

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BIRD CLUB

Bulletin No. 433



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

Welcome to the March / April 2014 Edition

Rare breeding birds, disturbance and information

Vince Lea

It's that time of the year when birds are breeding, and so far, 2014 is looking like a very good breeding season after a couple of really challenging springs. From my nest recording activities, it is clear that lots of birds are nesting much earlier, and many nests are proving to be successful. Some early attempts have been in sites that were too exposed – Song Thrushes and Blackbirds nesting in sites with limited leaf cover have been predated in some locations that we study, but there is still a lot of the summer left for them to try again. Our regular monitoring of the open nesting species at Cambourne has revealed Skylarks fledging by dates when no eggs had been laid last year, raising the prospect of third broods if the conditions remain favourable. Owls are also having a good start to the season.

One of the issues that the breeding season raises is the question of disturbance and publicity, particularly for rarer species. Revealing the site of nesting birds raises the risk of intentional disturbance; there are still a few egg-collectors at large, and with some birds of prey there is a market for young birds for falconry. Some individuals persecute raptors that are seen as a threat to their interests, be that game birds, racing pigeons or even in the name of conservation. Secondly, there is the risk of unintentional disturbance, from people interested in seeing the rare birds going about their business. In some situations, and with some species, setting up a watch point can be extremely effective at raising awareness and funds for conservation; this is most easily done on established nature reserves; birds nesting on private land require much more sensitivity.

We've had two great examples of these complex situations already this year; on April 12, Tony Juniper announced to the Cambridge Evening News that he had seen Peregrines nesting on the University library <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-26990632>. The club had already been aware of this pair and were working with various volunteers in the area to try and discover the actual nest location. Eventually, one of our members saw the female sitting on the window ledge while he was using the library! Quick discussions with the staff got a window blackout in place, so the birds will not be disturbed by readers. Once the chicks are hatched, we will hopefully get a watch-point, and maybe a webcam set up and will be able to show the birds to the public. This pair is clearly accepting of human passers-by at ground level and is in a safe location where interference would be extremely unlikely; given that it has been in the local paper and varsity

magazine, there is little point trying to maintain confidentiality! Once the chicks start to grow, there will be no way of hiding their presence anyway, as the noise and debris from the nest will become extremely obvious. By contrast, another member noted a sitting Stone Curlew on farmland visible from a public footpath. Again, we were quickly able to contact the landowner (who had already noted the birds), and an RSPB Stone Curlew expert who visited the nest to ascertain hatching date. We have thus removed any risk of accidental damage by the farming operations, and can maintain a low-key monitoring operation on the nest. But if it were made public, and regular visitors used the footpath and kept stopping to watch the birds, there is a high risk of disturbance and desertion.

So the message is, do not broadcast the discovery of a rare breeding bird, but send in details to our county recorder promptly. We can then take the appropriate decisions based on the sensitivity of the site, the wishes of the landowner, and the particular behavioural characteristics of the species concerned. There is a national monitoring programme run by the Rare Breeding Bird Panel, who are able to advise on these matters. They have lots of information on their website, <http://www.rbbp.org.uk/>, so even if you don't subscribe to British Birds (who have an excellent feature each year on this topic), you can see which species are involved and how to record information. The RBBP are very keen to compile data on all such species, and with some species the data is rather limited. Very rare species generally get fully documented if they are discovered, as the high level of interest ensures that much information is collected; a good example is our latest addition, Common Crane. This is not the case for many of the less rare species. Some of these species are extremely secretive, and very little can be determined from what observations can be made – Spotted Crake, Black-necked Grebe and Hawfinch (locally very rare, but nationally on the RBBP list despite some reasonable populations) are examples. Nonetheless, any such species records are highly valued by the club.

Some 'rare breeders' are relatively common species but have only a small breeding population in the UK; this is particular so for some of the wildfowl that winter here in large numbers. Wigeon, Pintail, Shoveler and Pochard are good examples – most of us would instinctively know that Garganey are rare breeders, but perhaps not think twice about seeing one of these other species in summer. As many of these duck species are quite secretive when breeding, even just a glimpse of one could be very important information – you may see a male Shoveler and not consider sending in the record, while another birder may see a female at the same site the following week and take the same attitude. If both records had been submitted, that would constitute a 'Probable' breeding attempt; just one of the records would constitute a 'Possible' breeding attempt. If neither observer submits their record, we simply would not know about them. Furthermore, if the record is significant, it may be possible for us to respond to the information and organise a watch, to see if the breeding attempt had any success, demonstrated by the presence of ducklings or distinctive behaviour by the adults, even if a nest cannot be seen. You may not be able to go back to the site, but if it is important we can probably find someone who can!

Some of the other rare breeders are relatively common in our area, but are nationally rare. We may take them for granted but in fact should pay them more attention – good examples include Marsh Harriers, Water Rail and some of the non-native species such as Muscovy Duck. Although the first two may largely breed on nature reserves, where formal monitoring can be relied on to determine their breeding status, there are a few records from other sites; I know of a pair of Marsh Harriers at an unlikely location that are now into their eighth breeding season despite nesting right next to a public footpath. As far as we can tell, this pair has been kept confidential and has not suffered from any significant disturbance despite the high risk of their location. The records have been maintained by the club and contributed to the RBBP for the national database. This is an important point to emphasise – the club keeps such records confidential where necessary, either on the insistence of the observer, the landowner or our considered opinion. The non-native species are often overlooked but keeping a watch on them is important from a conservation monitoring perspective.

And do not think that just because it is a nature reserve the observations you make aren't important additions to our knowledge – you may still be the only person to see something! We can easily ignore surplus information, but cannot do anything if we don't have the information in the first place. This might particularly apply to the chicks of waders such as Avocet, Little Ringed Plover and Black-tailed Godwit. Chicks are rarely seen, and these species can suffer high levels of predation so may not be around for long. Such sightings could be the only proof of confirmed breeding.

A final category of rare breeders are those that occur across the countryside, not particularly confined to nature reserves or other birding hotspots. These are particularly under-recorded and we need of all records of these, if possible. Good examples include Hobby, Quail, Firecrest and Black Redstart. Although Hobbies will feed in numbers over good wetland sites with lots of insects and hirundines in the spring, by the time they start breeding later in the summer, they often move out to more isolated clumps of trees on farmland. They can be quite secretive during the main nesting period, but the initial display activity and the eventual noisy chicks, are relatively easily obtained evidence of breeding, without requiring unnecessarily close observation.

One area in which we could do a bit more as a club is to better monitor the progress of our rare breeders, to produce more accurate information in the annual report and for the RBBP. If anyone feels that they could be on a list of contacts available to undertake careful watches of such species, please get in touch. We would want assurances (e.g. a recommendation from a known responsible person) that the site would remain confidential if necessary, and that no approach would be made to the nest without approved consent from Natural England via the BTO licencing system and the landowner; in other words, it's likely to be quite tedious and distant watching. If you've got the time and inclination for such, it would be highly valuable.

