



June 2011 Bulletin No.165

The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Inside:
Black Woodpeckers
Coastal erosion
County rarities
Digiscoping

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Cover photography –

Digiscope photographer: Danny Porter

Nesting on the old ice chute at Lowestoft harbour, this pair of Kittiwakes was digiscoped in March 2010.

Shot details: f10, ISO 800, 1/1600 sec. Equipment: Canon EOS 500D and Swarovski ATS 80. Image sharpened using Adobe Photoshop.

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All material for the September 2011 Harrier should be with the editor by w/e 26 August

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Suffolk Ornithologists’ Group Registered Charity No. 801446



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Welcome to the latest Harrier and the last of the re-design process – for the moment

As much as I enjoyed putting the last edition to bed, this quarter I have to open with an apology to several of its contributors, as a number of gremlins crept into print. But I can now confirm a proof-reader has volunteered to help and my trusty 'spill chucker' is now primed so that, hopefully, there won't be a repetition in this issue (fingers-crossed).

That said I have buried one deliberate error in this bulletin. The reward for the winning finder will be a pint of bitter (or equivalent) on me in The Dove (Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds – depending which is nearer to the winner)!

Sea erosion is a centuries old problem for this county and so, with the publication of Suffolk's Shoreline Management Plan late last year, it seemed appropriate to begin to consider the implications of this for Suffolk's coastline. Thus in this issue we have the first of a two-part feature dealing with coastal erosion and its implications for reserves, birds and our birding experience.

On a more positive note, we open with an interview with a leading woodpecker expert on the possibility of Black Woodpecker breeding in Suffolk.

Even though, like most of us, I've tried digiscoping, it still remains something of a mystery to me and I thought it would be helpful if a couple of experts gave us the benefit of their thoughts; so in this issue you can enjoy the results of their labour on this Bulletin's cover and in the colour supplement.

We are always on the look out for articles for the Bulletin, so if you've got anything you want to say, put it down on paper and send it to me (my address is opposite). Or, if you're a photographer, send me some low-res shots of Suffolk landscapes for the next issue's colour supplement. I'm intending this next supplement to illustrate all of the key Suffolk habitats, but with a twist, there has always to be a bird in the frame! Finally, scattered throughout this issue are a number of Su Gough's warbler illustrations. For those of you of an artistic leaning perhaps you would like to submit some of your own work for the September issue? The theme will be waders.

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

The Black Woodpecker – its Suffolk potential

Editor:

Like many I've seen this impressive species of woodpecker from Estonia to Hungary and as far south as Cephalonia – and I'd very much like to see more. As Gerard Gorman has recently finished a monograph on this iconic woodland bird (which is featured in the June issue of Bird Watch magazine), I thought I'd take this opportunity to interview him about the possibility of our ever seeing it in Suffolk.

Ed.: Thanks for talking to me Gerard. First, for those of you who don't know him (or haven't read his recent Bird Watch article), Gerard Gorman is amongst Europe's leading authorities on woodpeckers and he really knows this particular species well, as his monograph on it is being published this summer demonstrates.

Gerard, are we likely to see Black Woodpecker breeding in our lifetime in Suffolk?

Gerard: The short answer is, at best, possibly. There may probably have been the odd vagrant in the county over the years¹ but, in the short-term, the odds are against it. As for the medium-term, who can tell? Black Woodpecker wouldn't be the first species to confound the opinions of experts.

Ed.: But, as I understand it, this species has been expanding steadily westwards since the turn of the last century?

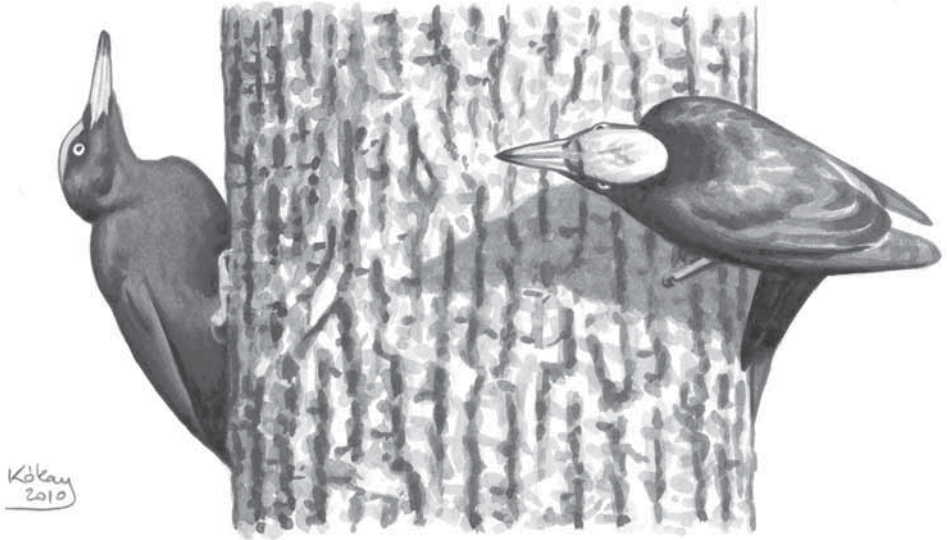
Gerard: That's true. In the early 1900s Black Woodpecker was regarded as a Central



¹ When I first discussed this matter with him, Gerard was already aware of a possible sighting of a Black Woodpecker at Benacre some years back.

European species. But, well before the start of the First World War, they had already begun to move westwards. By the 1950s they had occupied the west of Holland and their range

while they are not especially long-lived as a species (the oldest ringed bird found so far was only 14 years) they are usually successful breeders and numbers are such that dispersal



stretched down to the Ardennes. Then, by the 1990s, they finally reached the coasts of the North Sea and the English Channel. Now these woodpeckers can be found as close as 30 kilometres from England, and anywhere from Normandy to the north Netherlands.

Ed.: That is quite a record for what I thought was an essentially sedentary species?

Gerard: Well it is and it isn't. We know that the most northern European population of Black Woodpecker displays dispersal tendencies every year – probably out of necessity. But they also have a reputation for vagrancy throughout the range.

Ed.: So, why this westward expansion?

Gerard: There are two basic reasons. First,

often becomes the order of the day for fledglings when they come to leave the nest. Although most stay faithful to their natal area, there have been records of ringed juveniles recovered up to 1000 kms from the nesting site in their first year.

Second, new and appropriate habitat has become available. Changes to forestry practices, first in Germany and notably in France, have created a lot more habitat for this species. Proving this rule, the contraction in the numbers of Finnish Black Woodpecker can be laid at the door of the Finn's adoption of more intensively mechanised forestry practices. Combining this breeding success and more habitats means there has been plenty of reason and opportunity for Black Woodpecker to expand their range.

Ed.: So, back to my first question, what about breeding here?

Gerard: While it is possible, in my view it is unlikely in the short to medium-term – say the next twenty to thirty years.

Ed.: Why's that?

Gerard: Well, it's not the oft-cited length of the sea crossing acting as a barrier. Several of the islands in the Baltic were settled in the last century and to do so involved open sea crossings approaching 30 kms – which is about the distance for the shortest English Channel crossing. So the Channel is unlikely to prove to be a long-term barrier.

Ed.: O.K., so what about the extent of tree cover in Britain? England has significantly less forest cover than the remainder of Europe and is probably therefore less attractive.

Gerard: Sorry Phil, but I don't think this is the case either. Contrary to some expert opinion, Black Woodpeckers don't need extensive tracts of forest. Fragmented woodlands are fine, whether it's coniferous or deciduous, so long as it contains adequate nesting, roosting and feeding opportunities. And these requirements are met by quality woodland with a good percentage of big trees for nesting and roosting, along with some dead and decaying trees to provide feeding opportunities.



Ed.: Well, what about the absence of Carpenter Ants in Britain?

Gerard: I don't think this will necessarily prove to be a problem either. While it is true Black Woodpeckers are keen on Carpenter and other large species of ants, they are not exclusively wedded to them. Their diet across their Palearctic range is actually quite variable, taking in many different invertebrates such as beetles, wasps, bees and moth larvae, some spiders, small molluscs and even vegetable matter.

