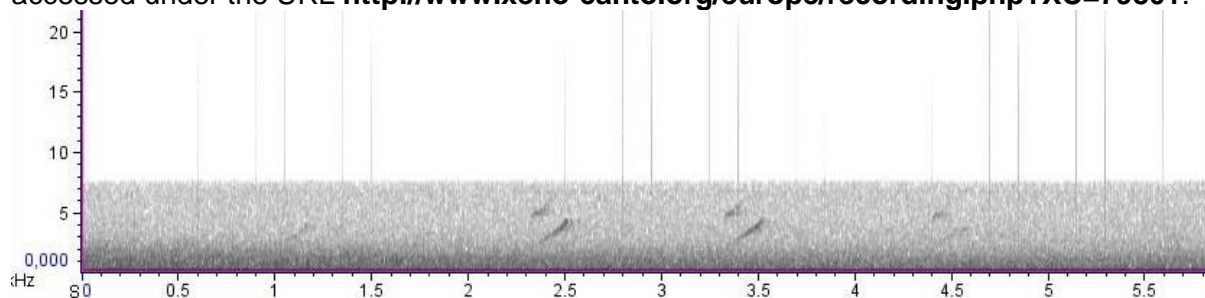
**Fig. 2:** Sonogram of Chiffchaff calls from Fowlmere, 06.04.2011 (recording by D.H. Hatton using a Remembird 2). A sequence has been uploaded to the xeno-canto website and can be accessed under the URL <http://www.xeno-canto.org/europe/recording.php?XC=79796>.



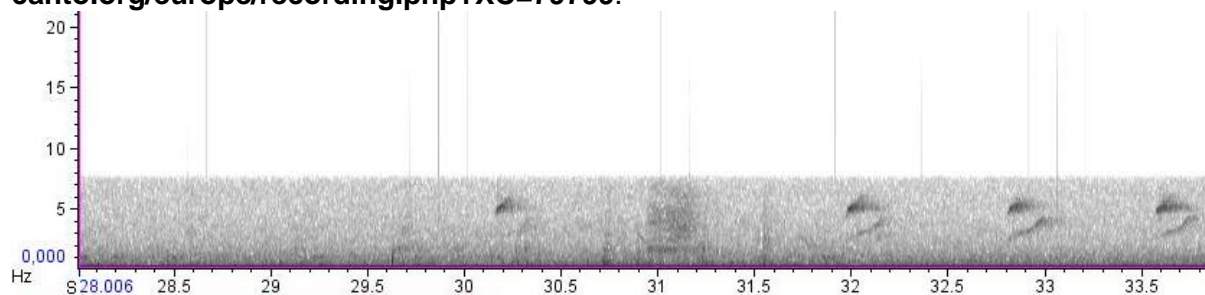
**Fig. 3:** Sonogram of (presumed) Chiffchaff calls from Helgoland, 24.10.2010, recorded using a Casio Exilim EX-Z70.



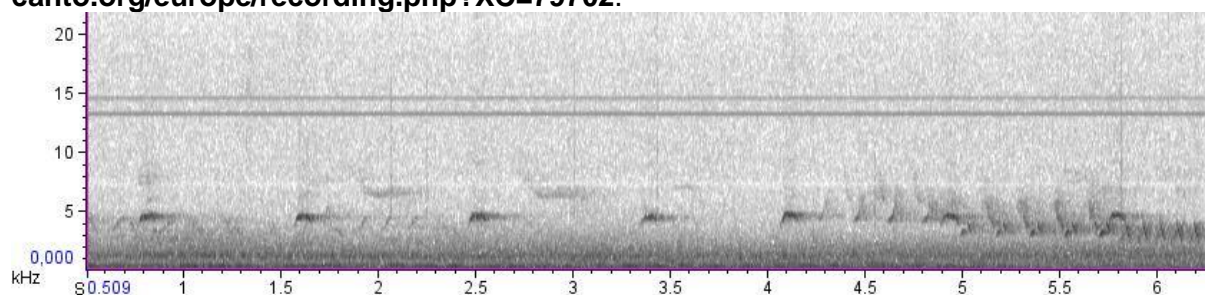
**Fig. 4.** Sonogram of Chiffchaff calls from Leverkusen, Germany, 01.05.2011, recorded using a Lumix DSC-FS9 digital camera. This recording has been uploaded to the xeno-canto website and can be accessed under the URL <http://www.xeno-canto.org/europe/recording.php?XC=79801>.



**Fig. 5.** Sonogram of Chiffchaff calls from Leverkusen, Germany, 01.05.2011, recorded using a Lumix DSC-FS9 digital camera (different individual to Fig. 4). This recording has been uploaded to the xeno-canto website and can be accessed under the URL <http://www.xeno-canto.org/europe/recording.php?XC=79799>.



