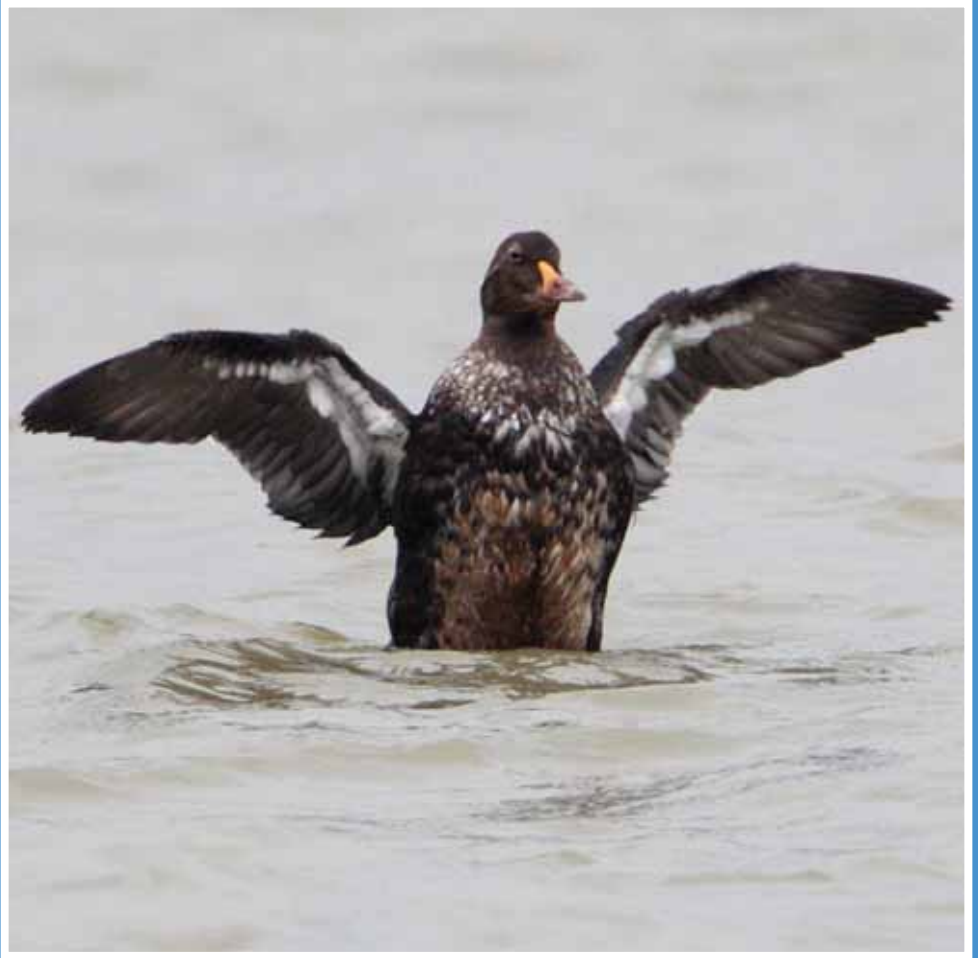


The Harrier

December 2010

Bulletin No. 163



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover: *King Eider, Dunwich, 13th September 2010, soon after its arrival – Bill Baston.*



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group
Bulletin No. 163 – December 2010

EDITORIAL

Welcome to Harrier 163. This will be my last Harrier as Editor. My life at present is extremely busy and I am finding it increasingly hard to find the time for The Harrier; and I haven't done any Suffolk birding at all (other than an Atlas tetrad) in the past year or so. There is the added complication that working in the public sector my future is very uncertain – I am making plans which may entail moving from Suffolk so I felt it better to be safe than sorry and try and find a new Editor for The Harrier now rather than leaving SOG in the lurch. I am very pleased to say that a volunteer has stepped forward – the new Editor for The Harrier is Phil Brown.

New editor for The Harrier

All material for The Harrier, March 2011 and beyond, should be sent to:-
Phil Brown – The Coach House, Denham Road, Dalham, Suffolk CB8 8UB
Email: p.brown@doc-doc.com

The other important change underway for SOG is that after years of discussion we are serious about trying to gain Gift Aid. This could provide a substantial financial benefit for SOG and bolster the Group's income. We have deferred a subscription rise for 2011, but the Group's accounts are running close to the wire and we are looking towards possible considerable expenditure should we decide to publish a Suffolk Atlas, flowing from the BTO national Atlas work. Bill Stone, the Group's Treasurer explains more about Gift Aid elsewhere in The Harrier, but I encourage you to complete the necessary forms which will be supplied to enable SOG to claim Gift Aid on your subscription.

Other changes are inevitable in the next few months – the Group needs a new Chairman and Secretary to be in place for the February AGM. Personally I have thoroughly enjoyed my involvement in SOG over the last 20 years – I wish the Group, the Council, and the many friends & acquaintances I have made through SOG, all the best for the future. I very much hope that, wherever I am, I shall be writing something for future Harriers.

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

Spellbound by Minsmere

John H. Grant

Seen the jaunty new hats the Minsmere tea-room staff are now wearing? Little red numbers that look a bit like the fez that the late, great Tommy Cooper wore to such great effect. Very stylish and, in a round-about way, somewhat appropriate.

For, “just like that”, The Scrape’s water dried up this summer – it vanished, as if some dark magic spell had been cast. It was much to the consternation of some ill-informed observers who seem to know more about wetland management than the entire ranks of RSPB professionals whose life mission it is to study such matters. There were grumblings that the grand old place has lost its magic – the RSPB had sold its soul to the corporate devil and devotes more time to turning the place into a theme park than looking after its habitats.

Breathtaking ignorance and arrogance if you ask me! Unlike some who have spouted forth on the issue, I do not profess to be an expert on hydrology or the management of shallow, saline coastal lagoons. I have, however, taken the time to chat to some of the wardens on the reserve – wetland warden Robin Harvey in particular – to try to understand the problems.

None of us in east Suffolk could have failed to notice 2010’s prolonged drought in which it is estimated that rainfall from spring into August was down to something like 20 per cent of the long-term average. Try as they might, Minsmere’s staff cannot conjure up rain, despite some of them wearing those Tommy Cooper hats! Given such a dearth of fresh water – and bearing in mind that by its very nature The Scrape has to have shallow water and is therefore prone to rapid evaporation – is it any wonder that the famous old lagoons dried up? Of course it isn’t and Minsmere’s staff and volunteer guides were as frustrated by the resultant lack of birds for part of the autumn as anybody else – probably even more so!

The fresh water for the famed East Scrape comes from North Marsh, which is clearly a very important area for breeding and feeding Bitterns. Suggestions that water could simply be taken out of North Marsh and put onto East Scrape skipped over the fact that the Bittern is a very high conservation priority – lower North Marsh’s water and the Bitterns will suffer and the RSPB will get criticised for that too!

As Robin himself explains: “The spring and summer were so dry that there was no spare water available to top-up East Scrape. Next year we will hold water levels higher at the start of the breeding season (we cannot hold them too high however as this will have an effect on nesting Avocets). We are also looking at ways of utilising water from the main reedbed. This is already used to top-up West Scrape though, so is not an all-encompassing solution to the problem. The middle compartment of West Scrape was dried out deliberately this year as part of the Scrape Following Project. This aims to let the dried-out sections vegetate over. The vegetation is then topped and rotovated into the soil. This is designed to increase the nutrient content which, in turn, will hopefully increase the invertebrate populations.”

It’s quite clear from the passion Robin and his colleagues have for The Scrape that they, too, are deeply concerned about the problems the famous old area faces. We would do well to remember, in any case, that shallow, saline coastal lagoons are

naturally an ephemeral habitat – it is only down to the meticulous care that the RSPB has given to The Scrape that it still exists at all! “Rest assured that we are doing all we can to rectify the situation,” says Robin – and the intensity with which he says it should leave no-one in any doubt that he and the RSPB really mean it.



Works taking place on a dried out Scrape; and below a more traditional view of the famous Scrape, RSPB.



So 2010 at Minsmere saw one of the worst droughts in living memory – but even in the face of that there was certainly no drought of rare or scarce species or breeding successes.

Totals listed in Minsmere's breeding birds schedule include nine booming Bitterns, Garganey, 17 young Marsh Harriers fledged, 34 young Avocets fledged, six pairs of Mediterranean Gulls, 167 Common Tern nests, 14 Woodlark territories and four of Redstart, 88 male Cetti's Warblers, 2 Grasshopper Warblers, 138 pairs of Sedge Warblers, 297 pairs of Reed Warblers and 14 Dartford Warbler territories. That's quite a haul isn't it?