RECENT BIRD REPORTS

The Editors' Message: this bulletin is drawn from records that appear on the Cambridgeshire Bird Club website "What's about" section and from Cambirds. In addition there are records sent to the County Recorder. However, many observers send in their records bi-monthly to line up with the paper bulletin. Readers will note that at present there is a more extensive E- bulletin every other month as a result. Can we ask observers to send in records to the Recorder on a monthly basis (ideally by the 5th of the following month) as this would improve the balance of the E- bulletins.

The records in this bulletin are unchecked and may be revised at a later date. Where no numbers are given the records relate to single birds. An asterisk after the name of a species indicates that it is necessary to send a description to the County Recorder before the record will be accepted.

March – April Headlines

BEAN GOOSE (Taiga)* Mar: Cambridge Research Park (1st – 3rd).
AMERICAN WIGEON* Mar: Ouse Washes RSPB (a drake 14th – 31st). Apr: Ouse Washes (1st – 3rd).
GREEN-WINGED TEAL* Mar: Fen Drayton Lakes (16th). Apr: Ouse Washes (male 10th – 13th).
RING-NECKED DUCK* Mar: Ouse Washes RSPB (a female on 29th – 30th). Apr: Ouse Washes (the same female was present until the 15th at least), Nene Washes (male on 11th – 25th).
CATTLE EGRET* Apr: Nene Washes (12th – 13th), Ouse Washes (16th onwards, and into May).
GREAT WHITE EGRET* Mar: Nene Washes (31st). Apr: Nene Washes (1st – 12th), Ouse Washes (10th, 2 on 12th and into May), Ellington (flyover on 16th).
WHITE STORK* Apr: Fen Drayton Lakes (flyover going SE on 26th), most likely the same bird at Swaffham Prior (flyover going E, also on 26th).

GLOSSY IBIS Mar: Hemingford Abbots (1st), Ouse Washes/Pymoor (2 on 23rd – 26th), Wicken Fen (26th). Apr: Ouse Washes (15th, then 2 on 27th).

SPOONBILL Apr: Ouse Washes RSPB (5th – 6th).

BLACK KITE* Apr: Grafham Water (flyover on 26th).

SPOTTED CRAKE Apr: Wicken Fen (a bird calling on 9th – 10th), King's Dyke NR (12th), Ouse Washes (single on 20th and 3 on 23rd).

DOTTEREL Apr: Black Bush Whittlesey (3 on 25th – 27th).

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW* Apr: Cam Washes (2 on 20th).

SNOW BUNTING* Mar: Paxton Pits (7th).

Other records

Wildfowl

Whooper Swan Mar: Witcham GP (20+ on 3rd), Swaffham Prior Fen (13 on 7th), Earith to Sutton Gault (maximum 260 on 19th), Burwell Fen (11 on 12th), Nene Washes (40 flyovers on 29th). Apr: Ouse Washes (maximum c120 on 1st, 52 on 5th), Nene Washes (3 still on 29th).

Pink-footed Goose Apr: Fen Drayton Lakes (a pair on 12th), Colne GP (29th).

White-fronted Goose Apr: Paxton Pits (an immature on 29th – 30th).

Brent Goose Apr: Ferry Meadows CP (25th), Nene Washes (3 on 25th).

Egyptian Goose Mar: Paxton Pits (maximum 5 on 8th), Sutton Gault (4 on 13th), Kingfishers Bridge (a pair on 17th). Apr: Paxton Pits (max 9 on 24th), Fen Drayton Lakes (a pair with young on 8th), Buckden (2 on 5th), Earith GP (pair with young on 6th), Nene Washes (3 on 13th), singles at three other sites.

Shelduck Mar: Paxton Pits (maximum 4 on 27th), Cam Washes (2 on 28th), Wicken Fen (max 6 on 17th). Apr: Gedney Drove End (20 on 13th), Wicken Fen (pair on 6th, 5 on 13th), Paxton Pits (3 on 15th), Burwell Fen (16th), Nene Washes (37 on 24th).

Mandarin Mar: Wimpole (4+ drakes on 2nd), Grantchester (pair on 14th), Castor Hanglands (6 on 15th).

Wigeon Mar: Cam Washes/Upware (max 250 on 4th), Wicken Fen (max 500 on 31st). Apr: Ouse Washes /Chain Corner (c100 on 8th, 1 on 12th), Paxton Pits (4 on 22nd), Nene Washes (190 on 29th).

Gadwall Mar: Wicken Fen (maximum 190 on 16th).

Baikal Teal* Mar: Fen Drayton Lakes (a drake on 31st, but said to have been present for at least two weeks prior). Apr: Fen Drayton Lakes (drake on 1st – 2nd) then Ouse Washes/Sutton Gault (5th to end of the month); *this record is under consideration by the BBRC as it may be a true vagrant.*

Teal Mar: Nene Washes (c1500 on 29th), Wicken Fen (maximum 190 on 16th). Apr: Ouse Washes/Chain Corner (200 – 300 on 8th and 150 on 14th), Paxton Pits (4 still on 27th).

Pintail Mar: Paxton Pits (pair 2nd – 27th), Witcham GP (a pair on 3rd), Wicken Fen (2 on 12th), Gamlingay (male on 23rd). Apr: Ouse Washes (a surprising 80+ on 6th, 8 on 8th, and 11 on 23rd).

Garganey Mar: Wicken Fen (2 on 16th – first of the year), Maxeys Pits (pair on 24th – 27th), Kingfishers Bridge (29th), Ouse Washes RSPB (a pair on 29th, 5 on 30th), Fen Drayton Lakes (29th and 3 males on 30th). Apr: Berry Fen (maximum 2), Burwell Fen (max 4), Fen Drayton Lakes (max 4), Maxeys Pits (2), Ouse Washes (max 6, all drakes, on 26th), Wicken Fen (max 4), Paxton Pits (30th).

Shoveler Mar: Wicken Fen (maximum 176 on 16th).

Red-crested Pochard Mar: Paxton Pits (a pair on 30th). Apr: Paxton Pits (a drake on 4th – 5th and on 21st, 2 drakes on 30th).

Pochard Apr: Wicken Fen (pair on 6th), Paxton Pits (male on 26th).

Tufted Duck Mar: Wicken Fen (maximum 25 on 16th). Apr: Wicken Fen (9 on 6th and a pair on 23rd).

Scaup Mar: Paxton Pits (15th to 7th April at least), Ouse Washes RSPB (18th), Fen Drayton Lakes (male on 22nd to 30th). Apr: Fen Drayton Lakes (male on 1st and 12th).

Long-tailed Duck* Mar: Grafham Water (the long stay bird was seen all month and to 2nd April).

Common Scoter Mar: Grafham Water (2 on 25th and 30th). Apr: Grafham Water (3 on 4th), Marsh Lane GP (16 on 22nd).