Ed.: So, as far as I can judge, all of these conditions are met in Suffolk. For example the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the RSPB and Forestry Commission landscape-scale project around Dunwich Forest should in time create perfect habitat for Black Woodpecker. Thus, if the woodland habitat is possibly all right, that they are able to readily find food and the sea is not a real barrier, why aren't they here?

Gerard: Search me!

Editor: Despite the it is worth keeping our eyes peeled. Although, given the length of the sea crossing from Holland, it would seem Kent is likely to pip us at the post. To help us Gerard has provided a couple of ID tips below; just in case:

Gerard's ID tips:

(1) It's not hard to ID – in most situations Black Woodpecker is unmistakable!

(2) With a little imagination a Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*, in flight might fool an observer into thinking they have sighted a Black Woodpecker, as they are similar in size and colour and both have whitish bills.

(3) In prolonged flight over open country, or when crossing a clearing, Black Woodpeckers can resemble a small corvid such as the Jay *Garrulus glandarius*. This is because this species of woodpecker does not bound in flight in so-called typical woodpecker fashion; instead, it holds its head up and flaps energetically with wing tips splayed outwards and upwards.

Lynx Edicions will publish 'The Black Woodpecker – a monograph on *Dryocopus martius*', this summer. Look for it and Gerard at the Rutland Bird Fair!

Illustrations: Kokay Szabolcs

Richard Rafe, *with input from RSPB & SWT*

Part 1: Suffolk and sea erosion

Editor: Richard Rafe's article is Part 1 of a coastal feature and deals with the implications for some of our reserves. Then, in the September issue's Part 2 we plan to talk in more depth about the likely implications of coastal erosion for these and other reserves, as well as what its effects might be on the birds and for us as birdwatchers.

Meantime, the Editor would like to hear from SOG members too, so we can publish your views about this important issue and perhaps collect some ideas about what SOG might do (my address for submissions can be found on the inside front cover).

The future of freshwater habitats along the Suffolk coast

The Suffolk coast has important freshwater habitats lying immediately alongside the coast, often protected from the open sea by narrow shingle barriers. As the Suffolk coast continues to erode and retreat, these freshwater habitats are likely to be either lost completely or change towards more saline, coastal habitats. So what does this erosion mean for some of our well known and much loved nature reserves?

Erosion on the Suffolk coast and the Shoreline Management Plan

The Suffolk coast is generally made up of soft geology, and the energy of the waves causes erosion. This is not new and has been happening for thousands of years. Without defences the coast would continue to retreat over its whole length: in some areas this might mean a retreat of only tens of metres; whilst in other areas erosion could be hundreds of metres over the next century. There are also many areas of flood risk along the Suffolk coast and, as coastal processes change, some low-lying areas may become more susceptible to flooding in the future.

Future policies towards coastal defence are set out in The Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (Suffolk Coastal District Council, 2010 – or SMP for short) and are driven by economics (what we can afford) and by sustainability (finding the ‘best’ solution). Over the next hundred years major residential and commercial areas will continue to be protected. In between these areas, where the policy is to “hold the line”, there are extensive lengths of coastline that will be managed either by a policy of “no active intervention”, or through “managed realignment”. However, this approach does leave some of our freshwater nature reserves under threat of loss or change over the next few decades.

Nature conservation on a changing coastline

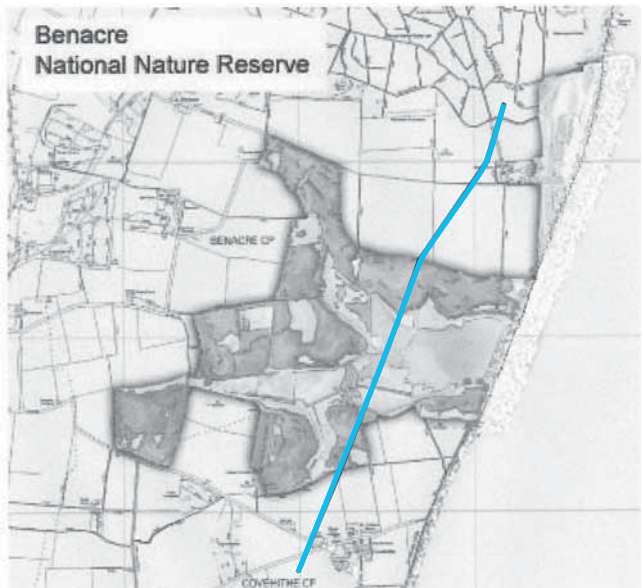
With a naturally eroding dynamic coastline, one of the main issues for nature conservation is achieving the right balance between

protecting features at risk and maintaining the natural processes that sustain important coastal habitats. In particular, this introduces the challenge of balancing the freshwater coastal habitats and the open coast habitat. As the coastline retreats many freshwater habitats lying along the coast will simply be lost; others become increasingly susceptible to inundation by the sea as shingle banks become more prone to catastrophic failure.

So what is this likely to mean for some of our coastal nature reserves famous for their freshwater lagoons and reedbeds, with associated Bitterns, Marsh Harriers, Bearded Tits and the like?

Benacre National Nature Reserve (managed by Natural England)

Benacre NNR encompasses the lagoons and reedbeds at Benacre and the associated Covehithe and Easton valleys. The SMP policy for this stretch of coast is “no active intervention” – a decision not to invest in



The future shoreline at Benacre as indicated by the SMP

providing or maintaining defences. The predicted coastline in 100 years time will lie some 500 metres inland of the present coastline (see blue line on map), with much of what is now Benacre Broad, Covehithe Valley and the reedbeds at Easton lost to the sea. The Benacre NNR management plan has a vision for the future that accepts that over the next 50 years Benacre NNR will change significantly. At current rates hundreds of metres may erode from the seaward boundary of the site and be lost, and the remaining freshwater marsh habitats are likely to become increasingly saline. Freshwater reedbed will disappear from Benacre and Covehithe and be dramatically reduced at Easton.

In recent years the shingle beaches, particularly that in front of Benacre Broad, has become increasingly susceptible to periodic breaches. In the past, Natural England and the Environment Agency repaired these breaches by bulldozing the beach back into place. It is increasingly likely that future breaches will be left alone; they may seal naturally, they may not.

Further south, the Easton valley with its important reedbeds runs up past the road at Potters Bridge. There is a danger that the road could flood more frequently; this, and a desire to

slow down the rate of change, means that options will be considered on how drainage of the River Wren can be managed. One possibility is building a flood bank across the valley below the road to prevent salt-water incursion upstream, thereby protecting the freshwater reedbed and the road.

Suffolk Coast NNR – Walberswick (Natural England) and Dingle Marshes (RSPB & SWT)

The SMP indicates a preferred option for this section of coast of “managed realignment”. The shingle bank between Walberswick and Dunwich has been actively managed in the past, being regularly bulldozed up into an artificially high bank, but that bank has become increasingly vulnerable to major breaches. The plan recommends that the shingle bank is allowed to act more naturally, adopting a wider and lower profile; the expectation is for only relatively minor migration of the shingle bank landwards – this would maintain the overall landscape of the frontage, but accepts that it will increase the risk of regular flooding behind.

The Walberswick (Natural England) NNR management plan predicts substantial changes in the future with unfettered coastal work and



The 2006 tidal surge at Waller Bank

a naturally functioning coastline. The shingle bank may breach on a permanent basis.

Cliff Waller (the previous Site Manager for the Walberswick reserve) was a man before his time – anticipating the future risk of the sea coming in more regularly, he built a bank (see blue line on diagram) across the narrow neck of Westwood Marsh to protect the bulk of his beloved reedbeds from being inundated by the sea. This bank will continue to protect the reedbed for many years to come, but in future decades this may well fail and the area presently occupied by the Westwood Marshes reedbed could become a tidal inlet fringed by saltmarsh.

