

The Harrier

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Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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EDITORIAL

W elcome to Harrier 162. A big thank you to everyone who has supplied material for this or previous (or future) *Harriers* – I could not put the group's magazine together without your contributions. My apologies for the shortage of illustrations in this and recent *Harriers*, which results in some rather dry pages of text; I seem to constantly put *The Harrier* together in a rush and haven't got round to seeking out illustrations relevant to the content, although there are several artists who willingly supply material if asked. I have now been editor of *The Harrier* for 10 years and feel it is time to give someone else a go – if there is anyone out there who would like to take this on then please get in touch; it really is not too arduous, especially as now everything, including photos, arrives and can be sent on in electronic format.

SOG is the county bird group. But there are many other bird groups of one sort or another active in the county. There are RSPB groups in Ipswich, Bury, Lowestoft and Woodbridge. I am aware that bird groups also exist in Lowestoft (the Lounge Lizards), Waveney, Lavenham, Beccles, Bawdsey and for the Stour Estuary; and there is a virtual West Suffolk birders yahoo group; and there may be others. There are ringing groups based at Dingle, Lackford, Redgrave & Lopham Fen and Market Weston Fen. This edition of *The Harrier* contains an introduction to BINS (a Suffolk based Bird Information Network Service). Plus of course SORC (the Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee) which already uses *The Harrier* as a voice-piece. I believe that one of the roles that SOG can and should play is as an umbrella for these groups which form part of an active and diverse birding scene in Suffolk. So this is an open invitation to any or all of these groups – if you would like to publicise yourselves and/or your events, or just provide some information about who you are and what you do, then I would very much welcome some short notes for inclusion in a future *Harrier*.

SOG remains active and has a strong band of volunteers working on behalf of the birders of Suffolk – taking part in Council, leading field trips, contributing to the Bird Report, administering recording (SORC) and ensuring smooth running behind the scenes. Nonetheless we must not be complacent. These are hard times for bird groups and natural history societies generally and we need to ensure SOG stays relevant in a modern world. I shall be resigning as Chairman at the next AGM (this my second term was always intended to be temporary) and several other

long-standing stalwarts are looking to hang up the reins. We need fresh, new enthusiastic people willing to play their part in the future of SOG – if interested, or just curious as to what it may entail, please get in touch.

Views expressed in The Harrier are not necessarily those of the editor or the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group.

Red Herrings and Norwegian Blues – a study of ringed gulls in the winter of 2009/2010

Jon Gibbs, John Grant and Mike Marsh

Gulls, gulp! Birdwatchers seem to love them or loathe them. Birders' attention has recently been drawn, in some cases somewhat grudgingly, to the rather taxing taxonomical issues surrounding the Herring Gull complex – if only because Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls are now both treated as separate species. Some observers, however, still seem to pay only passing attention even to these relatively glamorous gulls – once seen and ticked off they can be conveniently forgotten until next year. Many glaze over at the very mention of the word “gull”.

But – and it is a huge but – if you give gulls a chance to excite you they rarely fail. They belong to a dynamic family – populations seem to be surging in many cases, and many breeding and wintering ranges have been expanding at a bewildering pace. In some cases they represent a tough identification challenge, but that can be great fun – honest! In addition, many are actually very beautiful birds – and in many cases they can be real characters!

You can already see on which side of the fence the three authors sit. With this article – hopefully avoiding the pseudo-scientific pretentiousness of many birding papers that appear these days – we hope to inspire other observers to take a closer look at gulls in Suffolk and perhaps even to indulge in some ring-reading to add to the bank of knowledge being gained about gull movements from, through and into our county.

This winter's study began on a windswept November day in Minsmere's East Hide. A Great Black-Backed Gull was noted sporting a blue leg ring bearing the letters JZOT. Curiosity led the two JGs to find out more and soon we had established via the internet that this individual was ringed as a pullus in Norway in June 2005. It was next seen on 25th August, 2005, on a ship far from land in the German Bight area of the North Sea and then on land in The Netherlands in October 2008 before being noted in its native Norway in 2009, a few months before our sighting at Minsmere. A few months after our sighting it was back “home” in Norway again. It was indeed a “Norwegian Blue” – but certainly not the parrot of Monty Python fame!

Fired up, Jon in particular set about reading as many gulls' leg rings as possible over the winter and we set a cut-off date of 31st March 2010 for our sightings.

A total of 96 gull leg rings were read. The most numerous was Herring Gull – not

surprising this as most of our observations were made within a few miles of Orfordness, where Herculean amounts of ringing of this species and other gulls has taken place over several years. Indeed, during the 2010 breeding season alone more than 350 young gulls were colour-ringed at the site – 262 Lesser Black-backs, 87 Herring and two Great Black-backs, so there are plenty of new ones out there just waiting to be read.

In our little Suffolk study, 55 Herring Gull leg rings were read, involving birds being ringed or sighted in the UK, France, Belgium, Norway, The Netherlands and the Channel Islands.

A total of 20 Mediterranean Gull leg rings were read – the total being bumped up with a cross-border raid into Norfolk to see the “Meds” of Great Yarmouth. These involved birds ringed in or sighted in the UK, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and, most interestingly, Serbia and the Czech Republic.

Nine Lesser Black-backed Gull leg rings were read, involving birds being ringed or sighted in the UK, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands and Iceland.

Four Great Black-backed Gull leg rings were read, involving birds being ringed or sighted in the UK, The Netherlands, Norway, Belgium and France.

Finally, although not colour-ringed, Black-headed Gulls’ metal leg rings can sometimes be read and the details of eight were obtained, involving birds ringed or sighted in the UK, Finland and Sweden.

A wealth of data was collected even in our modest study. In addition to our old friend JZOT, who started the whole thing off, we have selected the following highlights to illustrate the fascinating travels undertaken by some gulls – underlining the truly international dimension of gulls’ lives and gull research.

- Lesser Black-backed Gull, red UTN: ringed as a pullus on 18th July 2004, on Orfordness, it was seen as a loafing non-breeder the following June at Matosinhos, Duoro Litoral, Portugal, before returning to its native Orfordness almost exactly a year later. It chose the top of St Peter’s Church, Aldeburgh, as a perching point on 23rd February 2010.
- Herring Gull, red HBL: an old favourite this one, having been reported more than 200 times since it was ringed as a pullus on Orfordness on 18th July 1998. The milestone 200th sighting came at Slaughden on 5th January 2010 – but this was no globetrotter as each of the reports came from no further afield than Southwold, with the bird showing a particular liking for Aldeburgh and Slaughden.
- Herring Gull, red KBS: ringed as a pullus on Orfordness on 9th July 2000, this was another home-loving bird. It became a standard feature on the roof of Aldeburgh’s White Lion Hotel during the study period, having previously been sighted at Southwold and Aldeby Tip, Norfolk between 2000 and 2006.
- Herring Gull, red KPB: a real Channel-hopper this one, with a particular liking for northern France. Ringed as a pullus on Orfordness on 10th July 2004, it was seen at Blaringhem, Nord, France in the two subsequent Decembers before visiting Great Yarmouth and Aldeby Tip in March 2006. On 4th January 2007 it was back at Blaringhem but in the next winter, on 4th January 2008, it had ventured to Nieuwpoort Vest-Vlaanderen in Belgium before returning to Blaringhem in March of that year. It returned to Orfordness in the summer of

2008, and was present again in February and June 2009 at least. It could not resist the lure of France again, however, and was in Armbouts-Capelle, Nord, France, on 5th January 2010 before visiting a site in mid-Suffolk on 8th February 2010.

- Herring Gull, orange MG9T: this character underwent a circuit of the North Sea in just over a year. Ringed at Pitsea Landfill Site, Essex, on 24th January 2009, it had reached Lowestoft on 15th May before crossing the North Sea to be seen at six sites in The Netherlands by 10th September and completing its North Sea circle by calling in at Minsmere on 6th February 2010.
- Herring Gull, white 6AA4: this one excited our colleagues in the Channel Islands. It was ringed as a pullus at Lihou, Guernsey, on 9th July 2009, and was resting on the old Sizewell A outfall rig on 26th January 2010 – apparently a rarely-reported movement for a Herring Gull from the Channel Islands.
- Mediterranean Gull, YHAO: an excellent record for Suffolk which got our pulses racing. It was ringed as an adult on Palic Lake, Subotica, Vojvodina, Serbia, on 17th May 2009. It was then encountered at Great Yarmouth ten times between 6th October 2009, and 24th February 2010, the last sighting being by Jon Gibbs, who then saw it again, at Minsmere on 18th March.

Dear old DIM Wallace had a phrase that seems to resonate with all this – “purposeful birding.” Without in any way wanting to sound pretentious, we know what he means. This has been fun birding with a point – we have added a little to the data bank relating to gulls’ movements and it has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience. All birdwatchers presumably feel some special connection with the birds they watch. But watching a ringed gull (or any other ringed bird for that matter) and, with hand-held computer technology, being able to find out almost immediately so much more about its life history really does get us “up close and personal” and adds an exciting and rewarding new dimension to birding.

However, it’s not been without its frustrations. Just after the cut-off date a Polish ringed “Caspian” Gull – yellow PAPN – was seen on Minsmere’s Scrape. We knew it was potentially from a hybrid zone, with Herring and Yellow-legged Gulls taking part in what is reportedly a free-for-all breed-with-each-other melee in parts of Poland, but the news of this bird was put out innocently enough as a Caspian Gull. After all, it looked very good for Caspian without being the longest-legged or longest-billed example. Now, in some quarters, doubts have crept in. It may have shown ominously dusky underwings and a few other ultra-fine-detail points that may have been anomalous. Or were these points simply within the variation that pure Caspians can show? All this seems to have enormous ramifications for all Suffolk and, indeed, all UK past and future records of Caspian Gull. This ringed bird proves we can receive Caspian Gulls from the hybrid zone – have all our Caspian Gulls been truly 100 per cent pure? Can any Caspian Gull record be accepted without the most painstaking forensic, feather-by-feather examination? Would it be best to refer to them all as “Caspian-type” gulls?

It’s enough to turn some away from gulls altogether. Some, maybe, but not us. We will persevere.

How to report your sightings. If you see a colour-ringed gull, or any colour-ringed

bird for that matter, visit the following websites and add to the wealth of knowledge that is being amassed:

www.euring.org – the site for reporting all European colour rings, with links to the BTO site, or www.cr-birding.be – this lists all European colour-ringing projects with a complete list of contacts and links.

In addition, you may wish to browse the following sites:

www.ntgg.org.uk – this logs all our neighbouring group's captures and sightings.

www.guernseygulls.blogspot.com – The blog of Paul Veron, a really avid ring-reader!

www.ringmerking.no – an easy-to-follow data-logging site for Norwegian gulls.