Goldeneye Mar: Grafham Water (maximum 72 on 16th), Holme Fen (4 on 4th), Ouse Washes RSPB (5 on 18th), Nene Washes (2 on 29th). **Apr:** Grafham Water (max 23 on 1st), Ouse Washes RSPB (female on 1st and 5th), Fen Drayton Lakes (max 25 on 1st), Paxton Pits (max 37 on 4th and 6 remaining on 15th).

Smew Mar: Ouse Fen (1st), Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 5 redheads on 2nd, a single still on 31st and on 1st April, Needingworth GP (max 12 on 5th, 7 still on 27th), Paxton Pits (max 2 redheads on 4th – 12th, a single until 16th).

Red-breasted Merganser Mar: Ouse Washes (pair on 12th).

Goosander Mar: Grafham Water (maximum 14 on 1st), Paxton Pits (maximum 4 on 22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (16th – 24th). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (a female on 3rd – 4th), Maxey Pits (16th).

Ruddy Duck Apr: Ouse Washes (drake on 10th), Nene Washes (a female 11th – 12th), Burwell Fen (26th).

Gamebirds

Grey Partridge Mar: Burwell Fen (2 on 14th). **Apr:** Haddenham (pair on 13th), Paxton Pits (2 on 16th and 24th), Cam Washes/Waterbeach (a pair on 21st), Holt Fen (pair on 25th).

Divers, shearwaters, gannet and cormorants

Red-throated Diver* Mar: Grafham Water (1st – 26th).

Great Northern Diver* Mar: Paxton Pits (1st – 29th), Grafham Water (long stay bird all month and 2 on 30th and 31st; the second may have been the Paxton bird). **Apr:** Grafham Water (2 long-stay birds until 4th at least and a single into May).

Cormorant Holme Fen (19 nests on 17th).

Egrets and herons

Bittern Mar: reported from Ouse Fen (2), Wicken Fen. **Apr:** reported from Ouse Fen (2), Ouse Washes, Wicken Fen (2).

Little Egret Mar: Cam Washes (maximum 6 on 16th), Mare Fen (max 12 on 7th), Ouse Washes RSPB (max 32 on 26th), Paxton Pits (max 2), Wicken Fen (max 2). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (max 2 on 1st), Maxey Cut (4 on 15th), Ouse Washes (max 10 on 23rd), Nene Washes (13 on 24th), Holt Fen (2 on 25th).

Grebes

Little Grebe Mar: Holme Fen (2 pairs on 4th), Wicken Fen (maximum 6 on 16th). **Apr:** Burwell Fen (7 on 16th), Wicken Fen (2-3 pairs).

Great Crested Grebe Mar: Wicken Fen (17th). **Apr:** Nene Washes (2 pairs), Wicken Fen (pair).

Slavonian Grebe* Mar: Ouse Washes (21st – 26th), Grafham Water (2 on 31st).

Black-necked Grebe Mar: Fen Drayton Lakes (22nd).

Raptors

Red Kite Mar: Paxton Pits (several dates), Croydon, Holme Fen (2 on 4th), Over (2 on 14th), Haddenham (15th), Cambridge/Histon Road (20th), Wicken Fen (4 dates). **Apr:** reported from Grafham Water (2), Leighton Bromswold, Nene Washes, Paxton Pits (3), Wicken Fen, Woodwalton Fen, and 6 sites in the Peterborough area.

Marsh Harrier Mar: Ouse Fen (1st), Burwell Fen (maximum 5 on 8th), Wicken Fen (maximum 8 on 4th and 7th), Cam Washes (16th), Woodwalton Fen (5 on 25th), Kingfishers Bridge (4 on 29th). **Apr:** at Haddenham/Aldreth Fen (2), Kingfishers Bridge (2), Little Wilbraham Fen (4), Ouse Washes (2), Paxton Pits (2), Wicken Fen (6), and Burwell Fen (a bird with green wing tags on 23rd).

Hen Harrier Mar: Wicken Fen (maximum 5, 2 males and 3 ringtails on 27th), Woodwalton Fen (male on 12th), Witcham GP (male on 19th), Sutton Gault (female on 19th and 23rd), Alconbury (male on 24th), Ouse Washes RSPB (male on 29th – 30th). **Apr:** Stretham (ringtail on 12th – latest record for this year).

Montagu's Harrier* **Mar:** Wicken Fen (a male on 23rd); *the black wing markings were noted so if accepted this will be the earliest recorded in the county, (previously April 15th)*. **Apr:** Wicken Fen (1st).

Sparrowhawk **Mar:** reported from Paxton Pits (maximum 3), Wicken Fen (2). **Apr:** at Comberton, Histon, Kirtling, Little Wilbraham Fen, Paxton Pits (3), Wicken Fen.

Buzzard **Mar:** (*numbers are birds seen together*) Fen Drayton Lakes (max 8), Paxton Pits (max 6), and 1 to 3 at 8 other sites. **Apr:** Great Shelford (7), Hemingford (6-7) Paxton Pits (14) and 1 – 3 at 11 other sites. *The e-bulletin editor spent a week searching the skies from his garden for a constantly calling Buzzard only to discover the source was a Starling – an indication of how Buzzards have become so common that local Starlings have added them to their repertoire?*

Osprey **Apr:** Whittlesford (10th), Holme Fen (2 on 17th), Paxton Pits (21st).

Rails and crane

Water Rail **Mar:** Grafham Water (3 on 16th), Wicken Fen (maximum 5+ on 21st). **Apr:** reported from Little Wilbraham Fen, Nene Washes, Ouse Washes RSPB, Wicken Fen (2).

Coot **Mar:** Wicken Fen (maximum 200 on 17th).

Crane **Mar:** Eldernell (max 10 on 27th), Wicken Fen (1 – 2 birds seen 9th – 10th). **Apr:** Ouse Washes RSPB (2 on 1st), Stuntney (2 over on 5th), Wicken Fen (2 on 26th), Nene Washes (maximum 7 on 18th).

Waders

Avocet **Mar:** Isleham Washes (41 on 2nd – 3rd), Cam Washes/Waterbeach (maximum 14 on 9th), Grafham Water (max 9 on 16th), 1 – 2 on various dates at Paxton Pits, Fen Drayton Lakes, Ouse Washes, and Burwell Fen. **Apr:** Cam Washes (4 on 12th), Ouse Washes RSPB (14 on 12th and 35 on 17th), Burwell Fen (4 on 23rd), Fen Drayton Lakes (max 5 on 30th), and 1 – 2 on various dates at Nene Washes, Paxton Pits, Ouse Washes/Chain Corner, Wicken Fen, Tubney Fen and Grafham Water.

Oystercatcher **Mar:** Wicken Fen (2 on 17th), Paxton Pits (maximum 8 on 19th), Kingfishers Bridge (29th), Burwell Fen (29th). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (max 6 on 1st), Burwell Fen (3 on 23rd), Fen Drayton Lakes (max 5 on 30th), and 1 or 2 on various dates at 6 sites.