In addition there was an exciting procession of rarities, including two species new to Suffolk! At the time of writing these included: Cory's Shearwater, Great White Egret (2), Purple Heron, Green-winged Teal, Ferruginous Duck, King Eider, Honey Buzzard (2), Montagu's Harrier (2), Rough-legged Buzzard (3), Lesser Kestrel, Red-footed Falcon, Temminck's Stint (2), Pectoral Sandpiper (3), Grey Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, Sabine's Gull, Alpine Swift (2), Wryneck (2), Shorelark (2), Savi's Warbler (2), Marsh Warbler (2), Icterine Warbler, Barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler (2), Penduline Tit (7+), Red-backed Shrike (2), Great Grey Shrike (3), Lapland Bunting, many. Is that enough to be going on with?

If hardened birders do not wish to go to Minsmere that's their choice, of course, and it's their great loss. They may think The Scrape is suffering, or that there are too many people on the reserve and that the RSPB is trying too hard to attract "non-birders" (those are attitudes that really rile me, but discussion of that aspect of the reserve is perhaps best left for another day!)

I will resolutely continue to enjoy the place – its birds and its social side, meeting and greeting as many visitors as I can and showing them some of the reserve's wildlife. The place, in my view, is simply magic – and I don't just mean those Tommy Cooper hats.

Are you narrow or broad minded?

Phil Brown

Jeff Martin's article on the East Anglian Heights seems to have provoked a good deal of discussion. As a resident on the edge of this area I'd like to contribute to the debate by offering evidence both for and against this narrow front migration assertion that the 'heights' make the difference.

Dalham is around 200 metres from the Cambridge county-line, so I represent the far west of the county. For those of you unfamiliar with this 'chocolate-box' village, Dalham is sited at the bottom of a distinctly steep valley (although it's only about 60 metres deep around the village) that runs north-south following the course of the 'raging' River Kennet (a chalk upland stream that is dry for part of the year) that drains north into the Lark.

Evidence for narrow front migration

This valley's role as a migration route is most apparent in the autumn when hirundines in particular are almost constantly noted for a period of about a month moving south in small groups up the valley. Occasionally there have been larger influxes. I recall losing count of a mass of Swallows briefly resting in the field behind my house shortly after day-break. As far as I could tell there was a flock of between 500-1000 Swallows occupying every available perch and so desperate to rest they

were even on the ground. They stayed for around 20-30 minutes and then, as a body, rose and headed south up the valley towards the Kirtling/Cowlinge watershed and then on, presumably, into the upper reaches of the Stour valley.

I also regularly witness small groups of hirundines being shadowed by Hobbies. While standing on my doorstep this autumn I glanced up to see a bunch of martins (30+) heading south. Then a trailing Hobby came into view, put on a spurt to close and then attempted to take out one of the stragglers. An awesome sight.

While all of this is anecdotal, it does suggest this valley acts as a corridor migration route. While it is perfectly possible for the same scene to be enacted on a broad front across the 'heights' to the east and west of Dalham, I am cautious to suggest so as, whenever I've been birding around the surrounding Estate during the autumn, I have only ever witnessed Hobby attacking hirundines over the village – while away from the valley, up on the 'heights', I seldom encounter Martins or Swallows during this migration period.

Evidence for broad front migration

But other species do seem to 'move' in much broader waves. I commonly encounter groups of Fieldfare and Redwing on the 'heights' itself or crossing the valley. Invariably these are east-west movements and my impression is they are conducted on a broad front.

So here at Dalham, between the hirundinidae and turdidae, I have regularly witnessed two markedly different migration strategies. Why this disparity?

Towards a conclusion

Self-evidently destination is the primary direction driver, with hirundinidae moving south to over-winter in Africa, whilst various turdidae are irrupting westwards from Scandinavia/the Continent to winter inland across England.

As to motives for the style of the migration (narrow vs. broad fronts) perhaps it reflects how different bird species manage to feed while on migration. Some species are able to move in broad waves as their food sources are widely dispersed, viz. turdidae. Whereas others, such as insectivorous hirundines, tend to be confined to narrow wet routes where insects are more abundant.

On balance I am inclined to think that this feeding opportunity issue better accounts for the disparity Jeff Martin noted than the pattern of topography over which species are flying in this area.

Further, given the modest scale of the area's topography (rising from the Fens/Brecks at 30m to a little over 100m), the 'heights' are unlikely to present much of a barrier. That said, the line of the 'old' sea coast to the east and west of Moulton (just south of Dalham) probably does represent a slight barrier, with the valley's width at this point presumably having a funnel effect to channel the hirundines' migration route into the narrower one we subsequently witness at Dalham.

More views on overland migration – from West Suffolk Birders

Richard Rafe (West Suffolk Birders)

Jeff's article on overland migration stimulated considerable email traffic amongst West Suffolk birders. Some of the more pertinent comments were:–

“Birds appear to follow all sorts of topographical features – coasts obviously but also edges of lakes, river valleys, as well as hills and ridges, and at other times just to move on a broad front.”

“Where we live in Pakenham, I often see birds in autumn flying down the Blackbourne valley, which runs SSE. Hirundines particularly do this. Winter thrushes are interesting. The flocks of Redwings and Fieldfares which pass over in some numbers at this time of year are consistently on the same heading, just about due west. This doesn’t follow any feature as far as I can see.”

“My experience of visible migration in the Haverhill area is of birds seeming to move on a broad front – can’t say that I’ve found any location much better than anywhere else.”

“Stradishall airfield attracts all sorts of passage migrants but I had always assumed that this was because it is an obvious block of decent habitat in a bit of an arable desert.”

My thanks to Jeff for a stimulating article which has obviously made people think.

Coloured-ringed gull article

Brian Small

I’d like to say sorry to all that read this as it has to do with many observer’s least favourite birds, large gulls. However, I (for one, probably in a minority) enjoyed Granty *et al*’s article on colour-ringed gulls and the fact that, via these rings, ‘normal’ birders can participate more actively in the ringing process, rather than the birds needing to be re-trapped to gain worthwhile data. I have spent many years watching gulls and reading rings, though I have to admit I am pretty remiss in recording the letters/numbers; but when I come across interesting ones I do make an effort.

So, in the winter of 2003/4 when I found a Caspian Gull at Southwold wearing just a metal ring, I was very keen to read it. Getting close, I could make out the word ‘Kiev’ and also the ringed code ‘L001802’. I sent this information off and got back the information that it had been ringed in a colony near Cherkassy, 200km or so SE of Kiev, Ukraine (49.46N 31.28E); this gull then returned for the next three winters. With this in mind, it was, therefore, a bit surprising to read the questions in the piece, based on the fact that one Caspian Gull they saw came from the hybrid zone (and no doubt others have as well), ‘Can any Caspian Gull record be accepted without the most forensic, feather-by-feather examination? Would it be best to refer to them all as ‘Caspian-type’ gulls?’

I don’t deny that there may have been some ‘Caspian Gulls’ that may have had some genetic impurity, but to throw the baby out with the bath water is, of course, a little absurd; as the Kiev-ringed bird shows, Caspian Gulls are coming from ‘pure’ areas also. That most records of Caspian Gull conform to what we now know are the typical features of the taxon is apparent, if you have studied them well – ‘feather-by-feather’, as they propose, would be good as I actually doubt that all records received are properly documented.

Finally, as an aside, today (13 October 2010) I found a ‘Caspian Gull’ at Southwold that immediately caused me consternation. It was sat on the revetment and though

much was good for Caspian it certainly had odd features: when it stood up, it had a yellow colour ring, from Poland, and no doubt from the hybrid colonies. As I know Caspian well, I felt that the odd structure (in particular) stood out, but those with less might not have been so questioning (or bothered . . . !).



Caspian type gull, Southwold – Brian Small

Recent Field Meetings

Havergate Island – 14th August 2010

Justin Zantboer [Leader]

This year's trip began in the worst possible manner with the RSPB boat blowing a head gasket the day before our trip! With uncertain chances of having another boat I decided it would be worth a gamble so took the decision not to cancel at the last minute. Fortunately the RSPB came up trumps and a substitute boat was in place. That wasn't the end though as, with the clock ticking, we were still short of two members, my wing man, the infamous Mr John Grant and young Sheila! A quick phone call to John to check on his ETA revealed that the old boy had plain forgotten us. This was a surprise that even I didn't expect but as the saying goes, the show must go on.

So for the first time since I have led the trip, we set sail without a full crew. Naturally we then had the customary rain shower! It was with slightly dampened spirits that we set foot upon the fabled island but with the sun breaking out, all the previous misfortune was soon forgotten as we entered the main hide. First birds seen were the ever dependable Spoonbills – always an uplifting sight despite their

normal statue like behaviour. As always, there was a friendly debate over the actual number present but it was eventually agreed that there were 15.