Dingle Marshes, and SWT and RSPB reserve, has become one of the most dynamic and unpredictable places on the Suffolk coast where the reality of long-term change is



'Waller Bank' site diagram

accepted. Currently a largely freshwater reserve, in recent years it has been inundated on a number of occasions by the sea breaking through the shingle ridge that forms the seaward edge. This trend may well increase with sea level rise, coupled with a human decision to stop shoring up defences using bulldozers². At some point the balance is going to tip and Dingle Marshes will become a mostly saline reserve. While this will not suit some species, yet others will benefit.

There is an envisaged impact on the Dunwich River which may be rerouted by the Environment

Agency or naturally find a new way to the sea. Under such circumstances the grazing marshes are likely to disappear and the area will become a tidal inlet.

Minsmere (RSPB)

The SMP has a policy for Dunwich cliffs of “no active intervention” – thus the cliffs will continue to erode but predicted losses are relatively slow, of the order of just a few metres, rather than the hundreds of metres further north. The shingle bank and dunes fronting the Minsmere reserve and Minsmere river valley will be characterised by “managed realignment” – i.e. there will not be an imperative to continue to manage them to retain their current line. There is an obvious fixed point to the south at Sizewell where a “hold the line” policy will apply. The area of greatest immediate risk is the shore south of Dunwich Cliffs – as the cliffs erode so the shoreline rolls back and the dunes south of the cliffs could be breached.

At Minsmere RSPB reserve there is an expectation that the North Marsh area will be breached by the sea in the near future (within 20 years) and that, as a result, the freshwater interests will be lost and the habitat will change to brackish or saline salt marsh. This may happen slowly if there are a series of temporary breaches of the beach dunes with the water in North Marsh becoming increasingly brackish. Alternatively it may happen quickly if there is a flood event that causes a large permanent breach. For Minsmere the key management is the rebuilding of the North Wall by the Environment Agency that will increase flood defences to the south and enhance the protection of the scrape and main reedbed, so as to retain their freshwater habitats and species.

² At first sight this seems counter intuitive, however it has now been demonstrated that naturally created and sculpted defences are more resilient than bulldozed banks.



A classic Suffolk reedbed vulnerable to change

Replacing reedbeds elsewhere

Most of the reedbeds and other wetlands within these reserves are of recognised international importance. International law requires the UK to replace such habitats lost by our changes in management – so where a decision is taken not to continue to protect and manage the shingle banks, and this leads to the loss of freshwater reedbed by sea water incursion, then there is a requirement to replace the freshwater habitats elsewhere. Replacement habitat should be created in close proximity if possible, or, if this is not possible, in sustainable locations further afield.

There are few places along the Suffolk coast suitable for the creation of new freshwater wetlands. The SWT previously developed the Hen Reedbed reserve, now itself under threat from river wall failure, and the RSPB is developing a new reserve near Snape. Current thinking for replacement freshwater habitats focuses on the Fens. The Fens provide a fantastic opportunity for wetland creation. The Environment Agency is funding a major programme that is seeking to create around

1000 ha of new replacement habitat in response to coastal change. We already have some major projects focused on extending, joining and creating new wetlands at the Great Fen, Lakenheath Fen and Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, plus The Wissey Living Landscape in west Norfolk.

The relatively new RSPB reserve at Lakenheath Fen demonstrates how successful such wetland creation can be for birds. Just 15 years ago this was carrot fields – now it supports breeding Cranes, Bitterns (seven ‘boomers’ were reported this year) and huge numbers of other reedbed birds. This is imaginative conservation in action. Our coastal nature reserves may change in the future but they will still be fantastic places for wildlife, and new freshwater wetlands will continue to be created to replace those lost along the coast.

Editor: If any member would like to comment on this story or the implications of sea erosion for Suffolk, please write or email the Editor (address details on inside front cover).

A coda to Jeff Martin's 'tailpiece'

As one of SOG's newer members and a complete non-expert, I have found Jeff Martin's views on migration extremely interesting reading.

Jeff's articles put me in mind of a time when Mark Nowers and I were pen-pushing colleagues in Croydon. Mark had learned that there was a hot spot on the crest of the North Downs at Worm's Heath (TQ378578), just south of Croydon. So, on 3rd September 2000, we met at the Heath and were astonished to find that there was a long, very broad trough in the North Downs descending northwards. From where we stood we could see down in the distance the Millennium Dome and beyond. Within an hour or so we had Hobby, Whinchat, Yellow Wagtail, Stonechat, both Common and Lesser Whitethroats amongst other species heading south.

Thus the question that now arises in my mind is, whether or not these birds had followed Jeff's Lea Valley flyway connecting to this easy route over the North Downs and on south into the Weald?



Pallas's Warbler

No-nonsense digiscoping

Definition: Digiscoping – The art of taking telephoto style pictures using a digital camera through a telescope. It is a way of tele-photographing for a fraction of the cost of a professional camera plus lens set up.

Background

Danny Porter, who originally hailed from south Norfolk but is now a Lowestoft local, describes himself as an average birder and "not an expert in cameras, lenses or photography". So why do we have an article on digiscoping by Danny? The short answer is, in his own words, "he de-mystifies" the whole process by describing it in no-nonsense 'layman's terms'. As also does Barry Woodhouse, a local birder and fellow digiscoper from Bury St Edmunds, who has also input into this article.

Danny's full articles on digiscoping can be found on SOG's website (www.sogonline.org). For this Harrier version we have extracted two sections from them. The first considers the pros and cons of the digiscoping set up when compared with conventional camera and zoom lens. Then, next, we outline some basic rules for actually digiscoping. This second section also includes examples from Danny's past efforts illustrating a number of points and demonstrating his progress with the technique – these are to be found in the centrespread of this issue of the Harrier.

If you want to see more of Danny's and Barry's digiscoping output you could visit

their respective websites:
www.dannysdigiscoping.com and
www.mydigiscopingphotos.webs.com

In the interests of putting digiscoping into perspective, Bill Baston has also very kindly provided some comments on the traditional use of the telephoto lens, so that we arrive at a conclusion.

Pros and cons

First up, Barry, Bill's and Danny's thoughts on the pro and cons of digiscoping vs. conventional photography:

Some digiscoping rules

Here we outline some guidelines covering the initial set up and then the subsequent act of photography. What then are the basic rules for guaranteeing good results?

1. Trial and error:

First, finding the right combination of kit – this is the art of combining a scope and camera, with if necessary, an adapter. Some combinations work well and others you will find do not. And you don't know which until you start to use them. So trials to correct any errors in your set up are the first critical step.

	Digiscoping	Conventional photography
PROS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Much cheaper set up and so an opportunity for more birders to have a go - More robust - Less equipment to carry and can be considerably lighter than large lens-based kit - Good-sized pictures obtainable at greater distances, or of smaller birds, than can be obtained using telephoto lenses - A quick shot of a distant and possibly scarce or rare bird can provide confirmation of important sightings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easier set up - Direct connection to the lens, only one item to focus - Results can be clearly seen at all times direct through the viewfinder - Can be handheld - Flight shots easier - More versatility in terms of setting and shutter speeds - Greater light-gathering ability of lenses - DSLR camera bodies offer faster autofocus, higher-quality sensor, more features and functions
CONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handheld not practical, must set up a tripod first - Manual focus of both scope and camera can be tricky – regarded as fiddly by some - With the compact and the adaptor, scopes can become 'back heavy' requiring a balance-rail to offset the extra weight - Target subject needs to be reasonably still - Slower shutter speeds - Have to be able to see the LCD screen – which can be tricky in bright sunlight - Vignetting needs to be dealt with - Flight shots difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater initial outlay - Heavier to carry around; many birders find themselves having to choose between their scopes or their big camera - Vulnerable to damage

Issues to contend with include:

- Scope selection – aim for a good-sized objective lens – 80 is better than 65mm
- Camera – almost any compact digital is fine
- Adaptor – start with a cheap and easy to use universal camera adaptor – this is preferred to the bulkier adaptors and less confusing
- Use a remote cable release or self-timer to avoid camera wobble

Good combinations of kit include:

- Celestron Ultima 80ED scope
- Universal Camera Adaptor
- A compact of your choice, preferably with a manual mode
- Tripod with a fluid head

2. Patience:

Assembling this kit can be frustrating, so you'll need to be patient:

- Perfect alignment of the camera with the eyepiece is critical. And only try to do this once the camera is on and in auto mode (with the flash off)
- Taking photos of any kind requires the ability to be able to judge the conditions and knowing how to set your equipment up to suit them
- So you need to be aware it is a constant learning process.