Golden Plover **Mar:** Eldernell (c2000 on 11th). **Apr:** Sutton Gault (58 in summer plumage on 6th), Whittlesey (18 summer plumage on 25th and 9 on 27th).

Grey Plover **Mar:** Paxton Pits (28th), Nene Washes (2 on 29th), Ouse Washes (30th).

Lapwing **Mar:** Paxton Pits (maximum 120 on 2nd). **Apr:** Fulbourn (9 adults and 3 chicks on 23rd).

Little Ringed Plover **Mar:** Fen Drayton Lakes (29th, the first of the year), Paxton Pits (flyover on 30th), Trumpington/Clay Farm (4 on 31st). **Apr:** Fen Drayton Lakes (1st, 26th 30th and 4 on 27th), Ouse Washes (5th and 12th), Tanholt GP (15th and 23rd), Burwell Fen (16th), Maxey Pits (21st), Paxton Pits (24th).

Ringed Plover **Mar:** Paxton Pits (2 – 4 on several dates from 7th). **Apr:** Colne GP (2 on 18th), Maxey Pits (19th), Etton Pit (22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 26th).

Whimbrel **Apr:** Grafham Water (14th), Paxton Pits (16th, 20th and 12 on 26th), Fowlmere NR (19th), Grafham Water (22nd, 2 on 26th), Nene Washes (2 on 23rd and 25th, singles to 30th), Fowlmere (36 over on 24th), Maxey Pits (27th), Berry Fen (2 on 30th), Ouse Washes (2 on 30th), Alconbury Airfield (30th).

Curlew **Mar:** Fen Drayton Lakes (4 on 12th), Nene Washes (4 on 29th), Paxton Pits (30th), Ouse Washes RSPB (30th). **Apr:** Ouse Washes RSPB (3 flyovers on 1st, 2 on 5th a single on 12th), Paxton Pits (5th), Buckden (2 flyovers on 5th), Diddington Pit (flyover on 7th).

Black-tailed Godwit **Mar:** counts over 100: Fen Drayton Lakes (maximum 500+ on 2nd), Ouse Washes RSPB (500+ on 30th). **Apr:** Ouse Washes (600+ on 5th and 12th), Fen Drayton Lakes (240 on 12th, 650+ on 14th and 50 on 26th), Nene Washes (max c1000 'Icelandic' on 12th and several other large counts), Kingfishers Bridge (100+ on 18th), and Berry Fen (100 on 21st).

Mark Eaton discovered considerable information about an individual he saw at Berry Fen:

“Ringed as an adult on the Tagus Estuary in Portugal in 2007, it has returned to winter there every year since, has spent considerable time in Norfolk (mainly Cley) every autumn, and most springs has been recorded passing through Cambs, including Fen Drayton, Berry Fen and Welches Dam. It has also lived up its CV with appearances in Belgium, southern Ireland and western Scotland, and has been seen on the Icelandic breeding grounds once.”

Bar-tailed Godwit **Apr:** Grafham Water (a flyover on 20th), Paxton Pits (5 on 20th and 13 on 26th), Nene Washes (22nd and 3 on 29th), Ouse Washes (2 on 26th).

Turnstone **Apr:** Paxton Pits (2 on 21st, the first record of the year).

Ruff **Mar:** Fen Drayton Lakes (c35 on 2nd), Paxton Pits (4 on 16th), Ouse Washes RSPB (277 on 18th), Nene Washes (8 on 29th). **Apr:** Ouse Washes (50+ on 5th, c40 on 10th and 152 on 12th), Paxton Pits (20th), Berry Fen (40 on 21st), Nene Washes/March Farmers (6 on 18th and 13 on 25th).

Sanderling **Apr:** Diddington Pits (7th, the first record for the year)

Dunlin **Mar:** Paxton Pits (7 on 1st). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (max 9 on 12th), Ouse Washes (7 on 12th), Grafham Water (4 on 14th), Burwell Fen (16th and 6 on 23rd), Maxey Pit (2 on 21st), Etton Pit (2 on 22nd).

Common Sandpiper **Mar:** Paxton Pits (24th – first of the year). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (14th and on several dates thereafter), Fen Drayton Lakes (3 on 20th – 21st, and 2 on 22nd), Cam Washes/Waterbeach (21st), Ferry Meadows CP (22nd), Eye Green (23rd), Berry Fen (30th).

Green Sandpiper **Mar:** reported from Paxton Pits (max 2), Grafham Water, Ouse Fen, Ouse Washes RSPB (max 2). **Apr:** Maxey Pits (1st and 6th), Ferry Meadows CP (10th), Tanholt GP (3 on 13th), Maxey Cut (3 on 13th), Colne GP (3 on 16th), Paxton Pits (20th – 22nd), Nene Washes (22nd), and Yaxley (23rd).

Spotted Redshank **Mar:** Nene Washes (29th, first of the year). **Apr:** Ouse Washes (10th – 12th, 17th, 26th and 30th), Nene Washes (29th – 30th).

Greenshank **Apr:** Wicken Fen (3rd, first of the year, and 23rd), Nene Washes (2 on 22nd and 28th – 30th), Fen Drayton Lakes (22nd), Burwell Fen (23rd and 2 on 26th), Ouse Washes (26th).

Wood Sandpiper **Apr:** Nene Washes (23rd, first record for the year, and 25th).

Redshank **Mar:** Isleham Washes (2 on 3rd), Cam Washes/Upware (4th), Eldernell (c 35 on 11th), Burwell Fen (14th), Grafham Water (maximum 12 on 16th), Paxton Pits (max 11 on 17th), Kingfishers Bridge (29th), Wicken Fen (max 20 on 31st). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (max 11 on 1st), Grafham Water (max 6 on 2nd and 22nd), Burwell Fen (4 on 16th), Wicken Fen (max 7 on 20th), 1 – 2 elsewhere.

Jack Snipe **Mar:** Wicken Fen (2nd).

Woodcock **Mar:** Holme Fen (9th), Wicken Fen (maximum 3 roding on 10th and 27th), Wennington Wood (5 on 10th). **Apr:** Cambridge/Milton Road (flyover 3rd), Wicken Fen (maximum 4 on 23rd).

Snipe **Mar:** Ouse Fen (4 on 1st), Paxton Pits (maximum 15 on 26th), Burwell Fen (8 on 14th), Wicken Fen (40 on 28th). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (max 4 on 1st), Ferry Meadows (10 on 4th), Wicken Fen (15 on 20th and 3 drumming on 23rd), Paxton Pits (20th), Nene Washes (15 on 24th).

Terns and gulls

Little Tern **Apr:** Ferry Meadows CP (24th and 26th), Paxton Pits (2 on 26th).

Black Tern **Apr:** First of the year on the 16th at Burwell Fen (2) and Grafham Water (3). Thereafter at Fen Drayton Lakes (6 on 21st and 4 on 22nd), Ferry Meadows CP (26th), Paxton Pits (2 on 26th and 27th).