With the water levels looking favourable, it was with high hopes that the wader sifting commenced. A good selection of birds was evident but numbers didn't seem so good, particularly of the smaller waders. At least 700 each of both Avocet and Redshank were present with maybe 150 or so Black-tailed Godwits. Scattered about were 80+ Dunlin, 11 Knot, a few Ringed Plovers and a Turnstone. At least four Grey Plovers were seen and five Bar-tailed Godwits, including two splendid juveniles which allowed close views. The pick of the bunch though were two adult Curlew Sandpipers, both in almost full summer plumage. Notable absentees were Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper and, incredibly, Lapwing while there were very few Ducks!

A check of the northern hides didn't produce much on the mud but the walk was livened up by an impressive movement overhead of southbound Whimbrel. This continued for much of the day with the total ending up on 180 with a flock of 69 being the biggest. We managed to add Greenshank to our list of waders but little else was seen before lunch was taken in the main hide. A small flock of Golden Plover flying over the lagoons was another addition to the wader list but otherwise, if anything, there seemed to be even less birds!

A walk down to Belpers after lunch turned up a couple of Willow Warblers and a Whitethroat as well as a couple of Wall Browns but Belpers itself was very quiet with only a couple of Golden Plover present and still no Lapwing! This was quickly rectified though as viewing from the next lagoon, we managed to see a distant flock of Lapwing towards Boyton. They all count! We also finally added a Common Sandpiper which proved to be elusive for some whilst watching the nesting Common Terns. This pretty much ended the trip though, taking our tally of waders to 17 which was respectable considering we didn't see Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Snipe or Green Sandpiper. The best of the other species noted during the day included Little Egret, Marsh Harrier and Sandwich Tern.

My thanks go to the Havergate staff for making the trip possible, particularly with providing substitute boats and obviously to the nine SOG members who always make the trip a pleasure. This was my last trip to Havergate Island as a leader so it's a shame I didn't go out with a bang! With that in mind, I would like to thank all of those members who I have led on Havergate in the past as you have left me some very fond memories. Hopefully I will still see you from time to time on the 'Felixstowe Peninsula' trips that I still intend to lead.

All the best and happy hunting on the Island, hopefully for years to come!

Havergate Island RSPB (Visit 2) – 25th September 2010

Chris Courtney [Leaders: Ashley Gooding and John Grant]

The full complement of twelve cheery members met up on a bright and moderately sunny Saturday morning for SOG's second Havergate trip of the season. Postponed a fortnight from the originally scheduled date, an air of keen anticipation hung over those assembled. Soon we were joined on the quayside by the RSPB's ebullient site manager Aaron Howe, who arrived to inform us that the

RSPB's vessel, October Storm, was suffering a flat battery that morning. Fortunately however, the skipper of the aptly named 'Regardless' had already agreed to step in, to provide us with safe passage to Suffolk's only island. As we boarded, Aaron and the skipper were heard to exchange remarks as to the high water level, despite it now being near low tide. As it happened these comments would prove to be somewhat prescient as the day unfolded!

Chugging along down the river, the calls of Redshanks and piping Oystercatchers soon rose up to greet us along with the usual melee of Black-headed and Herring Gulls, as well as the odd Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Avocet and Little Egret. Two Gannets were also noted flying above the Orfordness shingle not long after we steered round the bend between Chantry and Stonyditch points, and the low slung banks of Havergate hove into view.



Disembarking the boat at Havergate Island – Chris Courtney

Disembarking, we followed our leaders John Grant and Ashley Gooding along the narrow path from the landing stage to the visitor centre where dispensing with last year's game of 'hunt the key', we gathered to consider the plan of attack.

Today however, before getting down to birding in earnest, John asked us to join him to spend a moment to remember his dear and recently departed friend, Geoff Price. All present paid a respectful minute's silence to Geoff's memory, who as a long time SOG member, top Suffolk Lister and all round familiar figure on the Suffolk birding scene will clearly be greatly missed.

Moving, through to the viewing area at the rear of the building, we began to observe the birds present across the wide sections of the Main Lagoon, Gullery and

North Lagoon visible from this fine vantage point. At John's suggestion it was readily agreed to follow on from last year's example of making a full count of all birds that we saw on the island that day.

A good flock of Golden Plovers (148 in total) were among the first birds to be noted as well as two late remaining Spoonbills, a juvenile and an adult, seen roosting and later feeding. The latter were not without a little initial confusion as a few scopes and bins initially focussed on the plastic decoy spoonbills, but eventually we all agreed as to which were the real birds!

Enthusiastic voices cried out as different species were spotted across the lagoons and islets, and individuals volunteered to keep the running tally for that species throughout the visit.

A fine near summer plumaged Grey Plover (one of 11), contributed to the 14 wader species seen during the day. Among which other species included two Spotted Redshanks, four Bar-tailed Godwits and singletons of Greenshank and Snipe. Disappointingly, no Little Stints or Curlew Sandpipers were present and despite John's enticing offer of a 'large bar of chocolate' to anyone who could find him a 'nice nearctic number', nobody was able to claim the prize. Soon the sounds of rapturous consumption were to be heard, as John polished off the aforementioned confectionary all to himself!

Wildfowl, included good numbers of Wigeon (c120) and Teal (110), Shovelers (99) as well as 27 Shelducks and a single Pintail.

A few late hirundines were observed, with three House Martins over Gedgrave and two passing Barn Swallows.

Buzzards were well represented among the raptors with at least four birds



Barn Owl, Havergate Island – Ian Goodall

seen to soar over Gedgrave. In addition there were two Marsh Harriers, four Kestrels and singles of Peregrine and Sparrowhawk. Unfortunately for the majority however, the lone Merlin that sped past with the wind behind it, disappeared far too quickly for John and Mike Cartwright to be able to bring it to the attention of anyone else.

Having made the trip to the two hides at the north-western end of the island, we started off after lunch to make the trek down to Cottage Flood, having decided to forgo the even longer trudge to the frequently unproductive Dovey's hide. However, upon mounting the steps over the bank, the true effects of the silent and stealthy encroachment of the still rising spring tide became immediately apparent. Not only was the path to the other end of the island already mostly underwater but the landing stage was also cut off and was rapidly becoming further submerged!

A lone Barn Owl, no doubt seeking to profit from the forced evacuation of resident small mammals, was to be seen harrying to and fro along the bank towards us and was photographed as it flew over the visitor's centre.

Fortunately, Aaron soon appeared on the scene, giving us permission to walk along the bank. This inevitably caused a good deal of disturbance to many of the waders and wildfowl on the lagoons, but enabled us to reach a suitable spot from where the 'Regardless' was able to pick us up, a task completed just about in time! So concluded, in rather wetter weather than at the outset, a thoroughly enjoyable if ever so slightly adventurous SOG outing.

Spring open morning at Landguard Bird Observatory – 16th October 2010

Dave Pearsons [Leaders: Justin Zantboer and Nigel Odin]

A good number of members turned up to enjoy a rewarding morning's birding, which included a tour of the nets, ringing demonstrations, the traditional tea and cake and some good humoured banter. What more does a birder want? Maybe that occasional rarity would just add some gloss!

With so much going on it was inevitable that some would miss the highlights of the sea watching. While some members were watching a Goldcrest being weighed, measured and recorded a Velvet Scoter flew past – fortunately most were alerted and were able to get onto the bird. The next gem was a Little Auk that eventually sat on the sea beside a green buoy. This was missed by those drinking tea, those touring the compound, those who could not identify a green buoy and those who didn't know north from south. Such is sea watching. Other birds of note included several Gannet, Red-breasted Merganser, Wigeon, Brent Geese, Red-throated Diver and two Med Gulls.

Birds recorded out on the Common included three Wheatear, Black Redstart, two Fieldfare, eight Redwing, Mistle Thrush, good numbers of Blackbird and Song Thrush, two Brambling and Rock Pipit with a late migrating House Martin flying south together with a number of Swallows.

The Peregrine and the Little Owl were very obliging and appeared on their usual perches right on cue, giving good views for all.

It was interesting for members watching the ringing of a continental Song Thrush to see, as Nigel pointed out, the greyer colouration in certain aspects of the bird. I hope it and the other continental migrants enjoy a less harsh winter this year, if only that it helps our resident birds, like Stonechat and Dartford Warbler to recover their numbers.

As usual our thanks go to Justin and Nigel for a very enjoyable and informative morning.

SOG News

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group and Gift Aid

Bill Stone – SOG Treasurer

As Treasurer and Membership Secretary for SOG one of my main objectives has been to move SOG into a position such that we can claim tax back on membership subscriptions.