Greenfinch – “My early efforts were unsatisfactory – here there’s too much noise”

3. Practice:

Next you need to hone your skills:

- Begin in your garden, or wherever you can practice without distraction
- Experiment to find the right settings for your combination of kit in various conditions
- Recognise the trade-offs you are making with different settings, e.g. smaller zoom equals greater aperture and shutter speeds
- Avoid vignetting by zooming in on your target – but don’t over use the zoom facility as this can lead to slower shutter speeds creating blurred images
- Find ways, especially in bright sunlight (the best photographic condition), of being able to see the LCD screen clearly – a baseball cap or similar shade can help here.

Now, if you’re feeling confident, you’re ready to click away. The golden overall rule is

PRACTICE:

- Bright weather always makes for better digiscoping output
- Get as close to the target as you can
- Avoid using too much zoom as it will cause excessive camera shake, make focussing difficult and slower shutter speeds that can again result in blurry images.
- Try not to shoot on windy days
- Use several small memory cards rather than one big one. Like other cards they can corrupt and, by using a variety, fewer images will be lost.

4. Using the computer

In order to enhance your finished results it can be useful to use your computer. Only a few of the Photoshop functions can dramatically improve digiscoped photographs:

- Before you start to manipulate an image save as a TIFF (unless you intend emailing the results – in which case make a JPEG)
- Lightening the image by using the brightness and contrast scales
- Sharpening the image
- Cropping extraneous material out

Glossary

Adaptor – mechanism for attaching camera to scope.

Aperture – more commonly referred to as the ‘f number’ that represents the amount of light a lens is admitting for a shot.

Cropping – a computer-based technique to remove sections of the background around an image.

Digital Compact – a digital compact camera.

DSLR – digital single lens reflex camera.

ISO – or film speed (based on an international system of standards known as ISO) or ASA (the American equivalent) determines how sensitive the silver halide emulsion of film is to light (appears as whiteness), increasing in sensitivity by a factor of 2 when the value doubles or is advanced one stop, i.e., 100-200, 200-400, 400-800, etc. The same scale is now used to describe the sensitivity of digital camera sensors.

Noise – the “grainy” effect caused by using higher ISO’s.

Objective lens – the size of the large lens on your scope, usually 65-80mm in diameter.

Shutter Speed – defined as the length of time that the camera shutter remains open as the picture is taken, usually between 4 seconds – 1/4000th second.

Vignetting – a black soft-edged border around an image – zooming-in usually removes this effect.

Bill Baston puts the case for conventional photography

People have been achieving impressive results through digiscoping for some years now, and it does offer a serious alternative for photographing birds. For digiscoping has made it possible for more birders to have their own personal photo collections of birds – be they rare or common. This couldn’t otherwise be done without spending a lot more money and carrying many more kilos of equipment in the field.

While I have no personal experience of digiscoping and am not qualified to comment on the equipment or techniques involved, I can make a couple of points. The main drawbacks that I have seen, or been told about, appear to be:

- Once set up, the digiscoping rig is less manoeuvrable for flight shots or other action images; it can be done to some extent, but it is more difficult.
- A high-end DSLR camera also offers a vast array of features that you don’t get with a compact digital camera. These include fast autofocus, up to 10 frames per second, superior sensor quality, custom functions, etc.
- The lens quality and light-gathering ability of the digiscoping set-up are not as good as the big telephoto lenses – as you would expect given the price difference between the two systems!

But it’s not all one-way traffic. One great advantage of digiscoping, which the big-lens snappers envy, is the higher magnifications that are available, allowing the digiscopers to get good-sized images of more distant or smaller birds, which are sometimes beyond the reach of even the longest telephoto lenses.

Constant advances in technology and improvements in optics and digital cameras



Barn Owl stoop – flight shots such as this are more easily executed

will probably allow the digiscopers to gain more ground on the conventional photographers, whose heavy glassware hasn't changed that much compared with the huge and rapid advances in digital technology.

As things stand, the best results still come from conventional photography, but, as they say, watch this space!

Digiscoping and conventional photography – a conclusion

We can now see that as both techniques have benefits and drawbacks they are not necessarily competitive. In fact it might be argued that the two approaches actually complement each other.

Digiscoping seems to provide a good introduction to wildlife photography when dealing with relatively static subjects. It also provides birders with a relatively inexpensive opportunity to produce personal images, especially important when confirming sightings of scarce or rare birds.

High-end photography comes to the fore because it can provide good quality images, such as superb action shots in less favourable light conditions.

Each technique demands considerable skill, judgement and practice to perfect and can provide very satisfying, although differing results.

So, what should we conclude? Well, it's the old dictum, 'you pays your money and you takes your choice!'

Suffolk BINS – Spring 2011

Spring surprises

Well, where do we start, but only to say WOW! 2011 seems to have continued where 2010 left off, with further amazing firsts for the county. . . .

County first

March – 24th. This day started like most other March days, with the majority of us preparing for a ‘relaxed’ day at work, when Suffolk BINS came in to its own receiving and distributing news of a national ‘MEGA’ at Landguard Bird Observatory. A Short-toed Treecreeper had been trapped there and released at around 07:00 before flying into the Holm Oaks at the front of the obs.

News was quickly forwarded to all our members, with regular updates being sent at an unrelenting pace throughout the day, causing a heightened state of hysteria amongst Suffolk birders. Following its release the bird had seemingly disappeared, until it was re-trapped later that morning and, on and off throughout the day, providing fantastic in the hand views for many, as well as some confiding and elusive views on the ‘Icky’ ridge for the rest of the day. Finally it showed very well that evening behind the kitchen, where it continued to please many Suffolk and out of county birders, which the cracking photo in this issue’s colour supplement from our own Lee Woods demonstrates. The nation’s birdwatchers, travelling from far and wide, continued to be pleased with this little star.

Other March highlights included: drake Fudge

Duck, Oulton Marsh, at Lackford, the putative Baltic Gull (form fuscus) picked up on ‘The Slough’, and still in the west on the 12th saw the discovery of a Coues’s Arctic Redpoll at Mayday Farm, three Penduline Tits were found at Minsmere on the 14th, a Rustic Bunting was reported from Southwold on the 19th and a stunning singing male White-spotted Bluethroat was discovered at Whitecast Marsh near Oulton Broad on the 20th. On the 28th a Cattle Egret was seen following a plough on Peto’s Marsh, Carlton Marshes SWT before flying off towards Fisher Row and the Great Grey Shrike at Hollesley Common 17th–28th – all provided an excellent supporting cast to the Creeper!

April – Whilst the Short-toed Treecreeper continued to please the masses until the 6th, this was a frustrating month in many ways with some good, but difficult birds just not wanting to play the game. In particular the report of rufous Turtle Dove at an undisclosed site in Barsham proved frustrating, a possible Iberian Chiffchaff, trapped at Haven House, Thorpeness, a male Sardinian Warbler seen well but briefly at Hopton on the 7th, a couple of sightings of Black Stork, over Lake Lothing and Felixstowe, a White-tailed Eagle barely dipping into the county around the Lowestoft area and the possible Sooty Tern off Dunwich on the 24th. Some other goodies included a cracking male Woodchat Shrike discovered in the evening of the 28th and continued to perform into early May at Westhall, Halesworth (see the colour supplement for photo 2), and the stunning White-winged Black Tern (WWBT) at Minsmere, discovered on the 30th (see shot 3 in the colour supplement).