Sandwich Tern **Mar:** Ferry Meadows CP (2 flyovers on 31st, the first of the year). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (2 on 7th and a single on 17th), Marsh Lane GP (2 on 17th).

Common Tern **Apr:** Ferry Meadows (1st, earliest record this year), Paxton Pits (4th), Grafham Water (5th), Ouse Washes (2 on 12th), Maxey Cut (15th) and thereafter at several sites.

Arctic Tern **Apr:** Ferry Meadows (17th – the first of the year, 8 on 18th, 5 on 22nd, 15 on 24th – 25th, singles on various dates), Paxton Pits (6 on 20th, 3 on 26th and 15 flyovers on 27th), Fen Drayton Lakes (22nd and 2 on 26th – 27th), Grafham Water (3 on 27th), Nene Washes (27th).

Black-headed Gull **Mar:** Ouse Washes Earith (1000 on 17th).

Little Gull **Mar:** Ouse Washes RSPB (2 on 30th), Fen Drayton Lakes (9 on 31st). **Apr:** Fen Drayton Lakes (3 on 1st), Ouse Washes (3rd), Ferry Meadows CP (4th), Paxton Pits (2 on 4th), Grafham Water (2 on 5th), Paxton Pits (7 on 16th, single on 17th), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 21st – 23rd), Grafham Water (3 on 20th – 21st, single on 22nd), Kingfishers Bridge (10+ on 21st), Ouse Washes RSPB (22nd).

Mediterranean Gull **Mar:** Grafham Water (2 adults on 2nd and one on 30th), Ouse Washes (2 on 16th and 3 at Earith on 17th), Paxton Pits (adult on 27th). **Apr:** Grafham Water (an adult on 1st).

Common Gull **Mar:** Fen Drayton Lakes (c180 on 12th).

Yellow-legged Gull **Mar:** Milton Tip (max 6 on 7th), Paxton Pits (2 on 2nd). **Apr:** Milton Tip (3 on 17th).

Caspian Gull **Mar:** Milton Tip (maximum 3 on 1st), Grafham Water (22nd and 31st). **Apr:** Milton Tip (17th), Grafham Water (29th).

Iceland Gull **Mar:** Milton Tip area (2nd winter 1st – 13th), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 first winters on 1st and a 2nd winter on 12th), Witcham GP (2 on 14th), Diddington GP (2nd winter on 16th), Paxton Pits (2nd winter on 16th), Grafham Water (adult into roost on 16th and 22nd).

Glaucous Gull **Mar:** Milton Tip and surrounding area (1st winter from 1st – 22nd), Grafham Water (1st winter 1st – 5th and an adult on 5th), Ouse Washes (1st winter into roost on 13th and presumably the same bird at Witcham on 14th and 19th). **Apr:** Fen Drayton Lakes (1st winter on 7th and a 2nd winter bird on 12th – 21st), Milton Tip (2nd winter on 17th), Grafham Water (2nd winter on 18th and on 22nd).

Great Black-backed Gull **Apr:** Grafham Water (85 on 22nd).

Doves, cuckoo, owls, kingfisher and woodpeckers

Turtle Dove **Mar:** Aldreth (9th, a remarkably early bird).

Cuckoo **Apr:** Wicken Fen (19th, first record of the year), Paxton Pits (20th), Fen Drayton Lakes (21st), Woodwalton Fen (21st), Little Wilbraham Fen (2 on 21st), Soham (22nd); several records thereafter.

Barn Owl **Mar:** Burwell Fen (maximum 2), Sutton Gault (max 2). **Apr:** reported from Cam Washes.

Little Owl **Mar:** reported from Burwell Fen, Fulbourn. **Apr:** Ferry Meadows CP, Nene Washes.

Tawny Owl **Mar:** reported from Castor Hanglands and Grafham Water. **Apr:** reported from March (breeding pair with young being ringed seen on local television), Wicken Fen.

Short-eared Owl **Mar:** Burwell Fen (maximum 4 on 1st), Maxey Pits (4th), Swaffham Prior Fen (2 on 7th), Eldernell (9th and 14th), Holme Fen (max 2 on 23rd), Tubney Fen (12th), Grafham Water (16th).

Apr: Wicken Fen (2 on 5th).

Swift **Apr:** Buckden (14th – first record this year), Orton BP (20th), Cambridge/Barnwell LNR (22nd), Cam Washes (3 on 26th), thereafter at several locations.

Kingfisher **Mar:** reported from Cambridge/Bin Brook, Holme Fen, Paxton Pits (max 4 on 9th). **Apr:** Cam Washes, Comberton, Earith GP, Kingfishers Bridge, Nene Washes, Ouse Washes (2), Paxton Pits, Peterborough, Teversham Fen (3).

Green Woodpecker **Apr:** Barton Countryside Restoration Trust [CRT] (6 on 12th).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker **Mar:** Castor Hanglands (male on 3rd).

Falcons, Parrots

Merlin **Mar:** Haddenham (26th), Ouse Washes RSPB (30th).

Hobby **Apr:** Wicken Fen (13th, the first of the year, and 25th), Ferry Meadows CP (20th), Woodwalton Fen (2 on 24th), Nene Washes (24th), Fen Drayton Lakes (26th), Ouse Washes (26th).

Peregrine **Mar:** Wicken Fen (2nd and 10th), Paxton Pits (2nd), Cambridge (1 – 2 on several dates), Witchford (14th), Ouse Washes (30th). **Apr:** Cambridge (a pair throughout the month), Ouse Washes (5th, 12th and 23rd), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (12th), Ouse Washes (23rd), Berry Fen (23rd and 25th).

Ring-necked Parakeet **Mar:** Ouse Washes RSPB (around the visitor centre on 23rd).

Shrikes and corvids

Great Grey Shrike * **Mar:** Trundle Mere (long stay bird still present until the 28th and was last reported on 6th Apr).

Rook Apr: Louise Bacon writes: 'In all the recent winters out and about in South West Cambs, I have noticed no loss of rook nests to bad weather (over about 8 years); but this last winter, many local nests were simply blown away. About a month ago, rooks began milling around, and have now rebuilt. Interestingly, at those sites where ALL nests were blown away, the rooks have moved. These were often small colonies of up to 6 nests. They have mostly not gone far, 100m or so. At those colonies where at least some nests survived, the colony has stayed put, but moved trees, often to something a bit lower, but close by. Some of the small colonies which have gone seem to have teamed up with other nearby groups to enlarge or start a new, bigger group - this is especially true in Comberton. The most intriguing is a group now near the B1046 on the way to Bourn - I do not know where they have come from - presumably the middle of the village, so a movement of a kilometre at least.'

Carrion Crow Apr: Barton CRT (25 on 12th)

Hooded Crow Mar: Holme Fen (long stay bird still present on 11th).

Raven Apr: Castor Hanglands (2 on 15th).

Crests, tits and larks

Firecrest Mar: Pingle Wood (26th).