“Gift Aid” works by allowing charities, recognised as such by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), to increase the value of monetary gifts from UK taxpayers by claiming back the basic rate tax paid by the member. Subscriptions paid to a charity are not gifts but can be treated as such for Gift Aid purposes, provided that the payment is for membership of the charity only.

It can increase the value of subscriptions by a quarter at no extra cost to the member as the charity can reclaim tax from HMRC on its ‘gross’ equivalent – its value before tax was deducted at the basic rate. This is currently 20 per cent from 6 April 2008. This means that for every £1 donated, a charity can claim an extra 25 pence. In addition, HMRC will automatically pay a charity a further three pence for every pound. This is a ‘transitional relief’ – to adjust to the fall in basic rate tax (from 22 per cent to 20 per cent) – and is available on Gift Aid donations made from 6 April 2008 until 5 April 2011. This means that for every £1 donated, the charity can receive 28 pence, so the total value of the donation is £1.28.

So, where are we in this process? As it stands an application was submitted to HMRC in early November 2010 in order to have SOG (already a charity) to be recognised as eligible to claim Gift Aid.

Once I am in receipt of this registration number I can start to complete a claim based on subscriptions made by those members who are UK tax payers. However, before I can do this, members wishing to have their subscriptions treated as a Gift Aid payment must sign a tax declaration. An appropriate Gift Aid form will be sent out to all members once a registration number has been granted.

Claims can be made up to four years after the end of the accounting period to which a claim relates. So, for membership subscriptions made during for the year ending 31 December 2007, the final date on which a Gift Aid repayment claim can be made to HMRC Charities is 31 December 2011. Charities are also eligible to receive interest on backdated repayment claims that are received by HMRC within the time limits. Therefore, for income received in the year ending 31 December 2007 interest is payable from 1 January 2008.

Of interest the Suffolk Naturalists' Society has just received notification from

HMRC that they have been recognised as a charity. As many SOG members are also members of SNS it is my intention to work closely with SNS in order to simplify the Gift Aid claim process.

Obituary

Geoff Price 1940 – 2010

John H. Grant

The Suffolk birding scene has lost a great friend with the passing of Geoff Price. But with this sad death, above any other, comes a message of which we'd all be well advised to take heed.

Geoff seemed to confound age. He looked nothing like his years, this slight, wiry and dapper figure with his characteristic "jizz" that was Geoff's and Geoff's alone, with a swagger that was immediately recognisable at great distance as he appeared on, say, a Minsmere or Dunwich horizon. He barely had a day's illness in his life until that fateful stomach cancer which struck him down and was diagnosed just days after his 70th birthday. He always looked enviously sleek and fit.

And thereby hangs the tale. However healthy we may feel, none of us knows what may lie in store and with Geoff's passing he leaves a lesson for us. All we must do is to enjoy each day to its full, wring the maximum amount out of each and every hour and relish the fact that we, the lucky ones, are alive and can share in the delights and wonders of birding.

Geoff certainly did that alright. Born in Barkingside, he was evacuated from the London metropolis's wartime perils and lived with his grandparents in rural Kent, where his passion for birds was kindled. After the war he returned to Barkingside and later worked in an electrical contractor's office before becoming an accomplished electrician. After stints with the likes of the Australian government and Selfridges, Geoff joined the famed but now defunct furriers Swears and Wells. While working for the firm he met his wife-to-be, Helen, in Edinburgh in 1966. Geoff later joined a pharmaceutical company, again as an electrician, and he and Helen moved to Basingstoke, Hants. Geoff retired at the age of 53 and, in 1995, the lure of Suffolk's birds resulted in a move to Walpole, near Halesworth, and six months later to Darsham, near Westleton, where he lived until his death.

Geoff and Helen became an endearing double act on the Suffolk birding scene, making innumerable friends and becoming stalwart members of SOG, which they supported with their genial presence at countless indoor meetings and field trips. Geoff was a member of the RSPB for a staggering 57 continuous years and was proud to have known every warden who has been in charge at Minsmere. He was a keen supporter of the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust and carried out many surveys for the BTO.

Widely travelled, Geoff had a special love for Scandinavia and also birdwatched in such countries as Poland, Iceland, Bulgaria and the USA. His impressively meticulous note-taking was an example to us all. His diaries stretch back pretty well throughout his 65 years as a birder and they carry Geoff's trademark of thoroughness, neatness and orderliness.

After the dreaded diagnosis, Geoff confronted his fate with a philosophical bravery, retaining his engaging, dry sense of humour to the very end and that, too, was very much an example to us all.

It seems strange that we will never again see that familiar “jizz” on the distant Suffolk skyline or amongst us on an SOG field trip. But we can take heart from Geoff’s lesson to us – enjoy every minute you have and every bird that you see as you really do not know what life will throw at you. We should thank him for that lesson, and thank him, too, for his companionship. We’ve lost a good man, a man whose slender frame belied immense bravery.

Note: Helen thanks all Geoff’s friends for the cards, calls and text messages she received as gestures of support in her loss. There was no church service to mark his passing – he was in many ways a private man who did not like “fuss” – but Helen made donations in his honour to the Patrick Stead Hospital, the James Paget Hospital and to the Macmillan Nurses.

Indoor meeting change

We apologise for the last minute change of speakers for the November indoor meeting. Alan Davies & Ruth Miller (The Biggest Twitch) were unfortunately unable to make the date. Our thanks to Rob Macklin who stood in. Alan & Ruth have agreed to reinstate their talk on 27th January 2011.

Birds and Conservation

The state of the UK’s Birds, 2010

Richard Rafe

The state of the UK’s birds 2010 is produced by a coalition of RSPB, BTO & WWT and the UK Government’s statutory nature conservation agencies, being Natural England in England. It contains results from annual, periodic and one-off surveys up to 2009. Throughout its pages are a number of “Health checks” – simple summary paragraphs – and these are reproduced below as a useful summary.

Rate of loss amongst farmland birds slowed

The UK wild bird indicators provide only a broad-brush assessment of the health of our bird populations as they report simply the average of many changes, both good and bad. However they do suggest that the rate of loss in farmland birds – one of our greatest concerns – has slowed, although not halted, since the UK’s Biodiversity Action Plan came into being in 1994. Three of the four indicator lines have also shown a more positive trend since 1994, with the exception being that for seabirds.

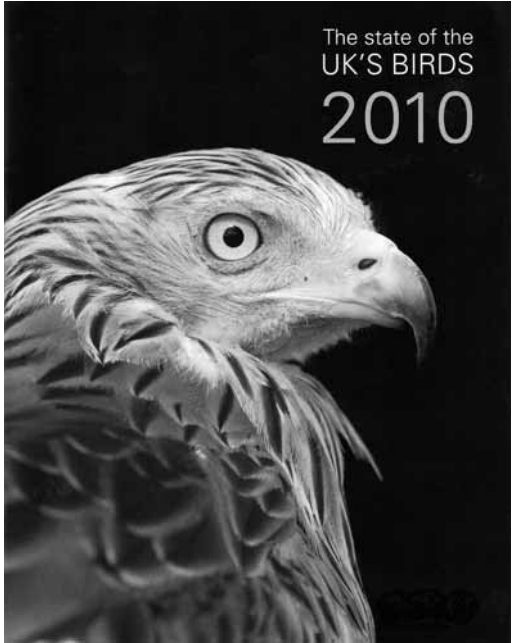
Common birds mixed trends

Trends amongst our common and widespread breeding species vary widely, with tremendous increases counterbalanced by dramatic declines. While we should celebrate recoveries of species such as Buzzard, it is clear from these trends that biodiversity loss in the UK has not been halted. Continued declines, particularly in a

number of farmland and woodland species, are serious enough that they could conceivably lead to the complete loss from the UK of species such as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Turtle Dove.

More breeding seabirds, but overall decline

While there are probably more breeding seabirds in the UK today than there were 40 years ago, the populations of many have now stabilised, or are decreasing. Greatest declines include those of Shag, Kittiwake, Arctic Skua and Herring Gull. By contrast, Gannet and Great Skua have increased markedly. Since the adoption of the UK BAP in 1994, the UK seabird index has declined by 5%. The main drivers of change are climate change (mainly through indirect impacts further down the food chain), the introduction of non-native mammalian predators (which affect ground nesting seabirds), and fisheries management (which can have both negative and positive impacts on seabird populations).



Waders increase

The steady increase in numbers of many species of wintering waders and wildfowl can be regarded as one of the UK's conservation successes over the recent decades, a testament to the protection and management of a network of wetland sites that have supported ever-larger numbers of birds. The recent onset of declines in many species is therefore cause for concern. Careful monitoring and research is needed, both in the UK and elsewhere on flyways, to determine whether this is a result of climate-mediated range shifts, or indicative of population-level declines.

The Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee

Justin Zantboer

As seems to be par for the course of late, there is very little to report. 2010 has been a slow year for submissions with the bulk of descriptions submitted being from members of SORC. This seems to be a sad continuation of 2009 which saw the number of outstanding descriptions probably at the highest ever.

The most notable change for SORC has been the dropping of the assessment and voting website. This was forced upon us as the website provider basically stopped

providing it! At present, we have effectively taken a step back with description assessment as all descriptions received are now being scanned and sent to members for individual assessment. However members are now assessing descriptions independently of each other, without the potential for being swayed by another member's comments or feelings interfering with their own opinion. The general feeling is that perhaps this is a fairer voting system anyway.

Another important change will be in the attitude to assessing "call only" records. Previously, if a bird was heard to call but not seen, SORC wouldn't consider the record worthy of assessment so discouraged submissions. This has now changed. As more and more birders are now realising how important birds calls are in identification (for instance at Landguard Bird Observatory, we probably identify 75% of the passerines flying overhead on call and more often than not, this is before the birds are even seen!) and consequently, making more effort to learn them, it was agreed that records based on "call only" should be considered. In an attempt to alleviate concerns, it was agreed that all records submitted purely on call would not be circulated in the normal manner but instead, would always, only be discussed at meetings. The records will be severely scrutinised. Observer's previous experience will play a huge part in assessing "call only" records as will the species involved. I'm sure that most people who rely heavily on calls for identification will know that it is a difficult art and that there are many similar sounding species. Single heard calls are unlikely to be accepted, so SORC are encouraging only records where the call has been heard repeatedly.

Another item of note is that mid October 2010 saw a decent arrival of Rough-legged Buzzards along the eastern coast of the UK and particularly into East Anglia. As we have done previously, it was agreed that asking for descriptions for each and every individual would be deemed a little harsh so we have accepted records from known observers on their merits only. You will notice if and when you browse through the list of outstanding descriptions that there are still records without names so if one of these was seen by you, please inform the relevant County Recorder or myself asap. Note though that this 'free period' is only for records occurring between 15th-25th October 2010. Any records outside of this period will still require descriptions.

I guess the only other notable change is that I'm now in my last year serving on SORC. Although being Secretary to SORC means that my term was unlimited (it wasn't that long ago that I envisaged serving for years to come). Combined with ever growing family and work commitments as well, I have really struggled this year and, to an extent, last year to find the desire that I previously had in "absolute bucketfuls" to make a difference in Suffolk. I feel now that it is only fair to stand down and allow somebody more enthusiastic to take on the job. It is coming up to ten years now that I have served and although I am hoping for a quick exit, I'm fairly sure that I will still be serving for a few months yet so this will see a decade of service. That's a long time to complete a voluntary job. As I said, I'm hoping for a rather sharp exit so if there is anybody out there who fancies a crack at one of the key roles in Suffolk birding, please let either Malcolm Wright or myself know. I will be finishing in September 2011 regardless but it would be good to have somebody trained and in place long before then, particularly for me!

I close as always by asking members to look through the lists of outstanding descriptions for 2010. If you are one of those observers listed that have yet to submit a description for one of your finds, I would ask you to get something submitted ASAP. If you were an observer perhaps lucky enough to see one of those birds listed, I also ask you to kindly submit something. Updated lists of recent decisions will be placed on the SOG website. Remember also that if you haven't already been doing so, it's now that time of year to submit all of your sightings for 2010 to the County Recorders. In an ideal world, most of you will have already been regularly submitting your records but in the real world, this probably hasn't happened on many occasions (I'm certainly guilty!) so your sightings will need to be submitted by 31st January 2011.

Have a good Christmas all of you and a splendid 2011.

Outstanding BBRC rarity 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 rarity 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	?
30/03/10	Penduline Tit x2	Minsmere	?
30/03/10	Savi's Warbler	Minsmere	JA Rowlands <i>et al.</i>
01/05/10	Savi's Warbler	Orfordness	D Crawshaw, MC Marsh + GJ Jobson.
08/07/10	Black Stork	Capel St Mary	?
17/07/10	Caspian Tern	Henham	
28/09/10	Red-flanked Bluetail	Corton	JA Brown <i>et al.</i>
30/09/10	Glossy Ibis	Minsmere	
01/10/10	Great Snipe	Covehithe	CA Buttle + R Walden.
10/10/10	Isabelline Wheatear (same)	Gunton	
10/10/10	Isabelline Wheatear (same)	Lowestoft	AC Easton, R Wilton <i>et al.</i>
17/10/10-24/10/10	Red-flanked Bluetail	Lowestoft	R Wincup <i>et al.</i>
17/10/10-19/10/10	Northern Long-tailed Tit x2	Southwold	
23/10/10	Glossy Ibis	Dunwich	SH Piotrowski <i>et al.</i>
30/10/10	Glossy Ibis	Southwold	C Fulcher + S Mayson
30/10/10	Pallid Swift	Dunwich	
Outstanding County rarity descriptions for 2010			
04/01/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Uggheshall	
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	

Outstanding County rarity descriptions for 2010 *(continued)*

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	
28/03/10	Alpine Swift	Burgh Castle	
28/03/10	Hooded Crow	Bawdsey	ML Cornish
29/03/10	Alpine Swift	Lowestoft (1310hrs)	
29/03/10	Alpine Swift	Southwold (1430hrs)	
30/03/10	Alpine Swift	Southwold (1100hrs)	
16/04/10	Raven	Cattawade	
18/04/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Trimley Marshes	
20/04/10	Hooded Crow	Kessingland	
21/04/10	Hooded Crow	Benacre Broad	
28/04/10	Serin	Landguard Bird Obs	DT Langlois + N Odin
30/04/10	Alpine Swift	Minsmere	
15/05/10	American Golden Plover	Minsmere	
16/05/10	Purple Heron	Minsmere	
16/05/10	Honey Buzzard	Hollesley	
17/05/10	Montagu's Harrier – 1S male	Erwarton	
18/05/10	Purple Heron (pos)	Beccles	
22/05/10	Purple Heron x2	North Warren	
26/05/10	Red-rumped Swallow	Trimley Marshes	P Oldfield
02/06/10	Marsh Warbler	Minsmere	JA Rowlands
07/06/10	Honey Buzzard	Henstead	
07/06/10	Marsh Warbler	Lavenham	
24/06/10	Quail	North Warren	
25/06/10	Quail	Shingle Street	P Lennard
26/06/10	Night Heron	Trimley St Mary	
30/06/10	Quail	Great Waldringfield	
12/07/10	Black Kite	Lavenham	
04/08/10	Honey Buzzard	Loompit Lake, Trimley St Martin	WJ Brame
05/08/10-07/08/10	Ferruginous Duck	Lackford	
17/08/10	Icterine Warbler (pos)	Felixstowe	
23/08/10	Cory's Shearwater (prob)	Southwold – north 1415hrs	R Marsh + LG Woods
23/08/10	Cory's Shearwater	Kessingland – north 1430hrs	P Read + C Darby
24/08/10	Cory's Shearwater	Southwold – north 1345hrs	NJ Mason, M Riley + P Whittaker
24/08/10	Cory's Shearwater	Felixstowe – north 1400hrs	CPS Ruffles
27/08/10	Icterine Warbler	Shingle Street	PR + JA Kennerley
29/08/10	Barred Warbler (prob)	Gunton	
01/09/10	Honey Buzzard	Ufford/Wickham Mkt	