Impressive coastal migrants tracked

May – With the WWBT continuing to perform until the 3rd, the supporting cast for the month included good passages of Pom Skuas and a Kentish Plover on the beach at Kessingland. BINS again came into its own

when, on the 4th May, many local birders were able to share up to the minute news and directions as they tried to catch up with the wide-ranging White-tailed Eagle and a White Stork along the Suffolk coast. Both species' every wing beat was tracked, providing many Suffolk birders and passers-by with a rare opportunity to see these spectacular species.

With the cooler air now behind us, and some warmer southerly airstreams heading our way, we were all holding our breath waiting and willing that next text message, with seemingly every update providing eager anticipation each time we reached into our pockets. With BINS now sending around 18,000 messages per month, providing news and updates of our county rarities and scarcities to some 130 members (current maximum), it must only be a matter of time we all thought...

Second national 'MEGA'

On 9th May Suffolk BINS was at it again, when being first to deliver news to its members and the world of the county's 2nd first of the season – an amazing discovery of the UK's 6th Audouin's Gull (see photo 4 by Will Brame in the colour supplement). This superb adult was picked up by John 'Granty' Grant on east scrape at Minsmere late a.m. and, once again via BINS, we sent Suffolk's birders into a dizzy spin! Unlike the 'Creeper' this individual was not destined to be a long-stayer, and all but the fortunate locals able to get out, those

lucky enough to be on their way back from meetings, and others on leave were able to catch up with this master. It continued to please the steady flow of red-faced scramblers on and off the scrape until around 16:20 when it was seen to fly strongly south and out to sea.

Up until going to press, there have also been three Red-rumped Swallows, a smattering of Honey Buzzards, a couple of Black Kites, a Pectoral Sandpiper on the 15th and Temminck's Stint at Trimley SWT, plus the Purple Heron at Minsmere.

Birding network working well

Moving into late Spring, I continue to wonder what may be next, but feel it only fitting to publicly thank Ollie and the gang at LBO for their efforts with the 'Creeper', 'Granty' for the Audouin's and to each and every one of our BINS members for their tremendous and ongoing efforts in making this service a fantastic birding network of up-to-the-minute information for local birders, day after day after day, and truly helping to mould this service into what it is. So thank you one and all, and let's hope the purple patch and constantly vibrating mobiles continue throughout 2011.

For any of our SOG members reading this, and wanting to enjoy daily updates, superb photography and much more, then visit the Suffolk BINS website at:
<http://www.freewebs.com/suffolkbirding/>



The Audouin's in situ



An interesting view of the stunning WWBT!

No-nonsense digiscoping

Digiscoping vs. conventional photography



1. Digiscoped Wood Sandpiper, Barry Woodhouse

Taken at Bury St Edmunds on 8 May 2011. One of two sandpipers in a small pool next to the eastbound A14. The shot was digiscoped using a Nikon d3000, with a Nikon t mount attached to a Celestron Ultima 80 ED scope, mounted on a Velbon c-600 tripod with a fluid pan head. Settings: taken in manual mode so no aperture; shutter speed 1/60th; ISO 200 white balance cloudy.



2. Digiscoped Pintail, Danny Porter

Shot at Leathes Ham LNR, 29 January 2011. Taken using a Canon EOS 500D, Swarovski TLS 800 adaptor, and Swarovski ATS 80 scope. Poor light, but some help from reflected light off the water's surface. An easier picture as the bird was close. Settings: 1/250 sec, f10, ISO 1600. High ISO kept the shutter speed up a bit here, but still not over-easy as the bird was moving. Using the TLS 800 adaptor my aperture is fixed to f10 through the 80mm scope – it would be f12 if I were using the 65mm version.

3. Conventional photography, Blue Tit in flight, Bill Baston

The shot was taken on 11 March 2007. The bird was flying in to a feeding station set up at a private site on the outskirts of Hadleigh. The camera was a Canon EOS-1D Mark II set at F8 with an exposure of 1/800th, while the lens was a Canon 500 mm f4 IS lens.



Just starting

Grey Heron, Hen Reedbeds, July 2008.

Taken at 1/250 sec, ISO 1600, f5.6. NOISY!! A small sensor with ISO of 800 or more will show all the noise (i.e. the white fuzz!!). Here, guilty of trying too hard on a dark day – it doesn't matter what you may try, taking a long-range shot on a dark day just won't work!! Also the bird was moving. Rookie!!



Experimenting with settings

View from inside the hide at RSPB, Hen Reedbeds, August 2008.

It was still early days. I was trying to get the poor light over distance would make it still, it did help – but not much! As you can see, a little clump of reeds proud of the main reedbed is visible through the hide window.

The following sequence of shots was taken using my Celestron Ultima 80 scope, a universal digiscoping adaptor and Nikon



This Grey Heron was shot at 1/15 sec, ISO 200, f5.6. It was very dull, only got any exposure as the shutter was open so long!!



Heron, same settings as previous, but switched the light settings to fluorescent!!



Heron, same settings as previous, but switched the light settings to fluorescent!!

ter's shots with his explanatory comments demonstrating how, with practice, his skills have and showing that trial and error is at the heart of successful digiscoping.

ings

Strumpshaw, showing the Grey Heron.

a good picture, without realising that for poor results. However, as the bird you look out the heron was in the bed in the top right-hand side of

n P50 8.1MP digital compact camera.



e settings as left, but switched the gs to incandescent!!



Nearing perfection

Grey Heron, Carlton Marsh, October 2010.

Taken at 1/50 sec, f2.8, ISO 1600. Using a Canon EOS 500D 15.1MP + f2.8 50mm lens, Swarovski ATS 80 and Swarovski UCA adaptor. Altogether a much better picture, even though taken in poor light. However, the bird was still and much closer, so the shutter speed didn't have to be so high. I felt this picture had decent exposure, and the bird looked "real". It does show that decent equipment does make a massive difference to the end result! Higher ISO noise on a larger sensor is not so apparent here.



Spring surprises



- 1** Short-toed Treecreeper, Landguard, Lee Woods
- 2** Woodchat Shrike, Westhall, Jon Evans
- 3** White-winged Black Tern, Minsmere, Jon Evans
- 4** Audouin's Gull, Minsmere, Will Barme



Field Trip Reports

Val Lockwood

(Leaders: Steve Piotrowski and John Grant)

Orfordness

26 September 2010

The eager group left the quay at Orfordness under dark cloudy skies, but hopes were high that these would blow over, as there was a brisk breeze.

The first bird seen was a Redwing, closely followed by numerous Meadow Pipits, 35 Linnets (the fact that a member had time to count these shows it was quite a slow start). A Kestrel hovered overhead, and a Bar-tailed Godwit and three Curlews were observed close by. Up to this point expectations had been lower than usual for this trip, due to the leaders advising that the lagoons were very dry and therefore we would not see as many species as normal.

Spoonbill and Osprey sightings

The fairly quiet observations which were being made as we progressed across Orfordness were suddenly interrupted by a member calling "Spoonbills", and we were all rewarded with excellent views of two Spoonbills flying directly overhead. The group was now invigorated and pressed on towards the village with added enthusiasm. A couple of members made their way towards the river wall in search of waders and, whilst the group held back to see what would be seen, a raptor was observed flying over the island and was identified as an Osprey. All hastened over to the river wall to catch a last glimpse as the Osprey flew down river and out to sea.

Deteriorating weather

By now it was getting very windy and a decision was made to go straight across to the lighthouse to try to find some shelter from the wind, whilst sea-watching. Swallow, Knot, Little Egrets and Oystercatchers were observed along the way. There was limited shelter from the wind and rain for some of the members who tucked themselves under the eaves of one of the buildings. An uninvited guest in the guise of a Feral Pigeon decided to take cover with the members and tried to perch on Ashley's head, before cowering under the bench – not sure who was the more surprised! It caused quite a commotion and a lot of merriment and distracted our thoughts from the rain and the cold. Other birds that were seen taking cover in the other disused buildings and brambles were Redwings, a Brambling, a Blackbird, a Whitethroat and a Chiffchaff. Also a flock of Starlings came through and a Rock Pipit was observed at fairly close quarters. Sea watching resulted in a total of three Great Skuas, ten Common Scoter, 30+ Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Avocets, Wigeon, Brent Geese, Little Gull, and Black Tern amongst others, including many Gannets.