Coal Tit Apr: reported from Chippenham Fen, Great Shelford, Wicken Fen,

Marsh Tit Mar: Wennington Wood (21 counted on 10th). **Apr:** Richard Broughton reports 55 territories in three woods in old Hunts. Also reported from Lucy Wood and two other woods in SE Cambs.

Bearded Tit Mar: Ouse Fen (4 - 5 on 1st). **Apr:** Wicken Fen (4 pairs on 30th).

Skylark Apr: Comberton/Westfield Farm (39 on 15th).

Hirundines and warblers

Sand Martin Mar: Sutton Gault (11th, first of the year), then several reports and on the 20th at: Paxton Pits 18, Chatteris 1, Grafham Water 2, Peterborough 4, and Needingworth 5. **Apr:** 50+ reported from Cam Washes (60 on 12th), Ouse Washes RSPB (200+ on 12th), Orton BP (100+ on 20th).

Swallow Mar: Grantchester Meadows (22nd, first of the year), Ouse Washes (2 on 23rd) then several records. **Apr:** Paxton Pits (5th), Ouse Washes (5th), Sutton Gault (6th), Ouse Washes RSPB (20+ on 12th).

House Martin Mar: Coates (31st, first of the year). **Apr:** Papworth (4th), Sutton Gault (6th), thereafter recorded in several places.

Cetti's Warbler Mar: reported from Grafham Water (2), Fen Drayton Lakes, Mare Fen, Paxton Pits (2), Wicken Fen (minimum 8), Woodwalton Fen (25th). **Apr:** Barton, Cambridge/Barnwell Pit, Crown Lakes, Eye Green, Fen Drayton Lakes, Little Wilbraham Fen (2), Maxey Cut and GP, Nene Washes (2), Paxton Pits (max 4 on 5th), Peterborough/Millennium Bridge, Tanholt GP (2), Wicken Fen (8) and Woodwalton Fen. *It is possible the mild winter has encouraged dispersal and the colonisation of new sites.*

Wood Warbler Apr: Abbot's Ripton (24th), Ely (30th).

Chiffchaff Mar: Earliest record: Stirtloe (2nd), followed by increasing numbers at numerous sites.

'Siberian' Chiffchaff* subspecies *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* **Apr:** Grafham Water (6th).

Willow Warbler Mar: Woodwalton Fen (25th, first of the year), Fowlmere NR (26th). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (3 singing on 3rd), Wicken Fen (3rd), Bretton (4th), Elton (4th), Monk's Wood (4th), Fleam Dyke (5th), thereafter at several sites.

Blackcap Mar: Cambridge (15th), Wicken Fen (24th), Fowlmere NR (26th). *With the overwintering population it is increasingly difficult to separate wintering birds from summering, thus early arrival dates are a bit blurred.*

Garden Warbler Apr: Great Wilbraham (11th, first of the year), Kirtling (15th), Grantchester (18th), Paxton Pits (22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 22nd), Ferry Meadows CP (22nd).

Lesser Whitethroat Apr: Paxton Pits (5th, the earliest record this year, only 5 days later than the earliest ever), Cambridge (12th), several records thereafter.

Whitethroat Apr: Ferry Meadows CP, (3rd – first reported returning migrant not counting the overwintering bird at Ouse Fen), several records thereafter. Comberton/Westfield Farm (17 on 27th).

Grasshopper Warbler Apr: Little Wilbraham Fen and Wicken Fen (both 11th – first of the year). Thereafter reported from: Castor Hanglands, Dogsthorpe Pit, Fen Drayton Lakes (2+), Fowlmere NR, Little Wilbraham Fen (4+), Ouse Washes, Paxton Pits (2), Wicken Fen (max 7), and Woodwalton Fen (3).

Sedge Warbler Mar: Paxton Pits (30th, first of the year). **Apr:** Fen Drayton Lakes (1st).

Reed Warbler Apr: Wicken Fen and Ouse Fen (both 10th, first of the year), thereafter at several sites.

Nuthatch, wren, and thrushes

Nuthatch Mar: Castor Hanglands (3 on 15th). **Apr:** Chippenham Fen (a pair caught and ringed on 2nd).

Treecreeper Mar: reports indicate good numbers of this species, maybe reflecting the mild winter.

Wren Apr: Richard Broughton reports 50 singing in three woods in old Hunts.

Ring Ouzel Apr: Knapwell/Grange Farm (female on 1st), Wicken Fen (10th – 12th), Paxton Pits (10th), Castor/Marham road (13th), Cam Washes (20th), Fen Drayton Lakes (male on 22nd).

Fieldfare Mar: Paxton Pits (31 flyovers on 2nd), Holme Fen (50+ on 4th), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (300 on 18th), Wicken Fen (55 on 18th), Ouse Washes RSPB (c70 on 26th), Maxey Pits (72 on 27th), Paxton Pits (14 on 29th). **Apr:** Maxey Pits (200 on 1st – 3rd, 80 still on 4th), Ouse Washes (3 on 23rd, probably the latest record of the winter).

Redwing Mar: Wimpole (120 on 2nd), Paxton Pits (13 on 19th and 2 on 29th).

Nightingale Mar: Histon (24th, first date of the year beating the previous earliest date by 11 days!)

Apr: Paxton Pits (6th, 2 singing by the 11th and then maximum 6 on 22nd), Marsh Lane GP (14th), Fen Drayton Lakes (17th and 22nd), Castor Hanglands (max 21 singing on 30th), Wicken Fen (12th - 30th).

Starts and chats

Black Redstart Apr: Ferry Meadows (9th), Ouse Washes/Oxlode (female type on 23rd), Fowlmere village (26th), Great Shelford (female type on 27th).

Redstart Apr: Paxton Pits (10th), Nene Washes (12th), Marsh Lane GP (a male on 17th), Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (a female on 21st).

Whinchat Mar: Haddenham (26th – first of the year). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (23rd), Wicken Fen (30th).

Stonechat Mar: Burwell Fen (maximum 4 on 1st).

Wheatear Mar: Cambridge Science Park (10th – first of the year), Devil's Dyke (17th), Blackbush (2 on 23rd), Paxton Pits (23rd), Fowlmere NR (23rd). **Apr:** Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (total of 6 on 9th), Fen Drayton Lakes (3 on 17th), Burwell Fen (3 on 23rd), Nene Washes (4 on 23rd), Whittlesey (4 on 26th), Nene Washes (4 on 25th, 7 on 28th, 5 on 29th and a single on 30th), Deeping High Bank (3 on 27th), and 1 – 2 birds at 11 other sites during the month.

Pied Flycatcher Apr: Paxton Pits (a male on 10th). *Spring records are less common in Cambs than autumn ones, and this is the earliest ever recorded in the county by a single day; the previous record was at Morborne in 2011 and that beat a record of April 20th in 1981.*

Sparrows, wagtails and pipits

Tree Sparrow Apr: Haddenham (a female ? paired with a House Sparrow on 13th).