Outstanding County rarity descriptions for 2010 *(continued)*

03/09/10	Kentish Plover	Blythburgh	BJ Small
05/09/10	Barred Warbler	Benacre	
06/09/10	Balearic Shearwater	Landguard Bird Obs	P Oldfield
06/09/10	Sabine's Gull – Juvenile	Sizewell	
07/09/10	Barred Warbler	Kessingland	
09/09/10	Honey Buzzard	Corton	JA Brown
09/09/10	Barred Warbler	Landguard Bird Obs	B Stone
10/09/10	Buff-breasted Sandpiper – probable	Blythburgh	
13/09/10	Black Kite	Metfield	
13/09/10	Grey Phalarope	Trimley Marshes	
30/09/10	Goshawk	Southwold	
02/10/10	Honey Buzzard	Eastbridge	
02/10/10	Honey Buzzard	Lakenheath Fen	
07/10/10-09/10/10	Honey Buzzard	Great Glemham	
09/10/10	Richard's Pipit	Thorpeness	S Mayson + R Joliffe
10/10/10	Northern Treecreeper <i>familiaris</i>	Orfordness	MC Marsh <i>et al.</i> (photos + ringed)
13/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Benacre Broad	
17/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Havergate Island – 1130hrs	
17/10/10	Black Guillemot (prob)	Southwold	BJ Small
18/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Dunwich – 1052hrs	
19/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Somerleyton	
19/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Sotterley	
22/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Henstead – 1246hrs	
22/10/10	Barred Warbler	Landguard Bird Obs	N Odin + DT Langlois
23/10/10	Hooded Crow	Covehithe	R Drew
24/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Ipswich	
25/10/10	Hooded Crow	Dunwich	
26/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Great Glemham	
27/10/10	Raven	Long Melford	
30/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Stoven	
30/10/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Wangford	
30/10/10	Hooded Crow	Orfordness	MC Marsh <i>et al.</i>
06/11/10	Siberian Chiffchaff <i>tristis</i>	Lowestoft	
06/11/10	Hooded Crow x2	Slaughden	
07/11/10	Cory's Shearwater	Slaughden	
07/11/10	Rough-legged Buzzard	Shottisham Creek	
09/11/10	Balearic Shearwater	Southwold	
12/11/10-13/11/10	Pallas's Warbler	Lowestoft	
13/11/10	Siberian Chiffchaff <i>tristis</i>	Gunton	
13/11/10	Siberian Chiffchaff <i>tristis</i>	Lowestoft	
13/11/10	Pallas's Warbler	Gunton	
13/11/10	Yellow-browed Warbler	Elveden	
14/11/10	Goshawk	North Warren	

Short Notes

Suffolk Tree Sparrow project – update as at October 2010

Simon Evans

So far this year we have colour ringed over 670 birds, mainly due to the superb efforts of John and Jan at the Ampton ‘mega site’, as well as at West Row and Wordwell/Culford. It is very pleasing to say that 95% of this work is in West Suffolk.

The colour ring scheme uses two rings, one on each leg. The right leg colour indicates the year of capture, so dark blue for 2009, light green for 2010 and black for 2011. The left leg colour indicates the population from which the bird originated in terms of pulli, or was first caught, in fully fledged birds. Light green for Ampton, Mauve for West Row and Yellow for Wordwell/Culford. A few other colours have been used in the east of the county so keep your eyes peeled.

As many of you already know, the Lackford Reserve population has grown, with 45+ birds one evening near the feeders and a similar number also noted on a Sunday morning. The Lackford Ringing Group will be attempting to catch some of these birds and if successful, then black will be the left leg location code for these birds. Birds from Ampton and Wordwell have already joined the Lackford birds.

Could I please ask you all to look carefully at any Tree Sparrows you may see in your travels and note any colour rings and on which leg they are. You can email me directly with any records at spe24@btinternet.com, or to Joe at Lackford Reserve.

Announcements and Requests

Be an ambassador for birders

Richard Rafe

I recently attended a twitch in a small country village where my wife and I were approached by a village lady as we parked our car expressing her exasperation at all the birders who had parked inconsiderately in the village recently. My wife dropped me off as close as possible to access the bird and then, being a good girl, went and parked the car in the village hall car park as requested by the lady and prominent signs around the village – it was some distance away! The space on the verge that we were about to occupy before being ‘moved on’ was immediately occupied by another birder. The presence of large numbers of birders was obviously causing concern amongst local residents.

Nearer to home, I was recently passed a complaint by a local resident about birders parking inconsiderately on a Suffolk site, blocking local access and accused of being abusive to a local couple who walked in front of birders very temporarily interrupting their view.

In contrast, there have been some fantastic examples recently of local communities accommodating birders (particularly during twitches) with well organised access arrangements and visiting birders giving generously towards local

good causes; the whole showing birders in a good light. Many rare birds turn up in situations where access may be difficult to negotiate or organise. It behoves us all to behave in an exemplary fashion in such situations – not least because if we are viewed as well behaved and harmless, if somewhat eccentric, then it is more likely that people will welcome us in for the next rare bird.

Christmas Wordsearch competition

Brenda Rafe

O	Y	S	T	E	R	C	A	T	C	H	E	R	S	M	E	W
R	E	M	M	A	H	W	O	L	L	E	Y	E	R	P	S	O
R	E	D	B	R	E	A	S	T	E	D	G	O	O	S	E	G
E	N	G	R	G	N	I	T	N	U	B	D	E	E	R	Y	R
L	E	M	E	R	L	I	N	R	E	T	A	E	E	E	B	E
B	R	O	D	Y	K	J	A	C	K	D	A	W	S	D	B	E
R	W	L	K	A	N	T	I	T	L	A	O	C	O	P	O	N
A	W	L	I	J	O	N	A	W	S	R	E	P	O	O	H	W
W	H	I	T	E	T	A	I	L	E	D	E	A	G	L	E	I
W	I	B	E	O	W	L	W	O	Y	W	O	N	S	L	O	N
O	M	R	R	P	I	D	B	Y	R	O	O	K	S	S	T	G
L	B	O	E	O	T	I	T	T	A	E	R	G	S	W	E	E
L	R	Z	D	O	E	R	E	D	W	I	N	G	O	I	N	D
I	E	A	I	H	E	N	H	A	R	R	I	E	R	F	N	T
W	L	R	E	E	T	I	P	I	P	Y	N	W	A	T	I	E
F	F	U	R	O	T	N	E	C	C	A	E	N	I	P	L	A
T	A	O	R	H	T	E	T	I	H	W	R	E	S	S	E	L

Find the 37 birds. Letters may be used more than once, but birds can only be found up or down, forwards or backwards, not diagonally. The unused letters taken in order, left to right, top to bottom, spell out a message from the editor. The solution to the puzzle is this message. Please send your solution to the editor (Richard Rafe) by 31st January 2011. The first correct answer drawn from a hat will be awarded a book token prize.

Recent Reports, July to September 2010

Justin Zantboer

All National and County rarities are still subject to ratification by the relevant committees; and probably most of these records will still need submitting to the relevant County Recorders so please ensure that if any of you as individuals saw any of the following mentioned birds, please submit them ASAP.

All individuals and organisations forwarding records are thanked for their efforts.

July 2010

A month of probable or reported rarities with the best of these being a possible first summer Baltic Gull at Blythburgh from 14-17th. Best of luck to the finder of this one! Two other national rarities were reported; a Black Stork flying over the A14 at Capel St Mary on 8th and a Caspian Tern flying over Henham Park, near Southwold on 17th.

County Rarities were a little less exciting with June's adult female Ferruginous Duck remaining at Minsmere throughout the month and a Black Kite being reported over Lavenham on 12th. Scarcer or unusual species reported included a drake Red-crested Pochard in eclipse at Trimley Marshes from 24th-31st; June's Quail singing at Great Waldringfield on 1st; summer plumaged Black-necked Grebes at Landguard on 14th, Alton Water on 17th and off Dunwich Cliffs on 29th; a Shag at Landguard on 11-12th with another at Lowestoft on 28th; a Great White Egret at Minsmere on 5th; a first summer Caspian Gull at Blythburgh from 13th-21st at least with a second summer bird there on 15th and a first summer bird at Trimley Marshes on 22nd; an adult Roseate Tern at Trimley Marshes on 4th; and Wood Warblers at Easton Bavents and Theberton on 28th and Landguard on 30th.

The supporting cast included just two Manx Shearwaters, as many as 23 Spoonbills (16 of these were on Havergate Island), two Red Kites, one Curlew Sandpiper and three Wood Sandpipers. Also of note were good counts of Yellow-legged Gulls at Blythburgh with peaks of 34 on 14th and 33 on 21st and of Mediterranean Gulls at Reydon, nr Southwold with a peak of 125 on 30th.

August 2010

Rather disappointingly, no national rarities were reported during the month.

County rarities were slightly more evident although unfortunately, apart from the female Ferruginous Duck which remained at Minsmere to 13th, there were no long stayers. Those reported consisted of:- Honey Buzzard over Loompit Lake, Trimley St Martin on 4th and Minsmere on 28th; a juvenile Montagu's Harrier in off the sea then over Minsmere on 12th; a Kentish Plover that had been frequenting the northern flats at Breydon Water seen in flight over the south flats on 7th; a Richard's Pipit which was bizarrely reported at least a month earlier than would be expected at Shingle Street on 20th; Icterine Warblers at Minsmere on 17th and Shingle Street on 27th and perhaps saving the best until last, a fine juvenile Ortolan Bunting on the common at Landguard on 28th, this being perhaps the only bird seen by more than just a handful of observers.

Seawatching provided a couple more county rarities with Cory's Shearwaters off Southwold and Kessingland on 23rd and Felixstowe and Southwold on 24th. What could have been the highlight of the month if it was identified was a Dark-rumped Petrel which flew south past Southwold on 23rd. Other seawatching reports included ten Sooty and six Manx Shearwaters, eight Pomarine and 27 Great Skuas and as many as 18 Long-tailed Skuas which included nine past Kessingland on 26th, although seawatchers elsewhere along the coast the same day failed to pick out any.