**Fig. 6.** Sonogram of unusual, aberrant, Chiffchaff calls 'see' from the Wahner Heide heath/forest near Cologne, 30.05.2011, recorded using a Casio Exilim EX-Z70 digital camera. Background Chaffinch song is visible from time=4.3 s onwards. This recording has been uploaded to the xeno-canto website and can be accessed under the URL <http://www.xeno-canto.org/europe/recording.php?XC=79702>.



[on the y and x axes of all figures the units are kHz and s respectively]

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## From the Chairman

*Peter Herkenrath*

On 14th May, we had our now annual birdsong workshop at Fowlmere Nature Reserve, in collaboration with the RSPB. Again, the workshop was fully booked, and unfortunately I had to reject a few late registrations. According to feedback from participants, the day was a success (see the separate article in this Bulletin). Once again, the workshop fell on the day that the Convention on Migratory Species – an international treaty under the auspices of the United Nations – had declared it to be the World Migratory Bird Day and we had registered the workshop as an event under WMBD. A *Bird Eye's View* was the theme of the 2011 WMBD, highlighting the many hazards that migratory birds face. These range from hunting on the migration routes, particularly in the Mediterranean, to habitat destruction for agriculture as well as drought in African countries. In particular the long-distance migrants among our migratory species suffer; those that winter south of the Sahara. Willow Warbler, Cuckoo and Turtle Dove are among the species of our Cambridgeshire avifauna whose numbers have declined severely over the past decades. The BTO and RSPB – with which the Bird Club collaborates in various ways – undertake research in the West African winter quarters of many of our migrants, working with colleagues from other European countries.

By documenting the status and trends of the Cambridgeshire avifauna our Club contributes to a better understanding of the situation of our migratory birds. Many of our members participate in BTO surveys, and we work closely with the BTO in the preparation of the national and our own Cambridgeshire breeding and winter atlases. Beyond the sheer enjoyment of being out and about watching birds, we can be assured that our observations contribute to the wider picture. A good example is provided by the results of the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey that many of us participate in; it is a key source for the government's headline indicator on the status of farmland and woodland birds and a similar European-wide indicator. I would like to thank all of you who take part in such surveys, who have been out in the field collecting data for the Atlas or contributing to the Club's database by sending in records.

This is the last season for fieldwork for the Atlas. In due course, we will hold a meeting of everyone who wants to be involved in writing the species section of the Cambridgeshire Atlas or helping with the production. Please get in touch with Louise Bacon or myself if you want to get involved. It will be quite a change from getting out as often as possible and collecting data in the field – to sitting at the desk at home and drafting text for the Atlas. I am sure I will miss all the field work that has taken me into many areas of the county previously unknown to me. I am looking forward to seeing the results of all the fantastic efforts of so many Club members for documenting our winter and breeding avifauna.

### **Birdsong Workshop at RSPB Fowlmere NR, 14 May 2011**

The spring birdsong workshop at Fowlmere Nature Reserve, held in collaboration with the RSPB, has become an annual event. The aim of the workshop is to learn bird songs and calls and thus to train birdwatchers to participate in surveys. This year, on 14th May at 6.30am, 20 people gathered to walk around the reserve in two groups, led by Tony Fulford and Peter Herkenrath, respectively. It was a rather chilly morning, with a bit of a breeze, so not the best weather for birdwatching, but in mid-May song activity is still very high. We recorded a total of 50 bird species, with several Turtle Doves singing and displaying, good views of Cuckoos, a Marsh Harrier, as well as a Treecreeper building a nest under the bark of a dead tree. A focus of these workshops has always been warbler identification, and we managed to see and/or hear Cetti's Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff. Only the ever-elusive Lesser Whitethroat escaped our eyes and ears. This year's workshop was registered as a local event for World Migratory Bird Day, which is held annually around the globe to raise awareness of the threats to migratory birds. The Club's thanks go to Doug Radford, the Warden for Fowlmere NR, for supporting the workshop in a variety of ways.

### **FROM THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE**

## Final Atlas Update Spring 2011

*Louise Bacon* (for contact details please see the final page)

With only June and July to go on field-work for the Atlas, we have to focus on the gaps. In this article I will outline a few key species gaps at the 10km square [hectad] level, and also mention a few species for which the breeding evidence could be enhanced. This is not an exhaustive list, as some species will not be breeding, and for some species it is very difficult to confirm breeding. All of our 10km squares bar two have between 60 and 75% of recorded species confirmed breeding which is fantastic – two are rather worse than this and warrant special attention – these are TF10 and TF20, north and east of Peterborough.