*A selection of colour ringed gulls, including "red KBS" (top right) mentioned in the text.
Photos by Jon Evans.*

What's in a name

Clive Collins

I have been intrigued by the recent pleas for the retention of the name “Sparrowhawk” pure and simple, rather than its “pedantic” (according to David Tomlinson) replacement “Eurasian Sparrowhawk”, because the name “sparrowhawk” itself is certainly a survivor. Together with “goshawk”, “kite” and “harrier” it forms an Old English raptor quartet whose names have survived from before the Norman invasion. “Sparrowhawk” is the Old English “spearhafoc”, from “spearwa” and “hafoc”, both of which first appeared in documents of the 8th century; “goose” is the Old English “gos”, “kite” is from the Old English “cyta”, and “harrier” is an extension from the Old English verb “hergian”, to harry, or to pursue and ravage. All our other raptor names are linguistic imports superimposed on our language by the Norman-French speaking invaders who settled in the country after the battle in 1066, bringing with them their ultimately Latin-derived vocabulary. You can probably work out what birds these are: eagle, busard, cresserelle, esmerillon, hobet, orfraie, faucon and voltour. That's right – all of them from Norman French, and in several cases pushing out of our language perfectly good Old English names that had been around for centuries, and which in fact live on in dozens of villages up and down the land which were first named in medieval times. The eagle was the “erne” in Old English, presumably used for both species then common in England, for it is remarkable that the name can be found in place-names the length and breadth of the country, from Earnshaw Bridge in Lancashire (“bridge by the small wood frequented by eagles”) to Earnley in Sussex (“meadow where eagles are found”); from Yarnscombe in Devon (“valley of the eagles”) to Eridge Green in Kent (“ridge where eagles fly”). Similarly, in Anglo-Saxon times the buzzard was known as the “wrocc”, and gave its name to Wroxhall on the Isle of Wight and Wroxton in Oxfordshire – “Werochestan” in the 1086 Domesday Book, meaning “the home-stead where buzzards are found” – plus several villages called Wraxhall. You would expect our commonest raptor, the Kestrel, to have had its own name in Old English, and it did: “stangella”, made up from “yeller”, after its shrieking “kek-kek-kek” call, and the intensifier “stone” (which has survived in “stone-deaf”, for example). By Shakespeare's time this had been modified to “staniel”. In “Twelfth Night” Malvolio finds what he thinks is a love-letter left for him by the Countess Olivia; in fact it is a forgery, and a trick. When Malvolio sees it on the path in front of him Sir Toby Belch, one of the plotters, says: “And with what wing the staniel checks at it” – i.e. see how the kestrel stops to hover over it. The kestrel had some other names in Old English, but unfortunately they are far too rude to be printed in a journal that might be read by children!

One question which arises from this excursion along ornitho-etymological byways is: why were some Old English raptor names retained, while others were replaced by Norman-French imports? The answer I think lies in that recreational pastime in which the Anglo-Norman aristocracy loved to indulge when they weren't bashing Saxon serfs: falconry. The birds which the falconers employed were given French names (as were most of the prey species, such as partridge, pigeon, grouse and quail). But birds such as the sparrowhawk, goshawk, kite and harrier were, because

of their hunting behaviour, practically useless for falconry. They don't circle and stoop from on high onto their quarry. They dart through woodland, or drift along looking for carrion or small mammals and reptiles. There is no spectacle involved, and in addition they were virtually impossible to train. Consequently falconers rarely bothered with them, and were content to leave them with their unfashionable, unglamorous Old English names.

So here's to the spearhafoc as it cuts through the trees and swoops over the hedges, bringing terror to the finches, tits and Dunnocks (all thoroughly respectable Old English names). Long may it flourish, Eurasian or otherwise.

The East Anglian Heights: do they stand at the crossroads of overland bird migration in southern England

Jeff Martin

Overland migration also takes place, of course, but at present little is known about its direction or volume. W H Payn – The Birds of Suffolk, 1962. (2nd ed.1978)

Shortly after the Second World War, two important papers were published on overland bird migration across the UK (Lack & Lack, 1949, and Simms, 1950). Eric Simms made his observations on a farm near Preston-on-Stour in the Cotswolds, while the observations of Elizabeth and David Lack (henceforth referred to as the Lacks) (Fig. 1) were made along the northern escarpment of the Chiltern Hills. These studies were largely based upon autumn migration, especially in October, and involved mainly, but not totally, the passage of Chaffinches, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks.

Following these revelations great interest was expressed in trying to establish the origins of those and many other migrating bird species across the UK. The north Norfolk coast, and subsequently The Wash, was named as a possible route through to the Cotswolds, and also to the Chilterns, while the coast of East Anglia, in the vicinity of Harwich and Felixstowe was also thought to be an important entry point for migrants from mainland Europe and which were also destined for the Chilterns and beyond.

These studies followed on from work that had been carried out before, during and shortly after the Second World War (see Boase, 1927; Glegg, 1928; Allen, 1944 & Glegg, 1947 for examples). Consequently, following the studies of

Simms and the Lacks, there then ensued a number of other papers on this subject (see Darlington, 1951; Raines, 1950 & Wood, 1950 for examples), while a little later Eric Simms compiled these routes with a little more detail (Simms, 1952). Some while later the British Trust for Ornithology



Fig. 1: Direction of October Migrants.
(Revised from Lack 1950)

(BTO) set up a network of overland observers, although unfortunately this project did not remain in place for very long. Throughout all of this activity scant attention was paid to East Anglia, and especially to the region of south-west Suffolk and north-west Essex. This area stands at the eastward extent of the chalk escarpment upon which the Lacks made their observations, and is an area which I now refer to as 'The East Anglian Heights'. The title of this low chalk ridge has received some derision in the past, but Williamson (2006) was content to use it, and for our purposes it is a fitting one.

The East Anglian Heights

The East Anglian Heights are sited at the eastern end of a north-eastern chalk escarpment which has its origins in the Wiltshire chalk downlands. It really develops into a feature in the county of Oxfordshire, and then runs through the counties of Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, finally ending in Suffolk to the south-west of Bury St Edmunds. In his review of East Anglia, Steggall (1978) points out that just to the west of Royston, a town in Hertfordshire that stands on the north facing escarpment of 'The East Anglian Heights', there exists an area which *'provides a tremendous view northwards over the thousands of flat acres stretching beyond Cambridge towards the Wash'*.

The highest points in each of the counties which make up The East Anglian Heights (henceforth referred to as 'The 'Heights') are at Great Chishill (TL4238) in Cambridgeshire, where the land rises to 480 feet (146m.) asl., at High Wood (TL4536) in Essex, just to the north-west of Arkesden, where the land stands at 460 feet (140m.), and at Great Wood, near Elms Farm (TL7955) in Suffolk, (Fig. 2) where the land rises to 419 feet (128m.). Just to the north of Great Wood are the remains of Chedburgh Airfield, a former Royal Air Force (RAF) base. Approximately 3¾ miles (6km.) to the south-west of Great Wood are the remnants of Stradishall Airfield, also a former RAF base. A number of the original RAF buildings survive at this site, and these together with some recent additions now form Highpoint Prison. The name 'Highpoint' is a misnomer as the land here stands at 394 feet (120m.) asl. To the immediate rear of the prison lies what is probably the largest area of unimproved grassland in the county. Formerly farmland, it was bought in the 1930s by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and it officially opened as an operational air base in 1938, at a time when pesticides and chemical fertilisers were in their infancy, and to the best of my knowledge, those have never been used on this site.

Due to the fact that Stradishall Airfield lies on heavy clay, it was soon discovered that although the site was good for growing wheat, it was not good for heavy bombers. Consequently, despite the extensive under draining that was carried out during its construction, the glue-like mud that appeared after heavy rain quickly led to RAF Stradishall becoming the first airfield in Bomber Command to be scheduled for hardened runways. Today the runways have gone, and grass has taken over. This is grazed by a small herd (c 40) of cattle in summer, but their presence is preceded in spring, following a mow to encourage a better grazing sward, by one of the most extensive carpets of Cowslips likely to be seen in southern England. With the exception of the prison compound (within which lies a rookery), the old airfield of Stradishall is still under the jurisdiction of the MOD, and access is restricted to permit

holders. We shall return to this subject later, but for the present we return to ‘The Heights’.

In human terms ‘The Heights’ are sparsely populated. It has always been an important agricultural area and none more so than since the Second World War. It was once a very important area for elm trees (Martin, 2008) but since the ravages of elm disease and intensive farming, there are now comparatively few large trees of any species at all in the area. During the period 1851-1951 there was a decline in the human population of south-west Suffolk in general, but since then the population has increased (Dymond and Martin, 1979), and while the population is not so great as it is in east Suffolk, it does mean that potentially there are now more bird recorders here than at any other time in Suffolk’s history.

The East Anglian Heights (not to scale)

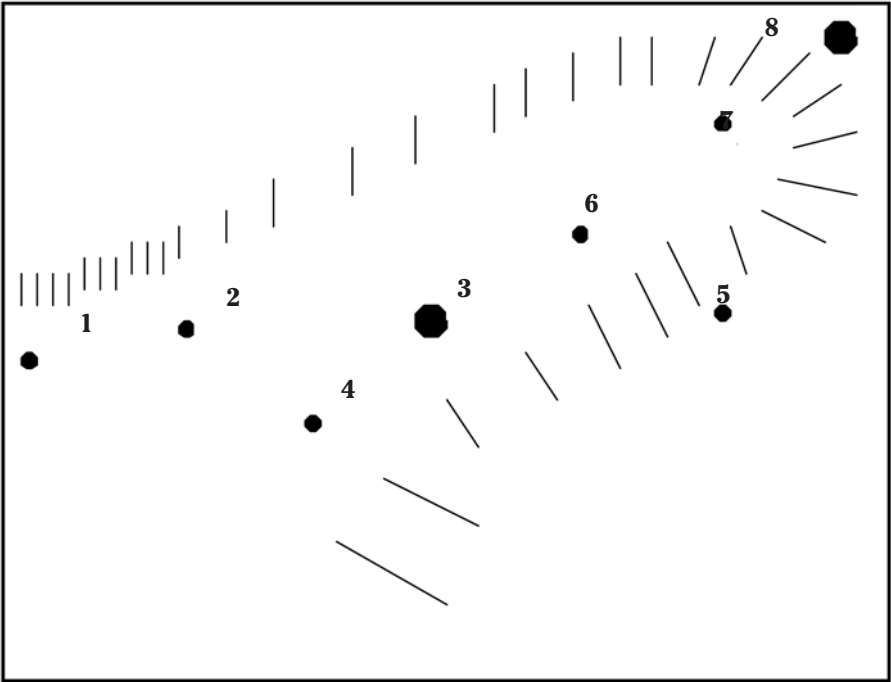


Fig 2: Approximate locations of locations mentioned in the text.

This poor outline drawing provides an approximate guide to those locations mentioned in the text. For more precise locations then it would be best to consult a suitable Ordnance Survey map. The vertical and diagonal lines are inserted to try and demonstrate the slope.

Short lines suggest a steeper aspect of the escarpments, longer ones a gentler view.

Locations: 1 Reydon (Herts), 2 Great Chishill (Cambs), 3 Saffron Walden, 4 Arkesden, (Essex), 5 Clare (Suffolk), 6 Stradishall Airfield, 7 Chedburgh Airfield, 8 Bury St Edmunds

The Suffolk background

It is now some 57 years since Payn (1952-3) presented his notes upon the status of the birds of south-west Suffolk. He remarked that '*Since Churchill Babington published his "Catalogue of the Birds of Suffolk" nearly seventy years ago, the west side of the county and in particular the south-west portion, has received scant attention ornithologically. C.B.Ticehurst's "History of the Birds of Suffolk," which was a far more thorough work in all other respects, unfortunately dealt very largely with East Suffolk and the "Brecks", and indeed little has changed since Payn wrote those notes.*

In his avifauna Payn (1978) set aside a section devoted to 'Overland Migration', and he emphatically stated that overland migration occurred in Suffolk but that little was known of it. In writing his avifauna Payn pointed out the contribution that bird-watchers in the remote area of south-west Suffolk could make on this subject, but with a few exceptions this was not followed up, although some useful information did radiate from that area during the 1980s, especially in the Sudbury and Haverhill areas, but that had largely dried up by the mid 1990s. He stated that some of the old Suffolk airfields offered good opportunities to observe overland migration, and amongst those he listed was Chedburgh. He left out Stradishall because at the time of his writing it was still an RAF station and so was presumably out of bounds to the public. Commenting upon diurnal overland bird migration he stated that '*Swallows, house martins, swifts, and kestrels, amongst others habitually travel across country and records show that a regular movement of waders takes place through Suffolk*'. All this, and more, is true and in the following account I give an overview of what goes on in that fascinating and much over-looked part of Suffolk.