In a break with tradition the leaders decided that we would leave lunch until we were back at the village, so that we could eat in the visitor reception hut, under cover, out of the rain. We made our way there via the ringing hut where three Robins, two Redstarts, a male Blackcap and a female Blackbird were ringed. A Barn Owl was keenly watched flying low behind the ringing hut until the sound of the Land Rovers carrying our rucksacks and lunch was heard. We had our lunch in the reception hut enjoying the use of tables and chairs and the friendly banter of the group. We ventured out after lunch but decided to retreat as the rain suddenly became very heavy. After sheltering for a while we decided to try again and managed to add several more species

including Snipe, Stonechat, Whinchat, Reed Bunting and Grey Heron to our list and managed to bring the total of Song Thrushes seen to eight. Unfortunately it continued to rain and we were advised to make a hasty retreat to pick up our belongings and return to the boat as there was an unusually high tide expected. Thankfully we all made it safely across to Orford Quay before the tide was too high to make a landing.

Many thanks to Steve and John for a thoroughly enjoyable meeting, as we had a great day despite the inclement weather conditions!

Bill Stone
(Leaders: Ashley Gooding and Bill Stone)

Rutland Water

23 January 2011

Visiting a bird watching Mecca?

Following the success of last year's trip, this was the group's second visit to Europe's largest manmade lake and bird watching Mecca.

As the group assembled at 08:15 in the grey and gloom of a cold Sunday Rutlandshire a few Redwings were seen breaking cover and flying off for their first foraging trip of the day. With eleven members assembled at the Sykes Lane Car Park the health and safety briefing was given but half way through the shout of "raptor" caused a temporary pause to formalities. Scanning away to the south revealed a splendid Red Kite over a distant wood and spirits were raised for the day ahead.

Dam failure – but Scaup scoped

Last year the dam end was full of wildfowl, however this year was the complete opposite! With very few ducks about we quickly picked through what we could see and recorded, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye (with several stunning males already displaying enthusiastically), Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Mute Swan and Cormorant. Walking to the southern end of the dam gave us some great views of four Buzzards (with at least two very vocal birds). Returning to the car park, a brief stop revealed a small flock of Fieldfares passing over. As we continued to walk back, a small party of ducks flashed past and dropped into the water near by, Scaup! A close look at the group revealed an adult male, a first-winter male and two adult females along with a drake Tufted Duck. As we approached the end of the dam another shout went up and there, above our heads, was the morning's second Red Kite! Given the absence of ducks at the east end of the reservoir it was decided to head straight for Barnsdale, which would allow us to scan a large part of the reservoir's North Arm.

Ducking and divers

Arriving at Barnsdale, we made our way down to the shore recording Sparrowhawk, Marsh Tit, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Chaffinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker in the nearby woodland. Scanning the bay revealed good numbers of ducks including a large herd of Wigeon. A few Canada and Barnacle Geese were feeding on the grassy bank and several Gadwall were found mixed in with the Mallards, Teal and Wigeon. More Great Crested Grebes and Mute Swans were seen offshore along with lots of Goldeneye. One lucky observer spotted a Slavonian Grebe, but the group could not relocate it. With more birds passing through, a fine drake Smew was picked out at distance and added some warmth to what was becoming a very cold day.

Based on some pre-visit research, the group moved to the reservoir's south shore and the Lyndon Reserve where both American Wigeon and Red-necked Grebe had been reported in the previous few days. Entering the reserve by the visitor centre the group's attention was immediately occupied by a very busy feeding station. Spending time here was rewarded with great views of Tree Sparrows, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and, especially welcome, Bullfinch. Continuing on along the path to the hides added Treecreeper, Kestrel and several more Bullfinches as well views over the water of a female Scaup. Arriving at the Wader Hide, we quickly merged with others in the hide and after a short while the drake American Wigeon was found amongst a large number of Eurasian Wigeon. With the two species side by side, the differences became apparent and several identification features could be recorded for future use (hopefully in Suffolk!) Large numbers of wildfowl were present and careful scanning revealed the day's first Red-crested Pochard, Pochard, Shelduck and several more Smew. A pair of Slavonian Grebes again fell to a lone observer but there was no luck with the Red-necked Grebe. After a move to the Deep Water hide and some frantic scanning the Red-necked Grebe finally revealed itself within a group of Great Crested Grebes. Several of us took a few seconds to scratch our heads as we had scrutinised this gathering of grebes long and hard and not seen the Red-necked, maybe it had simply just popped up...? With our target birds seen and studied the decision was made to head to the Bird Watching Centre at Egleton and have our lunch there.

After lunch, and with several more Tree Sparrows seen around the car park, the group headed out for the Lapwing Hide. The walk there took us into the lagoon complex and through some woodland. Unfortunately, a recently present Redpoll flock was neither

seen nor heard as we passed through the woods at the rear of Redshank Hide. Arriving at the Lapwing Hide the group quickly set about finding a reported trio of Slavonian Grebes. After a short time the three grebes were located at distance and then followed as they swam and dived together, regularly surfacing a good distance from where they had last been seen. More Smew, including four handsome drakes were found and at least two male Red-crested Pochards were seen.

A rare spectacle

A large gathering of Common Coot was noted. Normally Coots are of little interest to us birders unless, of course, you're looking for an American one! However this was different. The sheer volume of birds, approaching 600, was truly remarkable and grabbed the group's attention. Then, just as our interest was drifting, the Coot rose as one and, in perfect synchronisation, part paddled and part flew towards the far reservoir bank – like a black duvet being lifted from a mattress!

After this superb sight the group moved to the nearby Shoveler Hide. This revealed more ducks, a pair of Egyptian Geese and a lone Kingfisher expertly located by one member as it perched a good distance away, close to the reedbed. With the daylight slowly fading we headed back to the centre car park, calling finally at the gates overlooking Lagoon 1. Here we found numerous Goosanders, including a number of stunning apricot breasted drakes. A gathering of Golden Plover and Lapwings was noted and a lone Redshank took the wader count to three.

Almost 70 species

Whilst packing kit away and munching on the last contents of our packed lunches the group agreed that it had been a good day with some excellent birds seen. Reflecting on the trip, the American Wigeon had added a tick to a number of member's bird lists and nearly 70

species had been seen – for a cold January day, an excellent result.

My thanks go to Ashley for co-leading the trip and to the hardy members that had made the trek across the county line. As always, friendly banter and camaraderie made the day especially enjoyable.

Gi Grieco
(Leaders: Gi Grieco and Bill Stone)

Brecks

20th March 2011

An earlier start than previous years saw a good number of members meeting at Mayday Farm, including a couple of our younger members, Izzy and Katya. It is an encouraging sign that the younger generation are taking an interest in our county's wonderful wildlife.

The plan of action was to take a stroll around the coniferous woods before setting up for a look out for raptors, followed by a visit to some other excellent sites in the west of the county.

As an Arctic Redpoll had been seen earlier in the week along one track, although not for a few days, we decided to head that way. Nice selections of woodland birds were heard up in the pines including Dunnock, along with three tit species and Goldcrest. As we reached an area of thicket, it was remarked that we saw Bullfinch there last year and, right on cue, we

heard one call and managed to see three birds in all. Turning down the track we came to a clearing that on scanning produced Yellowhammer and Woodlark with a Treecreeper in the woods. Further along the track, we came to the area that the Arctic Redpoll had frequented and at this spot saw an excellent variety of finches, some of which were in summer plumage and looking very attractive, including Brambling, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch and Chaffinch. As we tried to pick out any unusual redpoll species within the flocks we had Crossbill fly over, a Sparrowhawk zipped through, momentarily putting the birds to flight and most unexpectedly some trilling calls alerted us to five Waxwing perched on top of some pines. A female Goshawk circled low and glided away all too briefly so that not everybody managed to see it.