At the end of this article is a list of species which appear to be missing from 10km squares; I'm sure some of them are really present but need to be sought after and recorded as present. This list is not exhaustive but is based on the priorities menu from the BTO Atlas site, which ranks those missing species against all of the neighbouring 10 km squares. Then there is a list of species at the 10km square level for which I think we should be able to increase the breeding evidence. This is important for both our own county data and for the national breeding atlas. Remember that for any tetrad in the county, there are doubtless birds which can be added, and hopefully with confirmed breeding. I managed both tasks this morning by seeing a starling carrying food – when I checked, it had never been recorded in that tetrad, let alone with breeding confirmed. This was near Wimpole, so not a remote part of the county – it's as easy as that! Remember that probable breeding means seeing a pair together, seeing/hearing a bird in the same place more than a week apart (territorial), hearing two or more birds of a species singing at the same time (territorial), visiting a possible nest site, carrying nesting material or exhibiting agitated behaviour. Confirmed breeding would be to see food being carried, seeing/hearing young birds, finding an active nest or a recently used nest, or seeing the distraction display of game birds and waders.

Key groups of species that often have poor breeding evidence assigned include game birds (e.g. Pheasants, partridges), ducks apart from Mallard, waders, doves and pigeons, warblers other than Common Whitethroat, wagtails and pipits, and Tawny Owl. Young Tawny Owls are out and about now, and their distinctive call can be heard in the evenings. Breeding ducks can be quite elusive, but they usually appear with their ducklings in June/July. July is a good time to visit a gravel pit or wet grassland site to look for nesting waders and their chicks.

Remember, go to the BTO web site for the Atlas (<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas>), and then to the regional results pages to find maps showing the level of species recorded and confirmed breeding in any tetrad or 10km square.

Even if you only add one record of breeding to the list for the whole county it is still something we never knew before, so why not find out what's not yet listed as breeding in your neighbourhood!

Missing species in the following hectads are:

TL07 Nuthatch, Little Grebe, Little Egret, Corn Bunting  
TL09 Hobby, Tree Sparrow, Little Owl, Little Egret, Teal, Gadwall, Shoveler, Corn Bunting  
TL16 Tree Sparrow,  
TL17 Snipe, Gadwall, Corn Bunting, Redshank, Teal  
TL18 Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Gadwall, Shoveler, Kingfisher, Sand Martin,  
Goldcrest  
TL19 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodcock  
TL25 Snipe, Gadwall, Great Crested Grebe  
TL26 Tawny Owl, Siskin, Tree Sparrow  
TL27 Pochard, Redshank, Water Rail, Little Ringed Plover, Tree Sparrow  
TL28 Water Rail, Garganey, Pochard, Tree Sparrow, Cetti's Warbler,  
TL29 Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Siskin

TL34 Little Grebe, Nuthatch  
 TL35 Great Crested Grebe, Shoveler, Little Egret, Pochard, Water Rail  
 TL36 Tree Sparrow  
 TL37 Marsh Tit, Nuthatch  
 TL38 Snipe, Teal, Shoveler, Spotted Flycatcher, Grey Wagtail, Cetti's Warbler  
 TL39 Garden Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Coal Tit, Treecreeper, Marsh Tit, Siskin  
 TL44 Marsh tit, Redshank  
 TL45 Cetti's Warbler, Shoveler, Gadwall, Little Egret  
 TL46 Snipe, Gadwall, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch  
 TL47 Pochard, Little Ringed Plover, Grey Wagtail, Coal Tit  
 TL48 Coal Tit, Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Marsh Tit  
 TL49 Little Owl, Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler, Cetti's Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Coal Tit  
 TL54 Nuthatch  
 TL55 Tufted Duck, Great crested Grebe, Little Egret, Snipe, Teal, Gadwall, Pochard, and Treecreeper  
 TL56 Treecreeper, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Tree Sparrow  
 TL57 Teal, Tree Sparrow, Marsh Tit  
 TL58 Garden Warbler, Treecreeper, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Tree Sparrow  
 TL64 Garden Warbler, Little Grebe, Great crested Grebe  
 TL65 Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Mute Swan, Reed Warbler, and Sedge Warbler  
 TL66 Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Little Egret, Tree Sparrow  
 TL67 Tawny Owl, Nuthatch, Grasshopper Warbler  
 TL68 Grey Wagtail, Bullfinch, Lesser Redpoll  
 TF00 Common Tern, Grasshopper Warbler, Teal, Little Owl, Corn Bunting  
 TF10 Grey Partridge, Snipe  
 TF20 Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Tree Sparrow, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper  
 TF30 Bullfinch, Little Grebe, Tawny Owl, Garden Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Goldcrest, Coal Tit  
 TF40 Little Grebe, Tawny Owl, Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler, Grey Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch  
 TF41 Sparrowhawk, Lapwing, Willow Warbler, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Teal

### **July 17<sup>th</sup> – the final Atlas Group Roving day**

This could be your last chance to help fill some of those species or breeding evidence gaps if you want to go out as a member of a Roving Group. Either get a group of two or three together or let me know if you want to join in with a group - I can assign target areas for coverage to improve our final coverage for the breeding atlas.