A recent and brief account of bird migration through south-west Suffolk

It was during the course of the early 1980s and 1990s that I ventured into south-west Suffolk as often as possible in my search for Barn Owls, and later I presented a brief account of their decline there (Martin, 1984 & Martin, 2008). It was during this period that I made my first visits to Stradishall along with Dave Bakewell in search of wintering Hen Harriers when access to the area was, at that time, unrestricted. It was then a much quieter place than it is now. The prison complex was still in its early years, and most of the hangars within it were still present. During the 1990s the MOD once again became active at this site, and it was closed off to the public. This was facilitated by the construction of a deep ditch around the site, while the previous access roads (formerly the perimeter track, and emergency access places) were closed off by barricades of earth etc. It then became an active infantry training ground, and in keeping with the requirements of infantry training, some blocks of trees were planted (Fig. 3). Even today there can be fewer tranquil places in Suffolk, and usually the only noise, apart from the birds, is the background conversations and subdued shouts from the prison inmates, or the occasional civil aeroplane flying over. The only real disturbance that I have perceived to the bird life occurs at weekends in fine weather when a few model aeroplane enthusiasts use a small part of the airfield, although the aircraft do fly beyond the area which is used as a take-off and landing area. Being one of the highest spots in Suffolk, it does mean that Stradishall can be very windy on occasions, and on late winter afternoons it can be

an extremely cold place. At times it is, without doubt, one of the most inhospitable, undisturbed and desolate places that I know of in Suffolk. Ornithologically however, in my view, it can also be one of the most exciting.

It was during the early 1990s that my visits to the old airfield ceased until 2007, when the fieldwork for the new breeding bird atlas began. This gave me the incentive to re-kindle my interest in south-west Suffolk and also an incentive to visit the old airfield to assist with MOD bird counts. This provided me with a greater appreciation of the overall range of species that occur in this area rather than just concentrating on one, as I did formerly. I had, by then, become interested in overland bird migration. This interest was first aroused when I read two papers some years ago, regarding the passage of waders and sea-birds off the south-coast of England and their overland movements (Newnham, 1984 & Newnham, 1985), but there were other things during the atlas period that also aroused my interest.

One such event occurred in July 2009, when we were parked in a quiet spot at Poslingford for a cup of tea after surveying a nearby tetrad. It was while we were there that I noticed a number of Common Swifts flying overhead. What attracted my attention though was that these swifts were not wheeling around in typical feeding mode. These swifts were intent on one thing only, and that was flying positively but steadily in a south-westerly direction. I subsequently discovered that in July and August, thousands and thousands of swifts were passing through this region, and especially along the valley of the River Stour (Fig. 4), in the vicinity of Clare (Martin, in prep.) Further observations elsewhere in south-west Suffolk confirmed my thoughts that this region, and especially the eastern most part of the Chiltern Hills, ie 'The Heights', is an important migration area for a considerable number of species, and that the numbers which pass through there are significant.

Subsequent observations revealed that to the north-west of Stradishall, in what might be termed as the north facing escarpment of 'The Heights', numbers of raptors pass through, including Hobbies and Kestrels, while in September of 2009 at least 10 buzzards were observed in one group, and additional numbers of buzzards on migration have been seen on other occasions. Unfortunately the group of ten was disturbed by a passing helicopter and they disappeared before positive identification could be made, but from what I could see they were probably Common Buzzards. Apart from raptors, plovers, mainly Lapwing are often seen in flocks as they too move along the northern escarpment. At the centre stage of all this stands Stradishall Airfield, and although it would appear not to have a great range of nesting species, at various times of the year it does have the most interesting and wide range of species passing through it and sometimes they appear in large numbers.

The migration period is especially important, and here I am not just concerned with autumn migration. Spring time too brings its surprises in the form of Red-backed Shrikes, while Swifts, Swallows, House Martins, Hobbies, Wheatears, Willow Warblers, Turtle Doves and Whinchats, amongst a host of other bird species, all make their way mainly north-eastwards in spring, while in autumn, on their return, they head for the west, south-west or the south.

The most startling thing to witness in autumn especially is the sight of Swallows and House Martins flying north-westwards across the airfield. My presumption, yet to be confirmed, is that those species, and probably many others, fly west along the

valley of the River Stour and as they near the origins of that river, and its landmark qualities are lost amongst the vegetation, the birds then leave this waterway and branch off in a north-westerly manner to enter 'The Heights' and then follow the chalk ridge that will eventually take them to Oxfordshire, and then finally on to southern Europe or Africa. I have seen martins and Swallows flying in a north-westerly direction at Poslingford, which is on a line half way between Clare and Stradishall, so the presumption is, that is what they do. Contrary to this I have, in spring, also seen Swallows flying fast, and in a positive manner, in a southerly direction at Kedington and Stradishall, while the numbers of finches, pipits and larks travelling north at Kedington in autumn, can also be interesting, but there are other minor routes yet to be fully defined, that contribute to the eastward passage of migrants in spring, and the westward one in autumn.



Fig. 3: *The site of the former runways at Stradishall. The original water tower, which stands within the prison complex along with most of the remaining buildings, can be seen in the distance to the left of the picture, whilst in the centre stands one of the tree plantations.*

A fascinating spectacle to witness in autumn at Stradishall is the sight of Swallows, House Martins and other species, such as Hobbies and numbers of Carrion Crows for example, flying in a southerly direction, while at the same time Swallows, martins and other species are flying in a north westerly direction. While all of this is going on there are groups of Skylarks, Chaffinches, Meadow Pipits and other birds, all flying in a westerly direction. At such times you certainly feel that you are at an avian crossroads. Goldfinches and other species also stop off to rest and feed at the airfield, and on one occasion last September there was a flock of over 120 present. Waders, such as Snipe and Lapwing, also use the airfield. In the 1980s, when I made

fairly regular visits to the old airfield, it was possible in winter time to see six Short-eared Owls present, and a roost of Hen Harriers often held up to at least four individuals of this uncommon species. Merlins too would put in the occasional appearance, and they may still do, while Curlew and other waders would also stop off. I have not found Hen Harriers there recently, but in early spring 2010, I was delighted to see a Short-eared Owl.



Fig 4: *The upper valley of the River Stour near Clare. Swifts, martins and Swallows can often be seen in migration periods in this shallow part of the valley.*

The old satellite airfield of Chedburgh also offers some wonderful sights, and the range of breeding birds there is greater, in my view, than Stradishall. Migrants also pass through, and in mid-June 2010 it was still possible to see flocks of House Martins, Swallows and Swifts, with an accompanying Hobby, all flying north-eastwards on migration. It is not clear yet whether Chedburgh also serves as a cross roads for migrant birds, but provisional observations suggest that it does, although perhaps on not such a grand scale as Stradishall.

These are just a few of the observations that I have made on my all too infrequent visits to this interesting part of East Anglia, and further research may confirm the thoughts of some earlier ornithologists, that migrant birds enter the UK through the Wash, and then either fly down to 'The Heights' and then west along the Chiltern escarpment and on to the west, or continue flying south, along the valley of the River Lea, on to the Walthamstow reservoirs and then perhaps on to the RSPB reserve at Rainham Marshes, or south into Kent, or on over London. The Wash must undoubtedly be an extremely important entry point for those birds which are intent upon overland migration through southern England (Martin in prep.) but this route

may not only be an important area for land birds, it may well turn out to be important for seabirds, and Thomas (2007) has presented strong evidence that skuas travel overland from the Wash to Somerset. If they do then it is likely that they use the Chiltern Hills route via 'The Heights' to reach that county.



Fig 5: A view near Nayland, in the mid-lower reaches of the Stour valley. Although the valley is not so shallow here, Swifts, martins and Swallows are not often seen. This might suggest an alternative route to Clare, but is more likely to be as a result of those birds flying much higher, especially the swifts and martins.

Elsewhere, the estuaries of the Rivers Orwell and Stour must also be important starting points for many migrants on their way to Africa and elsewhere. Since its formation the Landguard Bird Observatory has provided a great deal of useful information which has yet to be tied up with many aspects of overland migration across southern England. What a pity there is not something on the lines of an observatory at 'The Heights'. What revelations lie in waiting there? There is a useful ringing station at Lackford, and also at Rye Meads, in Hertfordshire, but there appears to be nothing along those lines in south-west Suffolk, or north-west Essex.

The threats

Unfortunately there are threats to these unique and wonderful inland flyways. On 13th July 2010 it was announced by British Telecom that plans for a windfarm of up to six 300 ft turbines have been submitted for a site at Clare, in south-west Suffolk. If planning consent is granted, then this will stand directly on the River Stour migratory path I have just described.

Elsewhere in this region, due to cut-backs, the MOD has announced its intention of disposing with Stradishall Airfield. In the first instance the airfield is being offered for sale back to the family members of the original landowners, but in view of today's land prices, compared with the 1930s, and the present state of farming, that sale seems unlikely. A use of this 'waste land' might be to expand the adjacent prison to help accommodate the burgeoning prison population. However, in light of the recent government cutbacks in expenditure that might not be a realistic venture. The case might also be put forward for additional housing, but it seems likely that there are other sites which exist in this region which offer better facilities.

As I have already described, Stradishall Airfield is a large open area standing on high ground, in a remote spot of East Anglia. To those disposed to wind farms then this might also be an ideal location on which to site a number of these turbines. In his review of bird migration Newton (2010) has expressed great concern at the large numbers of wind turbines that are being erected across Europe and Britain. He pointed out that wind turbines, which have been placed on major migratory bird routes, are known not only to kill birds, they also have a 'scarecrow' effect in deterring migrating birds from stopping off and feeding.

In conclusion

In this brief outline I have tried to convey the importance of this area in terms of bird migration. Birds are creatures of habit, and so it is likely that migrating birds have been using these flyways over southern England for many thousands of years. Why they fly across the North Sea from Europe before travelling through southern England, as they undoubtedly do, and then on to southern Europe or Africa, instead of flying directly southwards, we can only guess at present, but to upset these migratory patterns without assessing the damage that large scale developments might have on them would be negligent in the least.

As I have described, 'The East Anglian Heights' are not precipitous, but they do offer some diversification to the East Anglian landscape. They also offer, at present, a reasonably safe highway for large numbers of migrant birds to and from wherever they reside, in winter or summer. Most migrant birds are declining in numbers, and especially those which winter in Africa or southern Europe. With so much effort now being put in to their conservation it is up to us to do all we can to provide them with a safe journey through our country, once they reach our shores. In my view the nation has a duty not only to protect nesting birds, it has an obligation to protect what may well turn out to be migration routes of international importance.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Derek Moore, for pointing me in the right direction, and to the editors of *British Birds* for allowing me to reproduce David Lack's map.

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A Goshawk encounter

David Tomlinson

Here's a sweeping statement that's bound to raise a few eyebrows. Despite only living in Suffolk for a mere six years, I reckon I have more experience of watching hunting Goshawks in Thetford than any member of the SOG. However, I admit to cheating, as my experience comes from days out in the company of falconers, flying Goshawks on Elveden estate. During the course of a typical day, with five falconers (or more correctly austringers) each with a Gos, you get the chance to witness several flights, usually at pheasants, a few of which are successful.

Goshawks aren't friendly birds, so only one individual is ever flown at a time. If two birds are free simultaneously there is a strong probability that one will kill the other, and killing is what these birds are good at. Before I went hawking the first time I had a wonderful image of a cock Pheasant flushing, the Gos being cast from the wrist and capturing the pheasant in the air. Such classic encounters do happen, but rather rarely. It's more usual for both hawk and pheasant to disappear from sight, usually into woodland. The falconer's telemetry tells him that his bird has stopped flying, so he follows on looking for his hawk. If it has been a successful flight it's

likely to be mantling a dead Pheasant; if it has been unsuccessful (and most are), it will be sitting in a tree, getting its breath back.