We headed back to the open area to scan the skies for any further Goshawks, but to no avail, managing three further Sparrowhawks and, on the old tree stumps, Skylark and a pair of Stonechat.

Cavenham Heath

Our next destination was Cavenham Heath where the conditions were quite windy. We initially headed to the pits where we heard a Chiffchaff singing in the small copse. From the footpath visibility of the pit was obscured by scrub, which in the coming years will block views altogether. We noted a few duck species including Pochard, Teal and Tufted Duck and a count of four Green Sandpipers was made around the perimeter of the pit. A pair of Buzzards flew over giving good views, as well as a Kestrel. On the adjacent river we saw a Grey Wagtail. Back up on the heath we tried in vain to find a Stone Curlew, but their ability to remain camouflaged had us beaten! In the distance we noted Buzzard and a probable Goshawk.

Lackford Lakes

Our final destination was Lackford and en route, we pulled over, as a pair of Grey Partridge was visible close to the road in a ploughed field. When more members turned up they had trouble discerning them as the Partridges crouched down among the clods of earth to demonstrate their excellent cryptic camouflage. At Lackford we first paid a visit to the feeders and saw a single Tree Sparrow. One member, Eddie, had remarked earlier how we were duped there last year when after visiting Lakenheath, Izzy had played the song of a Golden Oriole she had recorded, and we thought there was an Oriole near these feeders. Well Eddie was duped again as the recording of the Oriole was played and he again excitedly said, "that's an Oriole" whilst scanning around looking for it, before we all broke into fits of laughter! Around the centre we saw a few Lesser Redpoll, those that had arrived first had also seen a Mealy Redpoll there too. We scanned the big boating lake and saw Great Crested Grebe and a Grey Heron flew over, while at the first hide a selection of ducks that included Shoveler, Teal, Gadwall and Tufted Duck were present. We scanned the gulls, as a Baltic Gull, a race of Lesser Black-backed Gull, had been present earlier in the week. We had one bird that had us going briefly but was identified as an '*intermedius*' race of the Lesser Black-backed and not the '*fuscus*' race we were hoping for.

Thanks to all for coming along to this annual visit and making it a pleasant trip to see some special Suffolk birds.

Steve Fryett (Leader)

Shingle Street & Hollesley Common

16th April 2011

A first Cuckoo³ at Shingle Street

There was the usual good turnout for this annual spring meeting and it started well with the first migrant zipping between the cars at the coastguard cottages before briefly alighting on the wire fence of Oxley Marsh whilst most of the assembled party were still putting their boots on! A male Cuckoo had caught everyone on the hop before eventually being seen by all.

A couple of Swallows were noted with a female Marsh Harrier over Oxley Marsh, while the allotments held singing Blackcap and a very obliging Willow Warbler. Scanning across the marshes revealed two Common Buzzards perched in a small hawthorn bush, with one very pale individual. We failed to see or hear either of the two Grasshopper Warblers present in the area. A singing Corn Bunting was finally located on a telegraph wire together with a couple of calling Reed Buntings that proved hard to find. Out at sea nine Curlews flew south, a lone Red-throated Diver and Teal were also noted. In the garden of the southernmost house in Shingle Street a pair of Wheatear was clearly preparing to set up a nest in the vicinity. In the same area a male Stonechat was a welcome addition to the day's sightings. The alluring call of a Whimbrel was noted twice but the bird could not be seen.

³ Beating this year's Grauniad 'Letters and emails' page record by a day!



Whitethroat

Hollesley Common

We then moved on to Upper Hollesley Common for lunch. The Common was surprisingly quiet but for several Yellowhammers and a fairly distant singing Woodlark. The third Buzzard of the day was noted passing overhead. The intended target species of the Common were Redstarts but they could not be seen or heard. Sparrowhawk and Whitethroat completed the species noted on the Common. Sadly we did not record Dartford Warbler for the first time in several years. The last two winters have been severe and appear to have taken their toll on Dartford's at Hollesley Common, although at least one pair has been noted in recent weeks.

Boyton Marsh

We then finished off the meeting at Boyton Marsh with Sedge and Cetti's Warblers noted, and at least three Yellow Wagtails and eight Avocets on the flash. A small flurry of Swallows and Sand Martins passed over with a Green Sandpiper dropping in and giving excellent views. A male Reed Bunting noted was nothing exceptional, other than the fact it was ringed, a rather unusual species to find ringed. We had an interesting day with some noteworthy spring migrants that made the day worthwhile.

Editor: I was disappointed to miss the Dartford Warbler and I asked Steve for further explanation:

As a species the Dartford Warbler has a history of suffering severely in the winter⁴. During the harsh winters of 1961/3 the UK southern counties' Dartford Warbler population crashed from 450 to just 10 pairs. Since that time these warblers had grown both in numbers and range to a UK total of 2800-3500 pairs by 2006. Experts consider this was partly due to a succession of milder winters.

Suffolk is now recognised as a growth area and should remain so with the continued management and restoration of the Suffolk Sandlings – a species stronghold. However a note of caution now needs to be added after the very cold winters in 2009/10 and 2010/11. As a result, the expansion we have recently



Cetti's Warbler

⁴ As Cramp *et al* has observed, the British population's size displayed "marked fluctuations due to severe winters."

witnessed, may well have come to a halt, with numbers actually falling back in 2010. In Britain where it depends on small spiders, beetles, caterpillars and other invertebrates as food sources, these are all inevitably in short supply during hard winters and, with deep snow lying for long periods, feeding can be badly disrupted and the birds' ability to survive prejudiced.



Dartford Warbler

So it may well be that the Dartford's site-fidelity and loyalty to its specialist habitat (low-lying heaths) is its downfall, with dispersal during winter rarely very far. Upper Hollesley Common, along with the other commons north of the River Deben, held 41 pairs in 2009. The bird count for all of Hollesley Common in 2010 was well down at 7, from 21 in 2009. However the species appears to have staged a slight recovery this year with 12+ being noted. So we were clearly unlucky at this field meeting with no Dartford Warblers at all – the first time for several years.

Illustrations: Su Gough, BTO

Book Reviews

David Tomlinson

The Norfolk Bird Atlas: Summer and Winter Distributions 1999-2007

By Moss Taylor and John H. Marchant
(BTO, £45.00)

It wasn't until I moved to East Anglia that I discovered the rivalry between Suffolk and Norfolk. The bad news from a Suffolk viewpoint is that Norfolk has well and truly beaten us with the publication of this, *The Norfolk Bird Atlas*, as the Suffolk equivalent still hasn't moved on from the fieldwork stage (linked as it is to the 2007 – 11 national Atlas). It's a bit like the Canaries beating Ipswich ten nil.

However, being first isn't always an advantage, and I see no reason why we shouldn't learn a great deal from this handsome production, and go one better.

With its 528 glossy pages and anything from one to three maps for each species, there's a mass of information to study here. The layout is clean and attractive to the eye, and the entire work is made all the more enticing by the beautifully reproduced colour photographs of each species, coupled with the usual line drawings that we have come to expect in works of this sort. Forty-five quid may be expensive, but you do get a lot for your money.

Atlases are about maps, and the distribution maps, based on the fieldwork of a small army of observers, are clear and easy to understand. Most resident species, such as Kestrel and Lapwing, have three maps each, one showing summer, another winter, and the third change since 1980-85. Winter and summer visitors get just a single map, while non-breeding visitors present in both seasons qualify for two. The maps do include the major rivers of Norfolk, making it much easier to place the distribution dots. These come in three sizes – small, medium and large, each indicating population numbers.

The texts for each species are the work of Moss Taylor, who not only writes well, but has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Norfolk's birds. He was the driving force behind *The Birds of Norfolk*, published in 1999, so really knows his stuff. The text puts each species into sharp perspective, and every one makes interesting reading.