The final date for field work for the Atlas is 31st July 2011. I know that there will be many among you who will feel a real loss of purpose after four years of intensive surveying. Perhaps this might be the time to join in with other . on-going BTO surveys?

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2011**

### **SUMMER OUTDOOR MEETINGS**

#### **Shropshire's Farm**

**Wednesday 29th June, 7.00 pm**

An opportunity for a guided walk to see conservation measures on a commercial farm, following up the Club's visit after the Farming and Bird Conservation Conference in October 2010.

The exact site will be confirmed later depending on activity on the farms. For further details check the Club's website.

**Booking is essential for this event.** Please contact Vicki Harley for more information or to book (contact details on back page).

## **Barbecue Evening at RSPB Fen Drayton Lakes Friday 8th July**

Enjoy a social evening at the new Discovery Zone and see the latest developments on this RSPB reserve.

Guided walk led by Neil Renwick (RSPB Community Projects Officer) and Peter Herkenrath (CBC Chairman) at 6:30pm.

Barbecue cooking at the Discovery Zone from 7:30pm. Bring your own food to cook (meat or veggie). Salad, baps, sauces, soft drinks available – donation towards costs.

A moth trap and bat detectors will be available later in the evening.

The venue will be signposted and toilets available.

**Booking is essential for this event.** Please contact Vicki Harley for more information or to book (contact details on back page).

## **Roswell Pits Reserve Friday 12th August**

We are arranging a guided walk at this wetland reserve, which is managed by the Wildlife Trust. For details check the Club's website or look out for announcements on Cambirds.

Please contact Vicki Harley for more information (see back page for contact details).

## **Farmland Visits**

Over the spring and summer we are planning to revisit some of the farms that we visited after the CBC Farming and Bird Conservation Conference. Full details will be announced on the Club website and in future bulletins.

For further details and to book, contact Vicki Harley (see back page for contact details).

## **'Open Farm Sunday' – an event at a Barway farm 12th June, 10am – 3pm**

Open Farm Sunday is an annual event that gives everyone the chance to meet the farmers who grow our food and care for the countryside. Organised by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming). G's (the Shropshire family) will be opening Hainey Farm in Barway as part of the nationwide event. Further details are on the CBC website at

<http://www.cambridgebirdclub.org.uk/images/HaineyFarm.jpg>.

To find other farms that will be open on 'Open Farm Sunday', visit <http://www.leafuk.org/ofs/visit/findfarm.eb>

## **INDOOR MEETINGS**

The next indoor meeting will be on Friday 9th September, Cottenham Village College  
*"The Urban Birder"* by David Lindo.

## **CCF Summer Symposium 23rd June, Cambridge**

The Cambridge Conservation Forum Summer Symposium will be held on Thursday 23 June at the Judge Business School, Trumpington Street, Cambridge. The theme is *'Landscape and localism: Future directions in habitat management'*. Among the speakers are Andy Clements, Director of BTO, and Louise Bacon of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club (the Club is a member of the Cambridge Conservation Forum), who will talk about local bird surveys including the atlas. The booking fee is £35 before June 10th and £40 afterwards (including tea/coffee, lunch and a wine reception). For details

including programme and booking form please see [www.cambridgeconservationforum.org.uk](http://www.cambridgeconservationforum.org.uk) or contact [Peter Herkenrath](#).

### **RSPB CAMBRIDGE LOCAL GROUP – FIELD TRIPS**

- Wed 15 June, 7pm, Wicken Fen, meet at car park
- Sat 25 June, 9.30am, Rainham Marshes, meet at reserve car park
- Sat 9 July, 3pm, Lackford Lakes & King's Forest, meet at Lackford car park
- Sat 23 July, 6pm, Cavenham Heath, meet at car park
- 

For more details and booking, please see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/cambridge> or call 01638 741018.

### **FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY**

We welcome the following new members – Tim Dee of Swaffham Prior, Matthew Mellor of Foxton and Simon Passey of Over.

*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](http://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 July 7th 2011**

**Please send records by post to: Mike Foley by July 5th 2011**

**Next Bulletin due out early August 2011, covering May/June 2011**

# GOOD BIRDING!