When a Gos has sighted its prey it pursues it just like an Exocet missile. Falconers' birds never gain the same experience of hunting as wild individuals, so lack some of the latter's skills, but even so it's noticeable how the older and more experienced hawks are invariably the most successful hunters. I remember on one occasion following a Goshawk into a wood where it has disappeared in pursuit of a pheasant. We eventually located both birds underground down a rabbit hole. The Pheasant had presumably gone down the hole in a bid to escape the hawk, but the latter was not to be put off so easily. The Pheasant, I might add, was dead.

Even if you have no interest in hawking, these days are invaluable in providing a wealth of experience of Goshawks, and as we all know, the more experience you have of a bird in the field, the easier it is to identify with certainty, even following the briefest of sightings. In addition to my hawking days, I've been lucky enough to have seen wild Goshawks in more than a dozen European countries, from Finland to Spain. Goshawks are widely distributed and often not uncommon, and much my best views of wild birds have been abroad. However, it's still possible to spend a week birding in prime Goshawk country and not be lucky enough to see one.

I live on the edge of the Brecks, in what ought to be prime goshawk country. Mayday Farm is, as the goshawk flies, only about 10 miles away. Yet in nearly six years of living here I've only had a single sighting, nor have there been any possible/probable encounters. This seems surprising, as I'm not unobservant, and there is abundance of game around my house to attract a Goshawk. In contrast, an average year produces at least three sightings of Peregrines.

My sole local sighting of a Gos was in September 2009. It was a very warm September day, and I had decided to paint my hen house. It was the time of the year when there was a reasonable chance of seeing a migrant or two fly over, so as a precaution I had my binoculars with me, mainly in hope of ticking off a House Martin for the monthly list. Suddenly there was a mass panic among the local Wood Pigeons. They were scattering in all directions, and my resident Swallows were giving their shrill alarm call. I looked up, grabbing my binoculars in the hope of seeing a Peregrine, but instead was rewarded with a fine view of a young Goshawk.

I've always been a jizz birdwatcher: a combination of the way a bird moves, coupled with its shape and general appearance, being, in my view, the best way to identify it. The instant I saw this bird I knew I was looking at a Goshawk, though the mass panic of the pigeons was a pretty good indicator, as there's no such reaction when a Sparrowhawk flies over. The hawk started soaring, so I dashed into the house and grabbed my camera from the kitchen table, then rushed back outside in the hope of locating it again.

It never fails to amaze me how, in just a few seconds, a bird you have been watching can completely disappear. Amazingly, this time it was still in view, though gaining height rapidly and rather distant. I bashed off a few shots in the hope of getting some proof of my sighting, rather than anything else. Digital photography is wonderful: at least two of my shots were sufficiently sharp and clear to allow considerable enlargement.

I duly logged my sighting on Birdtrack, and it wasn't long before Nick Moran, the



*Goshawk hawking at Elveden in 2007 –
David Tomlinson*

Birdtrack organiser, came back to me asking for further details. I soon discovered that Goshawk records are the most frequently rejected of any species by county bird recorders, invariably because of confusion with female sparrowhawks. I duly emailed my two best photographs to Nick and was delighted to hear that my identification had been accepted: the bulging secondaries were, I was told, a clinching field mark, though one I admit to being unaware of until then. I simply knew it was a Goshawk, and would have been mildly irritated if my record had been rejected.

The moral to this story is that the more experience you can get of a species the better, while it's ever so helpful to get your record accepted if you happen to have a camera to hand. Incidentally, I'm quite happy for Goshawks to remain rarities here, as I'm sure my free-range Pekin bantams would suffer if they were more frequent visitors.

Recent Field Meetings

Lakenheath and Lackford – 23rd May 2010

Gi Grieco [Leaders Gi Grieco & Dave Pearsons]

On a pleasant sunny morning fourteen members, including my daughter Isabella on her first SOG meeting, met in the west of the county at the excellent Lakenheath reserve. A good selection of birds can now be seen here, with a couple of potential speciality species if luck was with us.

Following the path outwards by the rail track the reed bed and scrub held good numbers of warblers, with particularly Reed Warbler being numerous, along with good views of Reed Buntings. Another species heard was Cuckoo and over the whole walk we must have encountered at least six, which is a good tally for this declining species. From the first viewpoint we heard Water Rail and briefly saw Bearded Tit, with Great Crested Grebe on the pool within the reeds. Carrying along the path and peering in to one of the poplar plantations a Great Spotted Woodpecker was noted and was seen to enter a hole in a trunk. While some members continued to watch the area and were rewarded with good views of a Spotted Flycatcher, others further up the path were fortunate to have a male

Golden Oriole fly over from another plantation. A male Marsh Harrier and a Grey Heron were also seen here.

On reaching the second plantation some were lucky to briefly view a female Oriole, while a Cetti's Warbler could be heard. Careful scanning showed no further sign of the Oriole so moving further up a male could be heard singing tantalizingly close but as so often not within sight! After spending time in the now very hot conditions some opted for the end viewpoint, while the more determined and those unfortunate not yet to have an Oriole sighting kept vigil hoping for a sighting. Persistence paid off in the end with views of the Oriole and some saw a Red Kite.

Looking over the far reed bed a further four Marsh Harriers were counted along with up to eight Hobbies, more Bearded Tits and a Bittern was heard booming. Back along the path by the river a Common Tern was seen patrolling up and down and an Egyptian Goose on one of the dried pools along the bank. Scanning of the large pool for Garganey was in vain with no sign though there were many Tufted Ducks and Mallard present and further Great Crested Grebes. Dave and my daughter were lucky in seeing a grass snake along the footpath. A good selection of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies were seen around the site, most notably common blue, small heath, hairy dragonfly and a male banded demoiselle. We decided to go back to the cars for lunch and get some shelter from the sun. Some of the group opted to sit in their cars while others sat round one of the picnic tables and while doing so we all sat bolt upright, sandwiches thrown down and heads looking left and right as we heard a Golden Oriole nearby or so we thought! It turned out my daughter had recorded the singing oriole earlier and was playing it back and had completely fooled us all!

Those who had not seen the Oriole were still, at this point, at the plantation – fortunately they had their lunch with them – and had decided to stay on so the rest of us all headed to Lackford. Our first port of call was to look at the bird feeders and we had good views of Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer and we heard a Nightingale. Again the song of Golden Oriole was heard and those not present earlier were getting excited until the prankster with her phone was revealed and caused much laughing amongst the group! Heading to the first hide we saw a Common Tern, two Little Ringed Plover and a tundra race Ringed Plover, several duck species and a Cuckoo was heard.

We decided to call it a day as the sun was still baking hot and with water running out further liquid refreshment was required along with ice creams from the reserve centre. My thanks to Dave on his first trip as leader and to all the members who made it an enjoyable trip.

Blaxhall Common for Nightjars, 3rd June 2010

Ashley Gooding [Leader]

It was the perfect evening for looking for Nightjars when we met in the car park at Blaxhall common. It had been a very sunny day and the evening was warm and still, but I felt that I should let the assembled know that on two recent visits it had not been good; I saw the smiles drop from a couple of people's faces, oh dear.

Not far up the track Val, I think, picked up a Hobby perched on top of a dead birch

tree and as we moved further up we had reasonable views but always against the light. It was not until we reached the top of the track that we were all indebted to Ivan for the excellent views obtained through his 'scope.

Churring started at 21.40 and it was not long before we had our first sighting of a male that I picked up flying towards us as everybody was looking in the opposite direction towards the churring bird. It showed very well as it flew across the track above our heads flashing its white wing and tail patches and briefly landed in a tree nicely silhouetted against the pale blue sky. As on the previous occasions that I had visited, the birds suddenly stopped churring and it was a full half hour or so until they resumed, so we spent the time debating which planet was on show, Jupiter or Venus, and listening to the night sounds especially the Tawny Owls, and we also saw the Hobby again flying in the dark. There were now at least five birds churring at various distances and we had some more good views of birds close to the track, best seen when they rose above the tree line and were silhouetted against the sky. It never really got dark and it was 22.45 when we arrived back at the cars without the need for torches.

So another good evening was had by all and I was so pleased that my fears about the evening were unfounded. Many thanks to all who shared this enchanting evening.

Minsmere and Nightjars, 18th June 2010

Paul Gowen [Leader]

This year's mid-summer evening trip to Minsmere was held on a very cool, breezy and overcast evening [more like March than June] when the leader was joined by a very select group of members, namely Marian & Barry Hart and Brian Taylor a recently joined member on his first fieldtrip with SOG. It transpired that Marian, Barry & Brian had all been on the same trip to Bulgaria, albeit in different years, so the leader was regaled with their reminiscences of the sights and birds seen – this certainly made up for the general lack of birds at Minsmere during the evening. I can only guess that the other 400+ SOG members chose to watch England play Algeria in the World Cup or just sat in front of the fire at home!

The scrapes at Minsmere were in the most part dried up and were inundated with breeding Black-headed Gulls many of whose young were now the size of their parents. The noise of the Vuvuzelas at the World Cup was nothing compared to the "racket" made by the gulls which intensified upon visits by Marsh Harriers looking for their next meal. It was decided that the route for the night would be a walk to the Island Mere Hide and back to the car park via the Bittern Hide before Westleton Heath for the Nightjars.

At the Island Mere a few Marsh Harriers were seen flying over the reeds bringing in food or just sitting on the bushes and posts. For the second year running a Spoonbill was seen flying over the reserve and the Bitterns kept a low profile and were not seen from this or the Bittern Hide. Two sightings of Hobby were noted from the Bittern Hide as were hundreds of Swifts hawking for insects over the reed beds. Just before we left the Bittern Hide a Grey Heron landed in the water just in front of the hide and as he was prospecting a young chick for his supper the female Mallard

attacked and chased the heron away still trying to bite his tail as he flew off. [Apparently more action here in 20 seconds than in 90 minutes of the England v Algeria match!]

Brian, whose company was enjoyed, was exhausted & hungry [after his early morning visit to see the Bluethroat at Welney] and did not join us at Westleton Heath for the conclusion of the trip. A quick and brief sighting of one Nightjar was all we saw despite others heard churring on the surrounding heath. The leader thanks those that joined him and promised as usual to try again for better results [and weather] next year.

SOG News

Minutes from the SOG AGM held on 25th February 2010 at The Holiday Inn, Ipswich

Paul Gowen

Welcome from the President

The President (Steve Piotrowski) offered all members a very warm welcome to the AGM and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Apologies

These were received from Bill Baston, Ken Garrod and Roger Walsh.

Minutes of the 2009 AGM

The minutes of the AGM held on 26 February 2009 as published in *The Harrier* No. 157 were agreed as correct with no matters arising.

Chairman's report

Richard Rafe reported that Council met five times during 2009, there had been 25 field trips, five indoor meetings, four editions of *The Harrier* and the Website was running very well. The membership continued to be around 450 which in time of recession was considered most satisfactory.

Other highlights of the year included support for the BTO Atlas, financial support for the Suffolk Tree Sparrow Project, support for the Suffolk Bird Report editor and to the Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee.

Looking ahead RR identified updating the SOG constitution, establishing SOG core services, embracing the "electronic age", networking with local bird clubs and taking advantage of the Gift Aid scheme as priorities for Council in 2010.

RR closed his report by thanking all Council members for giving their free time.

Officers Reports

Bill Stone – Treasurer presented the Accounts for 2009 which had been prepared by Andrew Gregory and audited by Jean Attenborrow.

A copy of the SOG accounts was distributed to all present and showed a balance of £1881 in the Building Society account and after expenditure this year a cash balance of £873. This gives a total of £2754 available for the coming year. The

members present unanimously adopted the accounts and SOG Council's proposal that subscription rates for 2011 be raised by a maximum of £2 if required.

In conclusion Andrew Gregory was thanked for his sterling work as Treasurer and Membership Secretary over the past years.

Mick Wright – Projects Officer reported on the continued success of the BTO Atlas work now in its third year – 730 tetrads had now been covered with around 260 full and part tetrads left to be surveyed. BBS and Webs counts had continued to be completed and MW thanked all those involved in survey work. MW encouraged all birdwatchers to submit “roving records” for the BTO Atlas.