The best of the scarcities reported included an eclipse drake Red-crested Pochard at Trimley Marshes from 9th; a female Scaup on Havergate Island on 13th, a Ruddy Shelduck at Southwold on 14th and two at Benacre Pits on 31st; a Purple Sandpiper at Lowestoft on 28th; a Long-eared Owl at Gorleston on 19th; a Short-eared Owl over East Lane on 30th; Wrynecks at Carlton Marshes and Gunton on 29th and Minsmere on 30th; Wood Warblers at Minsmere on 12th and 17th, Kessingland on 17th, Landguard on 26th and Bawdsey on 28th; and an early Lapland Bunting at Thorpeness on 30th.

Other reports included 21 Spoonbills (Havergate Island accounted for 19 of these), four Ospreys, two Red Kites, just two Little Stints, 11 Curlew Sandpipers, only four Wood Sandpipers, two Caspian Gulls, a peak of 143 Mediterranean Gulls at Reydon, near Southwold, on 1st, and one Ring-necked Parakeet.

September 2010

Without doubt the star of month was the much awaited appearance of a King Eider in Suffolk. With a first summer drake having first been seen off Yorkshire and then off Norfolk towards the end of July, Suffolk hopes were raised when it was last seen drifting south off Winterton on 29th July. However, with no confirmed sightings anywhere during August, these hopes slowly diminished so it was quite unexpected when it was seen drifting south past Kessingland on 12th. Fortunately for the masses, it was then relocated off Minsmere in the afternoon where it then took up residence, commuting between Dunwich and Thorpeness until the end of the month.

Although fast losing their rarity status within the UK, it was still remarkable for Suffolk to host two Red-flanked Bluetails, with the first being found at Corton on 28th closely followed by another at Pakefield on 30th. Including these two Suffolk records, at least six of these eastern gems were found in the UK between 27-30th although the Suffolk birds were the only ones in England. It's amazing to think that Suffolk's first one at Landguard way back in 1994 was only the 14th record for the UK. The only other national rarity was a Glossy Ibis which reportedly flew over Minsmere on 30th.

County rarities were not that well represented with probably the best two being a juvenile Spotted Crake found at Trimley Marshes on 18th where it remained attracting plenty of attention until 24th and a Greenish Warbler found at Thorpeness Caravan Park on 6th, remaining until 7th.

Honey Buzzards came in off the sea at Landguard on 1st and Corton on 9th and an early Rough-legged Buzzard flew south over Minsmere on 30th. A Black Kite was reportedly at Metfield on 13th and a Red-footed Falcon was seen flying south over Dunwich, Minsmere and then Sizewell on 12th. The only rare wader of the month

was a Kentish Plover which was seen briefly on the Blyth Estuary on 3rd. An Icterine Warbler was found on the common at Landguard on 4th where it remained until 12th, being very mobile and showing well at times, drawing much admiration from the unexpected number of observers. There was speculation that a second bird was present but unfortunately this was not proven. Barred Warblers turned up in the best numbers for a few years with singles at Felixstowe Ferry from 2nd-6th, Benacre on 5th, Kessingland and Orfordness on 7th, Minsmere 7-11th; Landguard on 9th, Orfordness on 28th and Felixstowe Ferry on 30th.

Seawatching during the month was relatively quiet with the highlights being a Cory's Shearwater tracked past Sizewell, Southwold and Corton on 4th (taking just 45 minutes to complete the distance!) and Balearic Shearwater off Landguard and a Sabine's Gull off Sizewell on 6th. Also noted were approximately 35 Sooty Shearwaters, just one Manx Shearwater, two Black-throated Divers, nine Pomarine Skuas, 14 Long-tailed Skuas and 26 Great Skuas. Also of note was a dark-rumped Whimbrel flying south past Southwold on 19th. As to be expected, its true identity could only be guessed at but with a Little Whimbrel in Belgium just two days previously...

The best of the rest included Red-necked Grebes at East Lane from 19-30th and off Landguard on 29th; Black-necked Grebes at Great Livermere from 11-15th and Benacre Broad on 19th; two Pectoral Sandpipers at Minsmere 24-25th and a single at Trimley Marshes on 26th; a Glaucous Gull reportedly at Minsmere on 19th; a Shorelark at Covehithe on 28th; a Wood Warbler at Westleton on 8th; Yellow-browed Warblers at Thorpeness from 26-28th and at Corton on 28th; Red-backed Shrikes at Orfordness on 3rd, Minsmere from 7-12th and Southwold on 12th and Great Grey Shrikes at Corton on 28th, Minsmere on 29th and Halesworth and Stutton Mill on 30th.

Also of particular note were eight Wrynecks from 7th at seven coastal sites between Shingle Street and Kessingland and, even more impressive, at least forty Lapland Buntings from 8th at 16 coastal sites between Landguard and Corton. The rather spectacular Lapland Bunting numbers were a reflection of a huge influx into the UK with flocks of up to 300 on the Northern Isles.

Signs of winter abounded with Snow Buntings noted from 17th, Pink-footed Geese from 20th, Jack Snipe from 23rd and Purple Sandpipers from 29th.

Other bits and pieces of interest included one Ruddy Shelduck, three Red-crested Pochards, 17 Spoonbills, one Red Kite, eight Ospreys, three Hen Harriers, five Merlins, 13 Little Stints, 25 Curlew Sandpipers, four Wood Sandpipers, six Short-eared Owls and one Caspian Gull.

Looking back – October to December 1960 and 1985

Philip Murphy

Slected highlights from the 1960 and 1985 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period October to December.

50 years ago

Divers and Ducks

What were, at the time, unprecedented totals of Red-throated Divers were recorded off the Suffolk coast in late December; we read of Red-throated Diver in

the SBR that *“At the end of the year most exceptional numbers were recorded from Dunwich to Walberswick, peak figures being 300 on Dec. 29th and c.200 on Dec. 31st.”* The former total remained as the highest total ever recorded off Suffolk until 28th December 1982 when 352 were counted, also off Walberswick. Accompanying the divers were up to 100 Velvet Scoters and 2,000 Common Scoters; of the latter species we are told that many sick and tired birds were found on the adjacent beaches in late December. Additional noteworthy waterfowl included 812 Mute Swans on the Stour Estuary in December, c.10,000 Eurasian Wigeon crammed onto Havergate Island, 8th November and 50 Greater Scaup at Lowestoft in October.

Rough-legged Buzzards and Red Kite

We read of Rough-legged Buzzard that *“During the autumn an unusual number of records, possibly due to the number of dead and dying rabbits which attracted the birds”*; totals peaked in November when there were up to four at Walberswick and three at Minsmere. What was only the second Red Kite to be noted in Suffolk since 1901 flew over Minsmere, 3rd November.

Waders and Med Gull

Havergate Island was again excellent for scarce waders with Kentish Plover, 1st October, a peak of 55 Little Stints, 2nd October, Red-necked Phalarope, 2nd October and the final Pied Avocet of the year on 18th November. The Mediterranean Gull returned to Pakefield on 15th October to spend its fifth consecutive winter in that area.

Gales impact on migrants

Migration at Lowestoft throughout the year was detailed meticulously in a separate article within the SBR. The most dramatic entry in this period related to 1st October following a night of gales and heavy rain; the tideline was walked between Gorleston and Lowestoft to see what effect the weather had had on migrants. A total of 698 birds were found dead, including 621 Redwings, eight Common Redstarts, four Black Redstarts, three Little Stints and singles of Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Woodcock, Pied Flycatcher and Brambling. There were also the following fascinating entries:

“October 22nd – ... Five Blue Tits in from the sea at 09.34 hours – appeared to only just make the beach, and were so exhausted it was possible to get within a foot of them; after resting for 30 minutes they flew on inland.

October 26th – ... A flock of c. 30 Long-tailed Tits resting on the sea-wall at daybreak, apparently very tired and extremely tame ... a most unusual occurrence, at least two Nuthatches flying overhead, calling loudly and apparently circling for a while before flying west, still calling loudly.”

Autumn passage migrants

Additional noteworthy passerine records included 32 Ring Ouzels on the coast, 2nd October (of which 15 were at Walberswick and ten at Minsmere), up to 15 Shore Lark, Walberswick, 27th November to 21st December, 12 Hooded Crows, Minsmere, 14th November, and up to 100 Bearded Tits foraging on shingle at the edge of the Benacre Broad reedbed in late December.

Notable late dates of summer migrants included Common Swift – 30th October, Barn Swallow – 7th December, House Martin – 9th December, and Garden Warbler – 6th November. No Blackcaps were noted after 28th October, and no Common Chiffchaffs after 26th October apart from one at Minsmere, 18th to 25th November.