Yellow Wagtail Mar: Nene Washes (flyover on 28th, first for the year), Paxton Pits (30th). **Apr:** Paxton Pits (1st and 13 on 12th), Ouse Washes RSPB (1st and 2 on 5th); thereafter counts of 20+ at Haddenham/Aldreth Fens (22 on 12th) and Nene Washes (30+ on 18th).

'Blue-headed Wagtail' *Motacilla flava flava* the nominate form (see below) **Apr:** Nene Washes (21st).

Grey Wagtail Mar: Mare Fen (3 on 7th), Paxton Pits, Stirtloe (3 on 2nd). Apr: Bottisham Lock (2 on 25th).

Pied Wagtail Apr: Grafham Water (20 on 9th).

White Wagtail Apr: Haddenham/Aldreth Fen (2 on 2nd), Paxton Pits (6th, 2 on 7th, 4 on 9th and 2 on 17th and 24th), Grafham Water (4 on 9th and 2 on 22nd), Fen Drayton Lakes (12th), Ouse Washes (2 on 22nd), Whittlesey (25th), Cam Washes (26th).

A note of explanation: 'White' Wagtail is the nominate form i.e. the species (Motacilla alba alba). The 'Pied' Wagtail is a subspecies (Motacilla alba yarellii). The White Wagtail is found on most of Continental Europe whereas the Pied is a breeding bird of Britain and Ireland. This applies also to the 'Blue-headed' Wagtail (nominate form) and what we call the Yellow Wagtail – which is a subspecies.

Tree Pipit Apr: Castor Hanglands (13th).

Meadow Pipit Mar: Paxton Pits (63 on 19th).

Rock Pipit Apr: Grafham Water (4th).

Water Pipit Mar: Ouse Washes roost (maximum 32 on 17th), Mare Fen (9 on 1st).

Apr: Ouse Washes/Sutton Gault roost (maximum 15 on 1st).

Finches and buntings

Brambling Mar: Haddenham/Aldreth Fen (3 on 18th). Apr: Paxton Pits (9th), Ferry Meadows CP (2-3 from 14th – 22nd, possibly the latest date this year).

Siskin Mar: Paxton Pits (8 on 2nd and 2 over on 19th), Wicken Fen (a female caught and ringed on 23rd).

Linnet Mar: Holme Fen (20+ on 4th), Paxton Pits (c40 on 19th). Apr: Maxey Cut (30 on 15th).

Lesser Redpoll Mar: reported from Paxton Pits, Wicken Fen.

Mealy Redpoll Mar: Fen Drayton Lakes (2 on 17th), Wicken Fen (3 caught and ringed on 11th).

Crossbill Mar: Holme Fen (9 on 4th), Ramsey (2 on 15th).

Bullfinch Mar: Castor Hanglands (a 'general abundance' on 15th). Apr: Dogsthorpe Tip (18 on 18th).

Yellowhammer Mar: Paxton Pits (c40 on 19th).

Corn Bunting Mar: Sutton Gault (12+ on 7th). Apr: Ouse Washes/Chain Corner (12 on 10th).

Exotica

Baikal Teal (see above; may or may not be a true vagrant). Also reported: Red-breasted Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Hooded Merganser, Reeves's Pheasant.

Contributors: Richard Astle, David Avis, Louise Bacon, Geoff Barlow, Rowena Baxter, Peter Beesley, Guy Belcher, Peter Bircham, Richard Broughton, Chris Brown, Philip Bubb, Mike Burdekin, Howard Butler, Roger Buisson, Ian Burfield, Malcolm Busby, James Cadbury, Dave Chambers, Saimon Clark, Ade Cooper, Ali Cooper, Steve Cooper, Robin Cox, Carole Davis, Martin Davis, Tim Dee, Brendan Doe, Ian Dickerson, Steve Dudley, Mark Eaton, Ian Ellis, Mike Everett, Mike Foley, Andrew Gardener, Don Gardener, Simon Gillings, David Goulding, Ben Green, Derek Gruar, David Green, David A. Griffiths, Richard Grimmett, Dennis Hall, Andy Hannaford, James Hanlon, John Harding, Kevin Harris, Jeff Harrison, Stephen Hartley, Ian Harvey, Mark Hawkes, David Heath, Jonathan Heath, Mark Hill, Graham Hiron, Michael Holdsworth, David Hollin, Ken Hook, David Hopkins, John Hoppett, C. Hothersall, Sarah Howlett, Bob Humphrey, Richard Jackson, Sue Jarrett, Richard Johnson, Colin Kirtland, Charlie Kitchin, James Knightsbridge, John Le Gassick, Vincent Lea, Chris Lines, Tony Mallyon, Monica Marks, Owen Marks, Bruce Martin, Paul Mason, Steve May, Duncan McNiven, Matthew Mellor, Andy Merryweather, Owen Mountford, Dick Newell, M. J. O'Leary, Daniel Osborne, Dave Palmer, Richard Palmer, John Parslow, Gavin Paterson, Richard Patient, Mark Peck, Robert Pluck, Rob Pople, Duncan Poyser, Graeme Reed, Gareth Rees, Duncan Ritchie, Tony Roberts, Duncan Ritchie, Rob Scoffin, Ralph Sergeant, RSPB Reserves, Bill Simmonds, Clive Sinclair, Bob Smith, Nigel Sprowell, Rob Spragg, Kevin Standing, Simon Stirrup, Brian Stone, Isaac Swift, Andy Symes, Andrew Taylor, Jonathan Taylor, Kevin Taylor, Paul Taylor, Richard Thomas, Chris Thorne and the Wicken Fen Group, Gary Thornton, Andrew Tongue, John Walsh, Mark Ward, Ian Webb, Matt Webb, John Webb, Mike Weedon, Jamie Wells, Mike Wilson, Matt Wilson, John Wells, Peter Wells, Kevin Wilson, Rod Wilson, Hugh Wright, Barbara York, Christoph Zöckler.

Apologies for any names omitted in error.

Please note that the next print bulletin will arrive a week or so later than normal due to holidays.

Cambridge International Swift Conference

Following two successful conferences in Berlin in 2010 and 2012, the local Action for Swifts group hosted the 2014 Conference in Cambridge, from 8-10 April, with support from Swift Conservation, the RSPB and South Cambs District Council. There were about 140 participants from 23 countries, from as far afield as Canada, the USA and Brazil, to Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, as well as representatives from many European countries.

The programme covered a range of topics, including Life Cycle and Migration Studies, Conservation Projects of particular interest to architects and planners, Nest-boxing, Population Monitoring, and a half-day devoted to Swifts in the Arts and to Swift Welfare. The talks ranged from the scientific, for example, research into the flight mechanism of Swifts as revealed by wind tunnel studies, and fascinating accounts of migration tracking using geo-locators, to the personal and anecdotal, such as an amazing presentation of artwork by the wildlife artist, Jonathan Pomroy, and an erudite investigation of the Swift as a literary icon by Charles Foster.

Presentations were augmented by a wide range of posters describing everything from experimental nest-boxes to Swift rescue initiatives in Tashkent.