Jean Garrod – Outdoor Meeting organiser thanked everyone involved in outdoor meetings for their help and hard work.

Election of Officers and members for the coming year.

The President explained that Andrew Gregory [Treasurer & Membership Secretary] and Trevor Kerridge [Council Member] had formally resigned from Council and that Steve Abbott's [Council Member] term of office had now expired. Nomination for Council had been received for Rob Macklin, Jon Warnes and Roy Marsh and Council had invited Steve Abbott to be co-opted to Council. With no other nominations received the President asked that those present accept “on block” the following Council members for 2010.

Council Officers:

Honorary President	Steve Piotrowski
Chairman	Richard Rafe
Vice Chairman	Jean Garrod
Bulletin Editor	Richard Rafe
Secretary	Paul Gowen
Treasurer	Bill Stone
Membership Secretary	Bill Stone
Projects Officer	Mick Wright
Website Coordinator	Gi Grieco
Bird Report Editor	Nick Mason

Council Members:

Adam Gretton	to 2012
Roger Walsh	2012
Rob Macklin	2013
Roy Marsh	2013
Jon Warnes	2013
Steve Abbott	co-opted

The above officers and members were unanimously elected to the posts indicated.

Finally Steve Piotrowski presented the **Denis Ockelton Trophy** (presented every year in memory of SOG former Chairman Denis Ockelton) for outstanding achievements in Suffolk ornithology to Will Brame (and his dog) in recognition of his

ongoing observations and excellent record submission to the relevant records committees.

Indoor meetings 2010 and 2011

Richard Rafe

The remaining two indoor meetings for this year are:

28th October 2010 – The Gambia – Bill Baston

25th November 2010 – The Biggest Twitch, a world year record – Alan Davies and Ruth Miller.

Dates for 2011 indoor meetings are:

27th January 2011

24th February 2011

24th March 2011

27th October 2011

24th November 2011.

The details of speakers and subjects for these meetings will be made available through the 2011 events card which should be available with the December issue of *The Harrier*.

SOG website update

Gi Grieco

As administrator of the SOG website I would like to thank the various members who have assisted me with the site; principally Mike Swindells who has helped set up the site and helps to keep it updated. Numerous photos help liven up the site and I would like to thank Bill Baston and Ian Goodall for many images that can be found on the various pages. I have recently set up a Gallery page with a selection of photos from SOG field trips and these are a nice pictorial record to compliment the written reports within the Harrier. I would like to thank the many members who have kindly sent me photos and would be pleased to receive more for inclusion. Recently Jean and Ken kindly lent me photos, some going back to 1984, which I have scanned and will be adding to the site.

Another new addition is a page dedicated to Suffolk birding sites, which will include information on species seen, access, useful related websites and photos of the site and birds found there. I would like to add as many sites as possible and would welcome any members with a particular local patch or site who could help compile some information and send to me. The aim is to have a handy reference not just for local birdwatchers but those who want to visit the county from further afield. Information and photos can be sent by email to info@sogonline.org.uk.

I have just recently added a link where members can use a search engine – Everyclick – that is specifically related to SOG and is an easy way to raise money for the group. Everyclick.com has launched a new way to donate. It means you can search the web and shop online. The special address is <http://www.everyclick.com/suffolk-ornithologists-group>, all searches and shopping made from here will raise money for us. A direct link has now been added to the front page of the SOG website – <http://www.sogonline.org.uk>.

Thank you to Richard and Jean Attenborough

Richard Rafe

I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Jean & Richard, from myself and on behalf of SOG. Jean and Richard are two of the unsung heroes of SOG who work tirelessly behind the scenes but don't crave the limelight. Jean and Richard have been stuffing copies of *The Harrier* into envelopes for posting for as long as I have been editor and I believe for several editors before me; without their sterling work *The Harrier* would not leave the boxes in which they arrive from the printers! And they are also active in the field – with an interest in butterflies and dragonflies as well as birds.

Bird Atlas 2007-11

Mick Wright

Breeding Season 2010

I wish to extend a big thank you to all of you who have sent in records for TTVs and Roving Records. If you have not sent in your breeding season records for summer 2010 please do so as soon as possible. The Suffolk Atlas Working Group needs to evaluate the records to see how much work is required for the final season of fieldwork in 2011. We are still short of confirmed breeding records, even for the coastal squares, and we do not have this information for many of the commoner species. Please search your notebooks and send in any records for confirmed breeding species (Blackbird in your garden, House Martin in the village etc.); please do not rely on someone else sending in the records. Records can be sent online to the BTO or in paper form to me.

Winter 2010–2011

On 1st November we start fieldwork for the fourth and final winter period. Help is still needed across all parts of Suffolk but particularly in the west of the county. We need volunteers for timed counts in tetrads (2 x 2 km squares); just two visits are required over the winter period, one in November/December and one in January/February.

We also need birders to submit general bird watching records as Roving Records to build up species lists for every tetrad in Suffolk – see species richness map below.

We have around a 100 tetrads left to survey so please can we all try to make this a bumper winter of fieldwork.

Tetrads in the west (TL) to be surveyed are:

TL66 C, D, E, H, M, S and X and part tetrads I, L, N, W and Y, which I suggest we do roving recording for species lists.

TL74 N, P, T, Y and Z and part tetrads G and X, which I suggest we do roving recording.

TL75 C, D, E, G, H, I, J, K, P, Q, V, W and X.

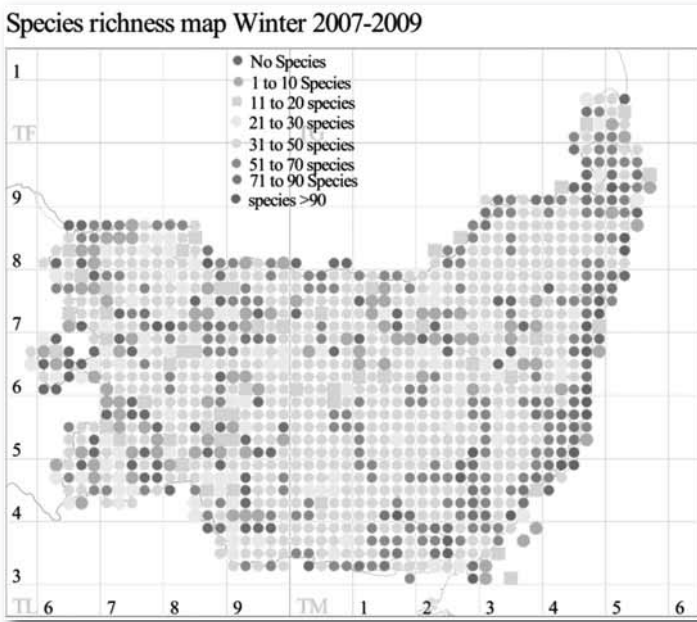
TL76 A, C, D, E, H, I, J, P and U.

TL77 A, B, C, D and G.

TL78 A, B, C, H and M and part tetrad N, which I suggest we do roving recording.
 TL84 E and part tetrad C, which I suggest we do roving recording.
 TL85 K, M, Q, S, V, X and Y.
 TL86 C, M, S, W and Y.
 TL87 X and Y.
 TL88 K, L and M and part tetrad E, which I suggest we do roving recording.
 TL93 C, J and P and part tetrad B, which I suggest we do roving recording.
 TL94 A and K.
 TL95 B, C, D, F, G, W and X.
 TL96 B, F and G.
 TL97 B, D, L, R and V.
 TL 98 E, J, P, U and Z all part tetrads, which I suggest we do roving recording.

Tetrads in the east (TM) to be surveyed are:

TM06 F and Q.
 TM07 B and C.
 TM08 E and Z all part tetrads, which I suggest we do roving recording.
 TM16 B, C, D, E, M, Q, U and Z.
 TM17 C and H.
 TM26 B, J, N, P, U, W and Z.
 TM27 R.
 TG39 F, K, Q and V, all part tetrads, which I suggest we do roving recording.
 TG49 Suffolk tetrads, which I suggest we do roving recording.



Species richness map, winters 2007-2009.

**Roving records are enormously important.
We need species lists for every tetrad**

If you wish to take on a new TTV for the winter of 2010/11 or be a Roving Recorder please contact Mick Wright, Atlas Co-ordinator for Suffolk, on 01473 710032 or email micktwright@btinternet.com.

By visiting www.birdatlas.net you can easily see the vacant tetrads and be able to select the one/s you would like to survey; this will automatically generate an email to me – just follow the online instructions.

On 1st November we start fieldwork for the fourth and final winter period.

Members of the working group are: Steve Piotrowski, Peter Lack, Andrew Green, Colin Jakes, Nick Mason, Andrew Easton, Margaret Regnault, Rob Wilton and Mick Wright.

The Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee

Justin Zantboer

Well I'm sorry to say that I have little to report as I have already missed the Editor's deadline for submitting my regular article! I will endeavour to offer a more informative report within the next *Harrier*. For the time being please cast your eyes over the following records, and, hopefully, somebody somewhere will be able to provide some details on a few of the records as, at present, there are sixty records here for 2009 that are going to be lost unless verified.

As always, an updated list of any recent decisions will be posted on the SOG website ASAP.

Outstanding BBRC rarities descriptions for 2009

08/03/09	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere	M Currie
29/07/09	Pacific Golden Plover	Breydon Water South Wall	?
30/10/09	Red-breasted Goose	Thorpeness	R Joliffe

Outstanding BBRC rarities descriptions for 2010

16/03/10	Penduline Tit x3	Minsmere	?
17/03/10	Penduline Tit x4	Minsmere	?
19/03/10	Penduline Tit x4	Minsmere	?
20/03/10	Penduline Tit x1	Minsmere	?
21/03/10	Penduline Tit x7	Minsmere	?
26/03/10–06/04/10	Pallid Swift	Kessingland	M Tickner <i>et al.</i>
28/03/10–31/03/10	Lesser Kestrel	Minsmere	A Cook <i>et al.</i>

Outstanding BBRC rarities descriptions for 2010 *(continued)*

30/03/10	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere	?
30/04/10	Savi's Warbler	Minsmere	JA Rowlands <i>et al.</i>
01/05/10	Savi's Warbler	Orfordness	D Crawshaw, MC Marsh + GJ Jobson.
06/06/10	White-throated Sparrow	Woodbridge	Per NJ Mason <i>et al.</i>
08/07/10	Black Stork	Capel St Mary	?