25 years ago

Notable Nutcracker

Interest in birdwatching increased rapidly in Suffolk during the 1980s, but in 1985 many of the county's birders had yet to see a Spotted Nutcracker having missed out on the 1968 invasion when about 75 were recorded in Suffolk. Accordingly the report of a Spotted Nutcracker on the north side of Westleton on 2nd November created much interest not just in Suffolk but also much further afield. Thankfully it was still there the next day when 400 birders were present. It remained in the area, feeding on apples, until 7th December when it was found dead. During its extended stay it was probably seen by well over 1,000 observers. Since the occurrence of this memorable bird there have been no further reports of Spotted Nutcracker in Suffolk.

White-tailed Eagle

The second major rarity in this period did not create quite as much interest amongst the birding community as did the Spotted Nutcracker but it was an equally impressive bird – a second-year White-tailed Eagle. This magnificent raptor remained in the area between Benacre and Dunwich during 12th to 16th November and what was presumably the same bird remained in the Benacre Broad area between 29th November and 18th December.

Dowitcher debate

Rarities in Suffolk have something of a reputation for being controversial and a dowitcher which remained at Alton Water between 20th October and 14th December continued the tradition. Although most observers considered that it was an immature Long-billed Dowitcher, others were of the opinion that showed some characteristics of Short-billed Dowitcher. After much deliberation BBRC accepted the record as being of Long-billed Dowitcher. Remarkably a second immature Long-billed Dowitcher was present at Minsmere on 30th October. There were no further records of Long-billed Dowitcher in Suffolk until one frequented the Stour Estuary in March and April 2007.

Skua records

Late autumn witnessed what were, at the time, the largest ever totals of Pomarine Skuas to be recorded in Suffolk, with up to 50 in November and 20 in December. The maximum site totals were nine, Lowestoft, 26th December, and eight, Minsmere, 18th November. On 17th November one was pursuing Common Scoters off Minsmere and on the same date an immature was seen to catch, kill and eat a Black-legged Kittiwake at Benacre Broad.

Waders

A late Pectoral Sandpiper remained at Covehithe Broad between 6th and 27th October. The total of 270 Pied Avocets on Havergate Island, 28th December was, at the time, a record county wintering total. One of the most remarkable sightings of waders ever to be recorded in West Suffolk occurred on 9th October when ten Grey Plovers, ten Red Knot and eight Bar-tailed Godwits flew west over Eriswell.

Yellow-browed Warbler

Before 1985 there had only been eight records of Yellow-browed Warbler in Suffolk. However, 1985 was to witness a significant influx of this Siberian warbler into Britain of which Suffolk's share was nine, this more than doubling the county total up to 17. Of these nine records, one occurred at Landguard in late September and the remainder were all in October with reports from Corton, Lowestoft (2), Walberswick, Minsmere (2) and Landguard (2).

November and December – late migrants

It was an excellent autumn for late summer migrants. The most unexpected were a Hoopoe at Sudbury from 8th to 11th December and a Sedge Warbler at Lakenheath on 8th December; the Hoopoe was, at the time, the latest ever recorded in Suffolk and the Sedge Warbler, not surprisingly, remains as the county's latest ever. Additional late dates included Arctic Tern, Minsmere, 17th November; Common Swift, Kessingland, 9th November; Sand Martin, Benacre, 16th November; Barn Swallow, Herringfleet, 10th December; Yellow Wagtail, Long Melford, 8th November; Whinchat, Minsmere, 7th November and Garden Warbler, Landguard, 9th November.

Advertisements

For sale: 65 Swaroski scope with x30 eyepiece; with head & tripod, £1,000

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Both in immaculate condition. Please contact Helen Price, 01728 668346.

SOG – who we are, what we do

SOG is the Group for people interested in the birds of Suffolk, and provides a network and a voice for birdwatchers in the county. The Group is administered by Suffolk birdwatchers for Suffolk birdwatchers, keeping them in touch with what is going on and with each other. Through the Group's Council, SOG has good links with other naturalist and conservation organisations in the region.



SOG organises an extensive programme of field meetings, an opportunity for members, young or old, novice or expert, to see birds, and to share camaraderie with fellow enthusiasts.

Indoor meetings are held in Ipswich, with quality speakers entertaining members with slides and stories of birds, both local and from around the world.

The Group's bulletin, *The Harrier*, published quarterly, keeps members in touch with what's going on – stories about birds, conservation, reserves, and people.

SOG organises and promotes surveys and projects on the birds of Suffolk, with an opportunity for members to participate. SOG is also able to support worthwhile projects through bursaries.

Membership of SOG is open to anyone with an interest in the birds of Suffolk. For details of membership, contact: Bill Stone, 27

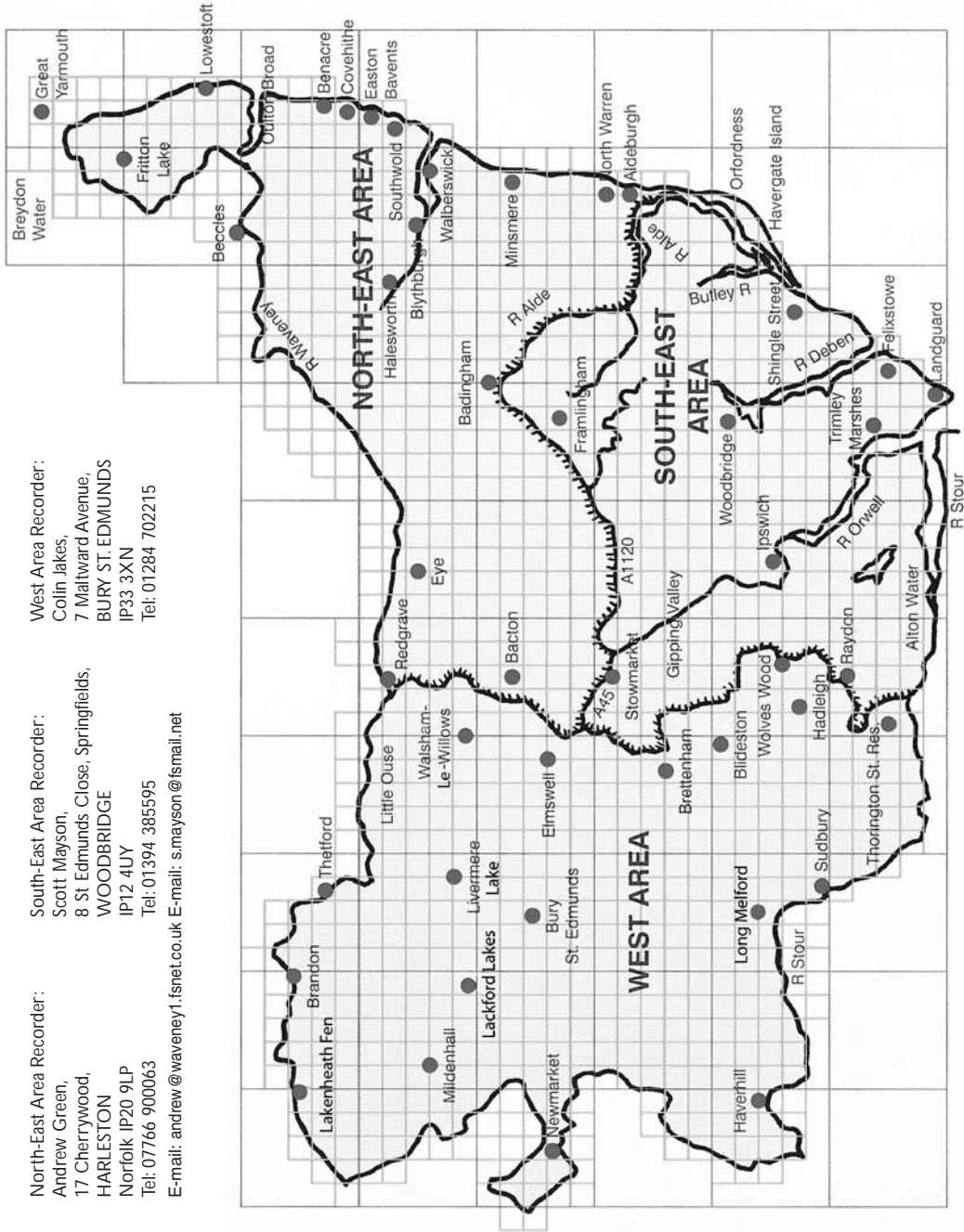
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Season's greetings
and a
bird-filled New Year

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SOG:– Adults: £13.00, Family: £15.00

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