The Cambridge Conference also broke new ground. Whereas the Berlin conferences had confined themselves to the Common Swift, we also had presentations dealing with other Palearctic species such as Alpine and Pallid Swifts. And we were intrigued and entertained by our speakers from the New World, who gave us fascinating insights into the lives of Nearctic species like Chimney Swift, Vaux Swift and the relatively uncommon Northern Black Swift. In this context, everyone was stunned by the presentation of the Brazilian speaker, Renata Biancalana, who described the nineteen swift species to be found in Brazil, only a few of which are properly researched and described; and the incredibly difficult circumstances in which she carries out her research, having to contend with hostile terrain, stultifying bureaucracy, corruption and even danger to life and limb from unsavoury people.

The Conference dinner, in the Old Court dining hall of Caius College, was an experience few will forget, with speakers Andy Clements (BTO director) and Mike McCarthy, environmental journalist of the year from the Independent Newspaper. The final presentation was by Amnonn Hahn about the ceremony that takes place each spring to welcome the Swifts back to their breeding places in the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The film he showed us was so moving that very few people in the audience could avoid a tear or two. The Conference concluded with a stimulating panel discussion. What was most extraordinary was the passion that the attendees have for the Swift. It is truly an iconic bird, and we should thank our lucky stars that we still have breeding colonies in our area. Now that so many people are becoming aware of the plight of Swifts there is reason for optimism that their decline might be reversed.

Jake Allsop & Dick Newell actionforswifts.blogspot.com actionforswifts@gmail.com

Dick Newell also writes on Citizen Action for Swifts in the current edition of British Birds, May 2014.

East of England Ringers Conference, March 2014

Saturday 29 March saw a hundred or so ringers convene at Huntsman Advanced Materials in Duxford for the first East of England Ringer's Conference since the one organised by the Wicken Fen Group almost exactly ten years ago. This time the hosts were the Upper Cam Ringing Group who organised a splendid programme and provided an excellent home-prepared buffet lunch. A number of people had brought poster displays, and the BTO ran a sales counter for ringing supplies.

There was a good spread of attendees from each of the seven counties which border Cambridgeshire, and a good turnout of local RSPB and BTO professionals. Morning coffee and afternoon tea breaks, together with a full hour for lunch, provided lots of opportunities for catching up and networking. Tony Yeats introduced the day as a tribute to Roger Isted of the UCRG who so tragically died in a road traffic accident last year; lunchtime wine sales were to be donated to the East Anglian Air Ambulance in memory of Roger.

The sessions themselves were nothing if not content-rich and the morning was mainly about technology. Chris Hewson opened with an information-packed round-up of insights from tracking African migrants, managing to cover Cuckoos, Nightingales and Swifts in some depth in his forty minutes. Then to Ken Smith trying to puzzle out the goings-on with his relict PIT-tagged feeder Tree Sparrow in Hertfordshire. Viola Ross-Smith was also satellite-tracking, this time Lesser Black-backs, including a female on a daily feeding run along the A14 from Landguard to the tip at Milton. Rosemary Setchfield described her RSPB research on Corn Buntings. After lunch the theme switched to BTO surveys and a series of undisguised commercials for greater participation in more focussed ringing and recording. Carl Barimore talked of his own conversion to the rewards of nest-finding at Wicken; Jeff Kew brought new meaning to urban garden ringing with his hundreds of RAS Blackbirds and thousands of Siskins; and Chris Hughes enthused over his satisfaction at twenty-plus years of Constant Effort ringing at Bainton. The day finished with the customary no-holds-barred ringer Q&A fielded by Jacquie Clark, masterfully chaired by Ringing Committee chairman Ken Smith.

Michael Holdsworth

Forthcoming meetings

CBC/BTO CONFERENCE: 27-28th September

Woodland Birds: Conservation and Ecology

The main conference will be held at Cottenham Village College on Saturday Sept 27th, with a choice of field visits the following day, to RSPB The Lodge and other sites.

The programme will cover habitat and species studies and current conservation issues. Speakers will include Rob Fuller, Ken Smith, Linda Smith, Richard Broughton and Paul Bellamy.

To receive further details and a booking form as soon as it becomes available, contact Vicki Harley, (contact details on back page). Also, see the club website for updates.

OUTDOOR MEETINGS

Please book for the field meetings via Vicki Harley (contact details on back page), or contact her for further details.

Friday 13th June Godmanchester Nature Reserve

Meet at 7 pm for a guided walk with Amy Robinson.

This beautiful nature reserve consists of four lakes (former gravel pits), interspersed with grassland and ancient hedgerows, and forms a part of the Ouse Valley Living Landscape – a priority area for the Wildlife Trust's conservation work. The reserve is on the route of the proposed Godmanchester to Hartford road, so come and see why the Trust is so keen to save the reserve.

Amy Robinson is the Wildlife Trust Ouse Valley education and community officer.

For information on the reserve see: <http://www.wildlifebcn.org/reserves/godmanchester>

Friday 11th July RSPB Grange (Hope) Farm, Knapwell

Meet at 7 pm for a guided walk with Ian Dillon.

In 1999 the RSPB bought Hope Farm, a conventional arable farm with the aim to develop farming techniques that produce food cost-effectively and benefit wildlife at the same time. By 2010, farmland bird numbers had more than doubled. For information on Hope Farm, see:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/projects/details/255987-hope-farm>

Friday 8th August – Field meeting to be confirmed; for details [see the Club's website](#) and/or the next bulletin.

Next INDOOR MEETING: Friday 12th September, Cottenham Village College

Facing Extinction: the World's Rarest Birds and the Race to Save Them by Paul Donald

Dr Paul Donald is Principal Conservation Scientist in the RSPB's international research team and is the Editor-in-Chief of the international ornithological journal *Ibis*. Among his many research interests is the conservation ecology of critically endangered species, and he is the lead author of a recent book on the subject. In this talk he will discuss the causes of rarity in birds and will outline the measures that are being used to prevent their extinction.

NEW MEMBERS: We welcome Peter Appleton of Gazeley.

Club Contacts

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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

The editors would welcome contributions to the E-Bulletin and print edition, on topics such as identification problems, behaviour, summaries of club talks, and book reviews. Contact us at cdbcbulletin@cambridgebirdclub.org.uk , and use this address to let us know if you would like to receive your bulletin in e-mail format rather than paper.

Bird Records, sightings and news

If you have seen a scarce or local bird, please submit the news to the '[What's about](#)' page on the Club website via [Pete and Paul](#) who maintain an up-to-date selection of recent highlights. You can also report interesting sightings on the [Cambirds](#) email group (not run by the Club, but we access the records). Any major rarities can be phoned in to Birdline East Anglia on 07941 333970.

Full lists of your records should continue to be submitted monthly to **Louise Bacon** the County Recorder, preferably using the [spreadsheet](#) available on the Records section of the website, **by the 5th of the following month.**

GOOD BIRDING!