Outstanding SORC rarities descriptions for 2009

03/02/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Semer	
04/02/09	Great White Egret	Minsmere	D Newton
16/02/09	Great White Egret	Somerleyton	
24/02/09	Black Brant – Adult	Falkenham Marshes	D Craven
26/02/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	St Olaves/Somerleyton	
07/03/09	Raven	North Warren	LGR Evans
15/03/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Reydon Marshes	
15/03/09	Willow Warbler x2	East Lane	
27/03/09	White Stork	Lackford	H Vaughen
31/03/09	Purple Heron	Ipswich	
05/04/09	Goshawk	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
05/04/09	Goshawk	Purdis Heath, Ipswich	PJ Merchant
14/04/09	Goshawk	Felixstowe	P Oldfield
16/04/09	Great White Egret	Micklemere	
16/04/09	Purple Heron	Ipswich	
17/04/09	Red-footed Falcon – Female	Great Ashfield/Norton	
22/04/09	Red-footed Falcon – Female	Castle Marshes, North Cove	D Moore
25/04/09	Great White Egret	North Warren	D Craven + ML Cornish
25/04/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Weston, nr Beccles	
26/04/09	Serin	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
27/04/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Thornham Magna	
30/04/09	Kentish Plover	Minsmere	
02/05/09	Montagu's Harrier – Ringtail	Southwold	CA Buttle
03/05/09	Red-rumped Swallow	Landguard	P Oldfield
06/05/09	Bee-eater	Butley	
07/05/09	Great White Egret	Herringfleet Mill	C Jacobs
07/05/09	Raven	Lakenheath Fen	
10/05/09	Bee-eater	Lound	
21/05/09	Black Kite	Rendlesham	
30/05/09–31/05/09	Purple Heron	Minsmere	
31/05/09	Black Kite	Haughley	
13/06/09	Montagu's Harrier	Sutton Heath	R Tomlinson + G Button
14/06/09	Ferruginous Duck	Minsmere	
14/06/09	Honey Buzzard	Minsmere	
25/06/09	Honey Buzzard	Minsmere	
27/06/09	Bee-eater	Sutton	R Tomlinson + G Button
24/07/09	Black Kite	Woodbridge Airbase	

Outstanding SORC rarities descriptions for 2009 *(continued)*

08/08/09	Great White Egret	Nr Aldeburgh	
08/08/09	Honey Buzzard	Elveden	
11/08/09	Honey Buzzard	Martlesham	
05/09/09	Cory's Shearwater	Southwold	
09/09/09	Spotted Crake	Minsmere	
15/09/09	Sabine's Gull – Adult	Gorleston	
16/09/09	Sabine's Gull	Lowestoft	R Murray
18/09/09	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Minsmere	JM Gibbs
19/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Corton	
19/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Hollesley	PJ Merchant
19/09/09	Red-necked Phalarope – Juv.	East Lane	D Craven
19/09/09	Icterine Warbler	Minsmere	S Patterson
20/09/09	Honey Buzzard	Corton	
23/09/09	Icterine Warbler	Kessingland	
24/09/09	Rough-legged Buzzard	Landguard	B Mackie + PJ Merchant
01/10/09	Honey Buzzard	Wickham Market	M Riley
03/10/09	Balearic Shearwater	Lowestoft	AC Easton
17/10/09	Great White Egret	Shingle Street	S Babbs
28/10/09	Great White Egret	Havergate Island	
29/10/09	Hooded Crow	North Warren	

Outstanding SORC rarities descriptions for 2010

04/01/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Uggeshall	
17/01/10	Rough-legged Buzzard (pos)	Ramsholt	
24/01/10	Cattle Egret	Haughley	
26/01/10	Rough-legged Buzzard (pos)	Aldringham	
27/01/10	Rose-coloured Starling	Lowestoft	
29/01/10	Green-winged Teal – drake	Minsmere	
06/02/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Hen Reedbeds	
21/03/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Aldeburgh	
21/03/10	Hooded Crow	Blythburgh	
23/03/10	Alpine Swift	Lakenheath Fen	
28/03/10	Ferruginous Duck – female	Lakenheath Fen	

Short Notes

Kingfisher – behavioural note – North Warren, 14th April 2009

Stephen Howell

A long the beach adjacent to the RSPB reserve I noticed a Kingfisher flying south, just offshore. It attracted the unwelcome attention of an immature Herring Gull which tried to predate it. Flying after it, the gull proved how agile this species can be, just inches behind the Kingfisher which really had to twist and turn to avoid being caught!

Eventually the gull gave up and the Kingfisher began heading inland towards the safety of the marsh, but then suddenly turned around, went back over the beach and started heading out to sea, gradually gaining height until it reached about 150 feet before circling back down and landing on the only jetty along this stretch of coast. I could identify the bird now as a female.

She took off again, flew north along the beach and landed on the shingle, right on the edge of the surf, seeming not to mind the small breaking waves which lapped around her feet. Some larger waves started to get her feathers wet, so she flew up to a dryer section of beach away from the waves and was still there when I left 20 minutes later. By far the strangest behaviour I have ever witnessed from a Kingfisher.

Rumble in the reedbed – the big Bittern fight

Malcolm Wright

On 17th April 2010 at about 15.00 hours, I was sitting in the Bittern Hide at Minsmere overlooking the reedbed. There were several other visitors in the hide. Directly in front of the hide there is an open cut of shallow water, perhaps 25m wide, and for about 15 minutes a Bittern had been showing intermittently but very well along the left edge of this cut, often secreting itself in the reeds. It then came out a metre or so into the open, stretched up its neck with its bill pointing skywards and inflated its neck feathers.

Quite suddenly a second Bittern emerged from the reeds on the right hand side of the open water. Its neck was thrust forward and its wings were spread in an aggressive posture. It rushed forward across the open water directly towards the first Bittern (photo 1). On reaching this bird, it launched a quite ferocious attack, stabbing rapidly with its bill at very close quarters. The two birds were locked



A second Bittern rushes at the first bird...

together for a few seconds (photo 2) and then the attacked bird managed to break away and took flight to the south across the reedbed. The attacker also took flight and followed it low over the reeds, some 30m behind. After flying for an estimated 800m, the first bird dropped down into the reeds and the second bird followed it down a few seconds later at the same spot. Presumably the fight continued on the ground but I was unable to see anything further.



... and a brief fight ensues. Photos by Malcolm Wright

BWP, under Antagonistic Behaviour, states “males evidently highly aggressive in defence of territory; sometimes found mortally wounded or dead from stab wounds and two males reported interlocked in ground combat”. Probably the first bird had invaded the attacker’s territory but I was surprised that it was chased so far and perhaps well outside that bird’s territory (up to 40-50 ha, according to BWP).

Recent Reports for April to June 2010

Justin Zantboer

All national and county rarities are still subject to ratification by the relevant committees. It is also important to remember that probably most of these records will still need submitting to the relevant County Recorders so please ensure that if any individuals saw any of the following mentioned birds, please submit them ASAP.

Although a good percentage of the following records were received from the Rare Bird Alert information service, most were received straight from Suffolk birders so, on this note, I would to thank Will Brame, Nathaniel Cant, Andrew Curtis, Richard Drew, Robert Duncan, David Fairhurst, George Gregory, Terry Holland, Paul Holmes, Gerald Jobson, Dave Langlois, Ernie Lucking, Peter Kennerley, Mike Marsh, Peter

Merchant, Nigel Odin, Paul Oldfield, David Pearsons, Collin Ruffles, and Mick Wright for their numerous updates during this period.

April 2010

Considering what a fantastic March Suffolk had, April was definitely a bit of a letdown! Bird of the month was the lingering Pallid Swift that remained at Kessingland up to 6th. We then had to wait right until the end of the month for another national rarity when a Savi's Warbler was found reeling at Minsmere on 30th.

County rarities were thin on the ground, with a Little Bunting ringed at a private site near Lackford on 18th being the only county rarity which wasn't a fly over! Unfortunately, as is seemingly the trend with this species in Suffolk, it was only a brief visitor which wasn't available to the general birder. The flyovers commenced with a Raven over Cattawade on 16th and continued with a Hooded Crow at Kessingland on 20th, a White Stork over Lackford and then Bury St Edmunds and a Hooded Crow over Benacre on 21st, a Rough-legged Buzzard over the Blyth Estuary on 22nd, an Alpine Swift over Trimley Marshes on 27th, a Serin over Landguard on 28th and an Alpine Swift over Minsmere on 30th.

Scarcer species reported included a Black-necked Grebe at Trimley Marshes from 21st-28th and a pair at Great Livermere on 23rd; two Great White Egrets over Martlesham on 7th with another at Dingle on 21st; two Common Cranes over Leiston on 9th then three over Bentley on 13th and a single at Minsmere on 22nd then Reydon from 23rd-24th; a Pectoral Sandpiper at Trimley Marshes on 27th; a second year Glaucous Gull at Minsmere on and off from 3rd-11th with presumably the same bird at Landguard on 4th; the Long-eared Owl at Rendham again on 18th and 21st; a Wryneck at Lound on 11th; a Hoopoe at Cretingham on 17th and the lingering flock of six Waxwings at Bentley up to 6th with three seen on 7th.

The supporting cast included a Pink-footed Goose, three Slavonian Grebes, two Spoonbills, ten Red Kites, seven Ospreys, five Hen Harriers, one Merlin, one Curlew Sandpiper, eight Wood Sandpipers, five Short-eared Owls, five Wood Warblers and two Pied Flycatchers.

May 2010

May started as April ended with a Savi's Warbler. This one was caught and ringed on Orfordness on 1st. The only other national rarity reported for the month though was a raptor seen over Pipp's Ford on 13th that was thought to possibly be a Booted Eagle! Unfortunately though, it couldn't be identified for sure and didn't linger.

County rarities were not as forthcoming as in previous Mays although those that lingered more than made up for it. The best of these were four Red-rumped Swallows found at Loompit Lake, Trimley St Martin on 2nd amongst a large number of *hirundines*. All four birds showed incredibly well and were enjoyed by many birders. Two remained on 3rd and one on 4th when it then moved to nearby Trimley Marshes. Another bird that performed well was a wing-tagged ringtail Montagu's Harrier that was found on the Scrape at Minsmere on 3rd where it remained until

14th. It was soon discovered that it was ringed as a *pullus* amongst the volcanoes of Auvergne, France on 18th July 2008. Other County rarities reported included a reported American Golden Plover at Minsmere on 15th, a Honey Buzzard over Hollesley on 16th, a first summer male Montagu's Harrier at Erwarton on 17th, a male Dotterel on the beach at Kessingland from 17-19th where a Tawny Pipit was found on 20th, a singing Marsh Warbler at Thorpeness and a Common Rosefinch ringed at Landguard on 25th, a Red-rumped Swallow over Trimley Marshes and a Marsh Warbler reportedly at Minsmere on 26th and a Bee-eater at Walberswick on 30th. On top of all this, a single Purple Heron was reportedly at Minsmere on 16th, two reportedly flew over North Warren on 22nd before first summer birds finally gave themselves up at Minsmere from 25th-31st and Felixstowe Ferry/Kings-fleet on 27th.

Of note, an impressive total of 13 Temminck's Stints was noted throughout the month with birds at Minsmere on 2nd-3rd and 14th, on Orfordness on 9th, 15th, 20th and 23rd before three were there together on 26th, at Boyton on 14th, two at Trimley Marshes on 15th and at Micklemere 20th-21st.

The number of scarcer species reported was impressive and included a Red-necked Grebe past Landguard on 20th; a Great White Egret at Trimley Marshes on 16th and then possibly the same bird over Ipswich on 22nd, 23rd and 25th; Common Cranes at Minsmere on 3rd and 7th with two there on 10th and five on 11th while two were at Castle Marshes on 15th; the Long-eared Owl at Rendham on 10th, 13th, 16th and 31st; a Wryneck at Landguard from 3rd-5th; Hoopoes at Corton from 9-11th and at Cowlinge on 15th; Grey-headed Wagtails at Boyton from 3rd-4th and at East Lane on 23rd and a female Red-backed Shrike on 24th.

The supporting cast included two Scaup, two Manx Shearwaters, five Spoonbills, five Red Kites, three Ospreys, two Curlew Sandpipers, one Purple Sandpiper, six Wood Sandpipers, one Jack Snipe, two Short-eared Owls, two Wood Warblers and three Pied Flycatchers.

June 2010

An interesting start to the month was provided by a raptor over the Gipping Valley that was again thought likely to be a dark phase Booted Eagle. This time, the bird was seen well over Stowmarket before being seen again over Baylham approximately 30 minutes later. Whether or not enough detail was obtained to clinch it though remains to be seen. This was certainly not a problem with the other national rarity of the month though as a stunning adult male White-throated Sparrow was found in a private garden in Woodbridge on 6th. Although access was somewhat limited, this third for Suffolk was enjoyed by several observers as it performed just outside the occupants back window. It's a shame the bird wasn't in a more accessible location though as I'm sure it would have been enjoyed by many more Suffolk birders if the opportunity had allowed.

County rarities were less impressive though with the best being a briefly grounded Bee-eater at Southwold on 1st and an adult female Ferruginous Duck at Minsmere from 23rd-27th. Others reported included Quails at North Warren on 24th, Shingle Street on 25th and Great Waldringfield on 30th; a Night Heron

reportedly seen twice in flight over Trimley St Mary on 26th; last month's first summer Purple Heron at Minsmere from 1st-11th; a Black Kite over Great Cornard on 30th; a Honey Buzzard over Henstead on 7th and Marsh Warblers at Minsmere on 2nd, Long Melford from 5th to 8th and then reportedly from 9-13th and reportedly at Lavenham on 7th.

Scarcities were quite simply, just that with the only worthy species being a Puffin past Minsmere and a male Red-backed Shrike on Orfordness on 9th, the Long-eared Owl again at Rendham on 10th and an adult Roseate Tern (ringed on both legs) was at Minsmere from 19-20th and then presumably the same at Trimley Marshes on 23rd.

The supporting cast consisted of just two Manx Shearwaters, two Shags, as many as 20 Spoonbills and up to ten Red Kites.

Looking back – July to September 1960 and 1985

Philip Murphy

Selectd highlights from the 1960 and 1985 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period July to September.

50 years ago

One of the most remarkable ornithological sightings in Suffolk during the latter half of the 20th century occurred in this period when as many as 14 Kentish Plovers were present on Havergate Island, 17th September. Additional notable wader reports from Havergate during this period included 20 Curlew Sandpipers, 30th August, 65 Little Stints, 17th September, up to two Temminck's Stints in September and a Grey Phalarope, 27th September. Further up the coast Minsmere attracted 35 Common Sandpipers, 31st July, two early Jack Snipes, 30th August, and a Red-necked Phalarope, 23rd & 24th August.

There were some interesting reports of seabirds. The figure of 131 Northern Gannets off Lowestoft, 18th September, included 75 fishing around Corton lightship which produced the comment that these were "exceptional numbers for Suffolk." Perhaps even more notable at the time was the Sooty Shearwater ("very full details obtained") off Lowestoft, 29th August, only the second for Suffolk and the first since 1947. A first-winter Sabine's Gull off Walberswick, 22nd September, was only the second in Suffolk since 1938, and of Arctic Skuas we read "more than usual recorded on autumn passage" with a maximum of six off Easton Bavents, 21st September.

Rarities in the period involved a Caspian Tern at Benacre, 21st July, and Tawny Pipits at Havergate Island, 4th August, and Covehithe, 6th September – these are the second and third Suffolk records of Tawny Pipit and the first in the county since 1889.

There were two interesting records involving geese: a flock of 40 Pink-footed Geese adjacent to Breydon Water, 18th August, was remarkably early, and a gathering of 66 Greater Canada Geese at Livermere Lake, 25th September, was the county's highest total in 1960.

Visible southerly passage was much in evidence at Minsmere in September; maximum totals involved 3000 “comic” terns, 9th, 2000 Meadow Pipits, 22nd, and 1070 Eurasian Siskins, 23rd. Up the coast at Walberswick there were counts of 1000 Meadow Pipits, 22nd, and 1000 Eurasian Siskins, 23rd – there was probably much duplication between the Minsmere and Walberswick observations.

Towards the end of September an impressive gathering of nine Lapland Longspurs was at Benacre, 28th.

25 years ago

Minsmere’s reputation for attracting rare waders was shown to be fully justified in July 1985, which commenced with a female Red-necked Phalarope on the Scrape. The phalarope remained on site from 28th June until 4th July when it was joined by Suffolk’s second Greater Yellowlegs which was to remain in the Minsmere/Walberswick area until 14th August. On 5th July observers present at Minsmere for the yellowlegs were amazed to see a Black-winged Pratincole fly in over the Scrape where it remained for a few precious minutes before flying off northwards over Dunwich Heath; this addition to the county list was not relocated.

Additional wader highlights at Minsmere during the third quarter of 1985 included Kentish Plover (17th July), two Temminck’s Stints, a total of six Pectoral Sandpipers, Purple Sandpiper (9th July) and a maxima of 29 Curlew Sandpipers (31st August) and 73 Spotted Redshanks. Equally notable were 148 Whimbrel, Havergate Island, 1st August and 34 Curlew Sandpipers, Walberswick, 7th September. On 15th September the Alde/Ore/Butley complex had attracted 78 Common Greenshanks and 69 Common Sandpipers.

It was a disappointing season for seabirds but inland an exhausted ringed juvenile Northern Gannet was picked up beside the Little Ouse at Lakenheath, 12th September; it had been ringed on 23rd July 1985 at Andoy, Nordland, Norway situated 2025 kilometres from Lakenheath. A Manx Shearwater was released at Dunwich, 7th September, after being captured in Northamptonshire.

The rarest duck in this period was Suffolk’s eighth Green-winged Teal found at Minsmere, 7th July, during which month there was a series of sightings of wild-fowl more normally associated with the winter months. These were a male Greater Scaup off Landguard, 28th, female Long-tailed Duck on Benacre Broad, 7th to 9th, male Common Scoter in Ipswich Docks, 24th, male Velvet Scoter off Landguard, 20th, and male Common Goldeneye at Benacre, 6th to 20th (two) and Martlesham, 9th.

It was a long time coming, but Ring-billed Gull finally made its way onto the Suffolk List in this period courtesy of a second-winter individual on Loompit Lake, Trimley St Martin, 28th September. A moribund Long-tailed Skua was found between Sizewell and Thorpeness, 14th September; it constituted the twelfth county record, but unfortunately died shortly afterwards.

Benacre attracted singles of both Tawny Pipit and European Serin on 30th August but it was Landguard which attracted the majority of the scarce passerines in this period. Intensive cover of our county’s south-eastern corner in August produced two Icterine Warblers, four Wood Warblers, peaks of 200 Willow Warblers on 22nd and

27th, and a maximum of 30 Pied Flycatchers, also on 27th – obviously conditions were ideal on this latter date for grounding night migrants. September at Landguard witnessed the arrival of another Icterine Warbler (21st), Common Grasshopper Warbler (18th), Ortolan Bunting (18th) and the site's first record of Yellow-browed Warbler (26th-28th); this latter individual was the first of what was to be, at the time, a record influx of this Siberian waif into Suffolk.

Particularly unexpected sightings in this period included a flock of Greater Canada Geese on the sea in calm weather about one and half kilometres off Benacre, 26th September, and two juvenile Eurasian Treecreepers found dead in a bat box at Rendlesham, 18th August.

Suffolk BINS – The 'Why and How'

Roy Marsh (co-founder along with Lee Woods)



Roy Marsh and Lee Woods – so that you recognise us 'in the field'.

I am sure many readers will have heard of Suffolk BINS, either already being members of BINS or regular visitors to our daily updated and free website: <http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding/>. There may of course still be a number of readers and members who may be thinking what is this Suffolk BINS thing?

For background, many years ago, Suffolk had previously used a system known as a 'Suffolk Hotline', where rings of birders in a certain area were formed to share and pass on bird information. This system worked well at times, however, the only way in those days of getting the message, was to get a call on the land line phone. In the Summer of 2006, Lee and I sat down and thought it time someone tried to reinstate this in one form or another. It was quite clear at the time that there were a number of local birders, from all four corners of the county, passing snippets on to one another; however, it was sometimes taking several days to reach some people, and on occasions it would only be by thumbing through the bird report the

following year that you would discover there had been a Hoopoe or Wryneck or something just down the road, but you had never known. We felt this would need to change if Suffolk was to again become a united and prolific county for bird watching.

So we decided it was time to try and pull together a service, whereby active birders from north, south, east and west Suffolk were able to easily share and access information from across the county, but at the same time, it would be essential that we didn't lose them from the field, so something mobile. . . . With the cost of pagers high, and a great deal of technology required to set this up, we decided that a *mobile – to – mobile* based platform would work well, if only we could find a deal for us and in turn for our prospective members which would be both efficient and affordable.

We initially approached around 20 of our most active birders, and asked if they would like to join this new service we were trying to set up, thereby supporting sharing of bird news. We decided upon the name of *Birders Information Networked Service* and BINS was launched! For a temporary measure we used a Pay & Go option and our very first message was sent to our new members on the 25th September 2006, and read:

Osprey Nth over Thorpeness 10:25 LGW, RM + report of a Yellow-browed Warbler sluice bushes, Minsmere this am.

We needed to continue our mobile efficiency research, and tested a number of Pay & Go Sims around the county, ensuring we would have greatest coverage to receive and send information, but at the same time, would need to be affordable to run, as our temporary system was already proving too costly, and not a cost we could easily pass on to our members. Early in 2007 we found a provider that not only gave the best coverage but also an 'unlimited' text contract. We soon bought in to two contracts, and we were flying. All members now, as then, pay a nominal amount each year at point of renewal, which is to cover the running costs, so BINS acts as more of a syndicate rather than a paid for service, where we all try to work as one team for the benefits of Suffolk birding.

So how does it work then? The system was then, as it is now, based upon a number of members being allocated to each of our now four phones; two groups are set up to house a selection of members numbers on each phone, so a total of eight groups. A message from a member is sent to one central number, where Lee very diligently composes a global message, ensuring we include the finder's initials, time etc. This message is then sent from one BINS phone to each of the other three BINS phones. Once the collated message has been received by each of the other phones, we will set about sending it out to each group on each of the phones.

If the sighting is of a category 1 or 2 for Suffolk, so a County rarity or National scarcity for example, we will ordinarily send this message straight out. Where not category 1 or 2, we look to collate several snippets together to send as appropriate. For non BINS members, we ask they e-mail news to us: Suffolk.birding@ntlworld.com We will then endeavour to pick up your information and share with others in a timely manner. We are now running at capacity, four phones and 100 members, so sadly we are unable to take on new members at this time, but would very much appreciate your news via our e-mail if possible, where we can collate and share to all.

Having done tests, we know that sending a message from one BINS phone to the other BINS phones and sending on their messages, all 100 texts would be sent out in around 6 minutes. Naturally, as you may appreciate, due to work meetings, commitments, etc. there may of course be the occasional delay, but thankfully not often.

We have found there are a number of telling factors which makes this system great for Suffolk, with the technical advantage over pagers being one of them. If you happen to be out in the field, or travelling through the Dartford Tunnel, for example, you may through your own provider be in a weak signal area and miss the original message sent. With a paging system this would never be recovered, however, with mobile – to – mobile once you again enter an area with a better signal your message will arrive intact, which is a major plus to many birders in the field. This, interlinked with our ability to share news as soon as we get it, leaves it possible to send messages very early in the morning or late at night, where required!

On a more personal level, we think the ‘One Suffolk’ feel has improved dramatically, with a more united front displayed from all four corners of the county, and this must be one of the telling triumphs for not only Suffolk BINS, but for all its members and those who support the service as a whole. On a national note, one of BINS crowning glory moments must have been the Spectacled Warbler at Westleton Heath. This was originally identified as a Subalpine Warbler with the limited views which had been obtained. Luckily the finder was a member of BINS, so passed this information through, which we then forwarded on to our members. Later that day, the bird was again relocated and re-identified as a Spectacled Warbler. Good numbers of both Suffolk and National birders were very happy to catch up with this MEGA rarity. Had BINS not been around, this may have been another description fatality, and with it, a cracking 2nd record for the county may surely have been lost?

So what of the successes? To date, we are fast approaching 300,000 hits on the website: <http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding/> and with the site only having been live for around 45 months, that is an average of 200 hits per day. and for a small non-profit making syndicate like Suffolk BINS, that seems amazing. The website also encompasses a number of other areas which help to attract visitors. One of the key pages is the monthly highlights. Each day these are updated with the day’s findings, and photos where they may have also been emailed in by our members and non-members alike. Lee solely undertakes this task, other than when he is away, and as I’m sure you will agree, does a fantastic job.

Alongside the daily updated pages, we also try to encompass some conservation activities by for example promoting events, eg LBO litter picks, Bird Atlas links etc. We also have dedicated pages for our Bird of the Year trophy, which is awarded to the finder of the best bird for that year, as voted for by our members, and a New Year’s Day bird race trophy, BINS Cup, for which each year teams take part in a day of intense birding on January 1st. We have a links page to other sites, and we have a guestbook where people are encouraged to join and log in to have general discussions or ask for advice; or perhaps you are planning a trip somewhere – well we even have a page with trip reports on, so it’s easy to see why it’s a popular site, and attracts quite so much cyber traffic!

Overall this wouldn't have been possible without our members, and both Lee and I recognise this, and would like to thank them for not only their support but for continuing to share their information with the county. Our service can and will only ever be as good and fast as the information and the timely manner it is received from our members, which has been a credit to all concerned previously, so thanks to one and all.

Finally, let's all hope for a good autumn, and one where we can all share and enjoy this truly wonderful hobby of ours, and who knows, we may even bump into one or two of you when we are out and about. It would be lovely to stop for a yarn, so just say hi.

Recent Bird News – ups and downs in the bird world – as reported in recent press releases

Richard Rafe

RSPB – Butcher Birds return to breed in England (September)

Conservationists are celebrating the successful breeding of a pair of Red-backed Shrikes, despite the attentions of convicted egg collectors visiting the breeding site. This is the first successful nesting in England since 1992, when the last pair bred in East Anglia.

The birds, at a secret location on Dartmoor, have been under close watch since May to guarantee their safety. RSPB staff and volunteers from the Dartmoor Study Group and Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society spent more 2,600 hours on site, working around the clock. The protection scheme has also been supported by the Forestry Commission, Natural England, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary and Dartmoor National Park Authority. The watch proved completely justified as a number of convicted egg collectors visited the site during the operation.

Kevin Rylands, from the RSPB, said: "We were delighted with the first sightings of the pair in May, but even more delighted when they settled down to nest. Although it's been hard work, the efforts of all our staff and volunteers have really paid off and we have three youngsters flitting about the site."

He added: "Surveys have shown that Dartmoor holds a wealth of species previously widespread in lowland areas such as Cuckoo and Whinchat. The shrikes will have arrived on spring migration and found the site to their liking. The extent of habitat and numbers of large insects on the moor have no doubt contributed to the success of this nest."

Roger Smaldon, one of the team of dedicated volunteers, commented: "The last recorded breeding on Dartmoor was near Meldon Reservoir in 1970, so this nesting attempt was far from expected, especially when the national picture of nesting has been totally negative for the past two decades."

BTO – Feeling Blue: garden acrobat takes a tumble (September)

The Blue Tit, perhaps our most iconic garden bird, is slipping away from bird feeders. The BTO's Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS), which celebrated its Ruby Anniversary last winter, has revealed a 42% decline of this species in gardens over

the past 40 years. Blue Tits, synonymous with bird feeders, have declined from an average weekly count of 5.3 individuals per GBFS garden in the winter of 1970/71 to just 3.1 individuals per garden last winter.

Blue Tits aren't alone either: 40 years of GBFS data bear out long-established, precipitous declines in Starling and Song Thrush (both down by 75%), and in House Sparrows (down by 70%). After a meteoric rise in the first 30 years of the survey, numbers of Collared Doves have also fallen, down by more than a quarter in the past 10 years.

However, it's not all bad news. Fuelled by increases in feeding of nyjer seed and sunflower hearts, Goldfinch numbers have increased massively over the last 20 years, while Long-tailed Tits have exhibited a tenfold increase in GBFS gardens. Tim Harrison, BTO Garden BirdWatch Development Officer, commented: "The GBFS reveals that Blue Tits are declining in gardens, while other surveys, such as the Breeding Bird Survey, also hint at a downturn in the population at large. In gardens, changes in bird feeding could be responsible; where once the dexterity of the Blue Tit would have been king-feeding on monkey nuts threaded on string, peanuts in a mesh feeder or coconut shells stuffed with fat-modern foods and feeders mean that Blue Tits face stiff competition from other species."

David Glue, BTO Research Ecologist, added: "Forty years of the GBFS has provided a fantastic resource. It is the longest running survey of its kind in the world and has only been possible through the dedicated observations of hundreds of UK householders who participate voluntarily. With urbanisation and the development of new bird-care products continuing apace, the importance of the GBFS will continue to grow."

The best way to help monitor the continued fortunes of garden birds such as Blue Tits is through the year-round BTO Garden BirdWatch survey. To find out more about the survey and to receive a free copy of the BTO guide *Feeding Garden Birds*, get in touch with the BTO Garden Ecology Team on 01842 750050 or by emailing gbw@bto.org.

Natural England – UK's first breeding colony for 300 years sets up in Norfolk nature reserve (August)

This summer, the emerald marshes of Holkham National Nature Reserve in Norfolk are hosting a unique breakthrough for one of the UK's rarest breeding birds. The Spoonbill – which has bred only four times in Britain in the last three centuries – has had a stunning success at Holkham, and for the first time in over 300 years the UK has its own breeding colony of these beautiful crane-like birds.

Careful monitoring has confirmed that four nesting pairs have now fledged a total of six young, with at least a further two pairs still feeding their young in nests. At no time since the early 1700s has more than one Spoonbill bred in the UK and conservationists are hoping that the unique breeding success at Holkham will not be a one-off.

Attention was aroused when a total of 9 spoonbills – mostly adults in full breeding plumage – arrived in the area. The Spoonbills set up home in the mixed breeding colony of Cormorants, Grey Herons and Little Egrets already on the site.

Michael Rooney, Natural England's Senior Reserve Manager at Holkham NNR said:

“A lot of careful work has gone into creating and managing ideal habitats for a range of nesting birds at Holkham NNR, so it is very exciting that the reserve has become a safe haven for a breeding colony of Spoonbills. As several pairs nested successfully this year, we hope that the birds will return and establish a permanent colony in future years.” The nesting colony is surrounded by water and is therefore safe from predators, while the presence of pools in adjacent fields provides nearby feeding opportunities for the adults raising hungry chicks.

RSPB – 20 years of shame, as war continues against birds of prey (September)

2009 was another shocking year for the persecution of birds of prey, with 384 reported incidents of shooting, trapping and poisoning, according to the RSPB's 20th annual Birdcrime report.

Twenty years of reporting on Birdcrime has revealed that several police force areas suffer higher levels of bird of prey persecution than others. In England, top of the league are North Yorkshire, West Mercia, Northumbria, Devon & Cornwall and Cumbria. In the report, the RSPB has identified 11 recommendations for government action, so that these appalling crimes can be eradicated.

Dr Mark Avery, the RSPB's Conservation Director, said: "Wildlife crimes are an abhorrent feature of our countryside. And for the sake of eagles, kites, harriers, buzzards, falcons and Ospreys, we have to take more action to consign these crimes to history. Over time, egg collecting has diminished, but the killing of birds of prey is as big a threat today as it was two decades ago." During 2009, there were 384 reported incidents of bird of prey persecution in the UK, including 224 in England, 123 in Scotland, 17 in Wales and 11 in Northern Ireland. Nine crimes against birds of prey could not be assigned to a country and were recorded at a UK level.

The Hen Harrier is on the brink of extinction in England as a breeding species, with just six successful pairs in 2009. This is the species most affected by persecution, despite the fact there is sufficient habitat to support well over 200 pairs. A report published by Natural England in 2008 showed that nest failures as a result of adults 'disappearing' were seven times more common on grouse moors than any other land type. Modelling suggests the UK's driven grouse moors could support 500 nesting pairs of Hen Harriers: in 2008 there were just five.

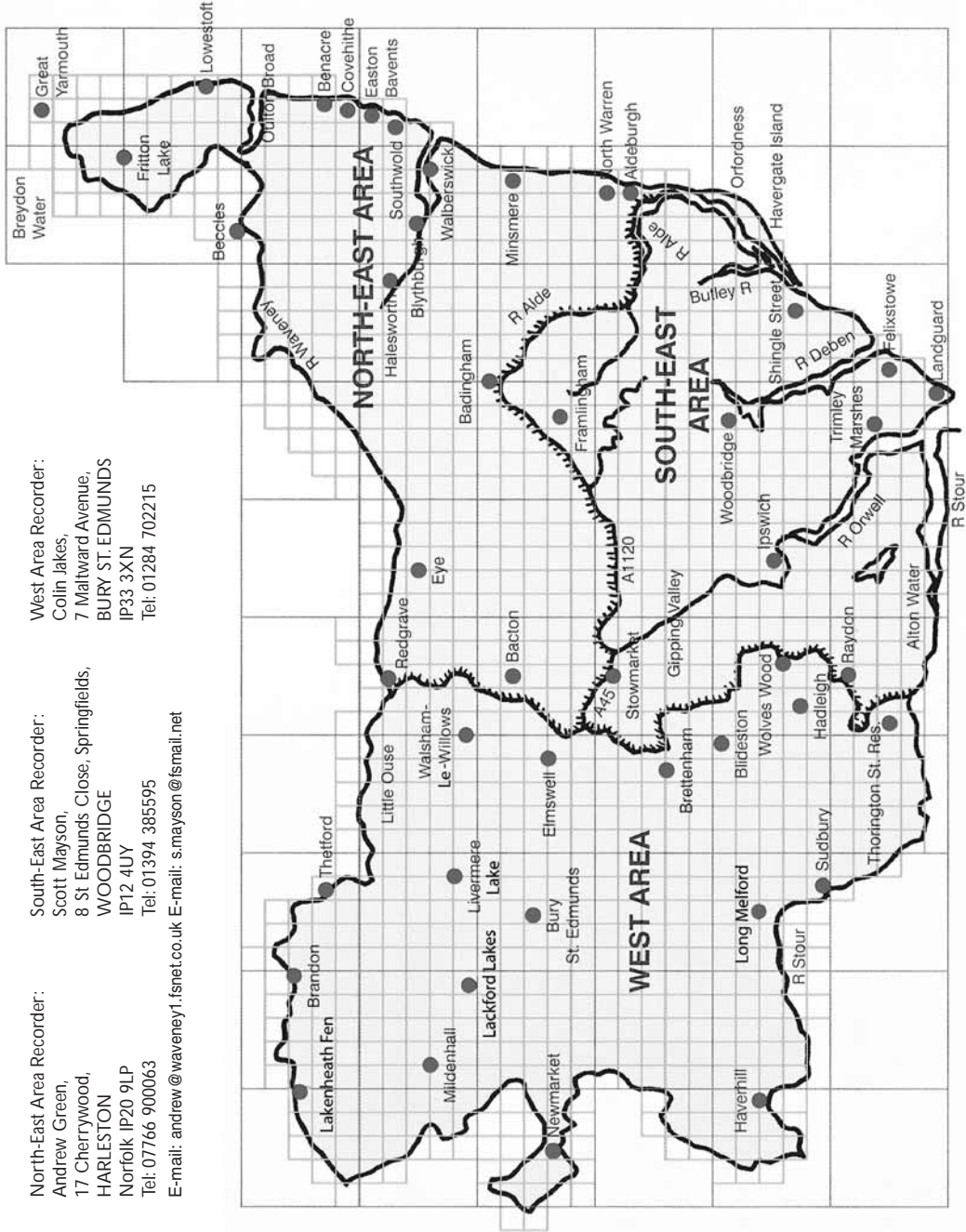
There has been a huge expansion of the UK Red Kite population in the last 20 years. The exception to this is the north Scotland population. Despite being one of the first projects and in suitable habitat, the population has only just reached 50 pairs (compared to over 800 pairs in the Chilterns, where the same number of kites were released 20 years ago). Modelling work carried out by RSPB, published in Biological Conservation in 2010, showed that increased adult mortality caused by illegal poisoning could explain almost all of the difference in population growth between the north of Scotland and the Chilterns.

The conflict with land managed for the shooting of game birds remains the main problem for birds of prey, particularly the upland grouse-shooting estates in northern England and Scotland. The main birds of prey affected are Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Goshawk, Peregrine and Red Kite.

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