Species coverage is comprehensive, and even includes Caspian Gull, which receives a full page. Rare visitors are given two or three paragraphs at the back of the book, though some, such as Ring Ouzel and Dartford Warbler, do qualify for maps. Incidentally, it's worth noting that the birds are given the familiar names we all use, so there are no Tundra Swans or Hedge Accentors lurking here.

Much of the book's visual appeal comes from the superb selection of photographs, taken largely from David Tipling's extensive library. David gave the BTO permission to trawl through his entire digital library of over 7000 images to select the pictures they wanted. However, at times the selection is bizarre. Why use two pictures of Red-throated Divers in summer plumage, one even with a chick, when this is a species that doesn't breed in Norfolk, and is rarely seen there in this plumage? Many of the photographs were not taken in

Norfolk, either. It won't take you long to spot a number of shots that look out of place, even if it's not always obvious; the Pintail were taken in Japan, the Mallard in New Mexico, but I only know that because David told me. There's even one very large photograph depicting two birds, one of which isn't on the British list. I will leave you to work it out.

So how can we do better in Suffolk? My first suggestion would be to use several authors for the texts, as the marathon work undertaken by Moss Taylor can hardly have speeded up the long interval between fieldwork finishing and publication taking place. Sadly, this atlas is already four years out of date, so I believe it's vital to ensure that our atlas comes out as soon as possible after the fieldwork ceases this year. Secondly, we should have a strict rule that only photographs taken in Suffolk should be used to illustrate a Suffolk atlas, and that details of where and when each photograph was taken should be provided. We are lucky enough to have some great photographers living in our county, so this shouldn't be difficult. If the editors decide to use line drawings, too, then let's only use Suffolk-based artists.

However, criticisms aside, this is a volume that most Suffolk-based birdwatchers should have on their shelves, and are likely to refer to often. It may even inspire those of us who live south of the Little Ouse/Waveney to venture north a little more often.



Garden Warbler

The Biggest Twitch. Around the world in 4000 birds

By Alan Davies and Ruth Miller (Helm, £12.99)

Twenty-five years ago I saw rather more than 1000 species of birds in a year. It was easy: I visited Australia, had two trips to Kenya and did a lot of birdwatching in both Britain and Europe. To see more than 4000 in a year is rather more of a challenge, even when you've got a whole year to do it. Like a good many other SOG members, I went along to the indoor meeting earlier this year when Alan and Ruth were the guest speakers, and I much enjoyed their slick and professional presentation (I didn't fall asleep once!).

This talk was sufficiently interesting to tempt me to buy their book and discover the full story of how they managed to set a new world record (4341) for the number of species seen in a year.

Like their talk, the book is very much a joint production, with the two authors contributing alternate chapters. I was greatly relieved to discover that they both write well, while their style is sufficiently similar to force me, on several occasions, to look back to see who was writing a particular chapter. There's a lot to read, too, as the slim paperback contains 300 pages of small type. Rather to my surprise, I found it a good page-turner, and I read it quickly.

Part of the book's attraction for me was the fact I have visited the majority of the countries

the intrepid pair took in during their year-long marathon, and their accounts not only brought back old memories, but sent me checking whether I had seen such birds as Red-eared Firetail or Silver-eared Mesia. The answer was yes in both cases, but I'd forgotten them, despite the latter being described as a "mind-blower" by Alan.

However, what I enjoyed most were the tales of hardship and privation the couple endured in their quest. Their Ethiopian expedition made me feel glad that I wasn't there with them, despite the wonderful birds. The same can be said of their time in Malawi, where they ended up with 13 million Kwacha (that's the local currency) stashed in their Land Cruiser. Their South American exploits covered a number of countries that are high on my wish list, though their stories of the heat and humidity, the awful roads and dubious food haven't encouraged me to book my trip yet. The birds may be great, but the price of seeing them is high, and not just in monetary terms.

Talking of money, I wasn't surprised to learn that Ruth and Alan ran out of the stuff halfway through their year. I'm sure that they did their homework very carefully, but I was surprised at quite how many long-haul flights they undertook, repeatedly returning to their UK base. Their choice of countries was also a little surprising, but they did add a number of European countries in order to appeal to the prospective readers of their planned book. They are reasonably confident that anyone trying to beat their total will find it very difficult, and I suspect they are right. Reading this book might also put off any prospective world listers. I certainly wouldn't want to have a go unless I had a very generous sponsor and the use of an exclusive executive jet.

Looking back – April to June 1961 and 1986

Selected highlights from the 1961 and 1986 Suffolk Bird Reports for the period April to June.

50 years ago

This period witnessed a notable addition to the Suffolk list with a Bonelli's Warbler present at Dingle Hills, Dunwich on 29th and 30th April, during which time it was trapped and ringed. In 1997 the Bonelli's Warbler was split between Western Bonelli's Warbler and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler; it is a testament to the skills of the Dingle Hills ringers of 1961 that 36 years after its occurrence Suffolk's first Bonelli's Warbler was readily accepted as being a Western Bonelli's Warbler.

Notable rarities

Two notably rare species occurred at North Warren in May. The first, on 13th May, involved a Little Bittern that rose almost from the observer's feet and flew a short distance before dropping into the North Warren reedbed. The second species, Great Reed Warbler, involved two individuals in the North Warren reedbed; the first, a singing male, was present from 18th May and was joined by a second bird on 18th June with both being present until 2nd July. One of the birds had a clearly defined territory and favourite songpost

but no evidence of breeding was obtained. Both of these records were published as addenda in the 1962 SBR and the Great Reed Warblers were described as being "in a reedbed near Aldeburgh".

The highlights of spring wader passage were a Kentish Plover, Havergate, 25th May, two Dotterels, Benacre, 24th May, 117 Whimbrel, Havergate, 11th May and up to three Wood Sandpipers in May at Minsmere and Reydon.

Scarce passerines involved two Hoopoes, Westwood Lodge, Blythburgh in the third week of May and single male Golden Orioles at Nacton, 22nd May and Minsmere, 25th and 26th May and 7th June. An unexpected report involved a Redwing at Minsmere, 12th June.

When Hobby and Osprey were scarce

In the early 1960s both Hobby and Osprey were very scarce visitors to Suffolk where in spring 1961 there were only two reports of the former species and one of the latter. Single Montagu's Harriers were at Westleton, 5th May and Havergate 9th May.

Great Bitterns increased from eight pairs in 1960 to ten pairs in 1961 at Minsmere, where also seven juvenile Marsh Harriers fledged from three nests. Havergate was the only British site to host breeding Avocets in 1961 when 65 pairs reared 60 juveniles; additional breeding highlights at Havergate included three pairs of Short-eared Owls and at least 500 pairs of Sandwich Terns. A pair of Wrynecks possibly bred at a coastal site where this species' distinctive song was heard regularly between 8th April and mid-June. Also on the coast, reports of Stone Curlews came from Orfordness in May. Perhaps the most unexpected breeding record involved a pair of Curlews that bred successfully at an undisclosed site in northeast Suffolk.

25 years ago

The first modern-day occurrences of Marsh Warbler in Norfolk and Essex were both in 1983 but we had to wait until 1st June 1986 for Suffolk's first, and long-awaited, record of this mimetic songster when a singing bird was present at Walberswick.

Some gains...

A lot has changed in the status of some spectacular species in Suffolk in the last 25 years; evidence for this statement is that a Peregrine Falcon at Easton Broad, 28th May was one of only two seen in Suffolk in 1986 but it is perhaps even more remarkable that a Little Egret in the Orfordness/Havergate area during June to August was the county's sole record that year.

Additional scarce migrants were particularly in evidence at Minsmere which recorded Purple Heron, 2nd May, male Kentish Plover, 26th May, up to four Temminck's Stints, 19th to 21st May, male Red-necked Phalarope, 12th June, Wryneck, 3rd May and singing Icterine Warbler, 24th June. Elsewhere, two Dotterels were located inland at Livermere Lake, 29th May, three Hoopoes frequented the coastal region and single Woodchat Shrikes were at Carlton Colville, 1st to 11th June and Tunstall, 7th and 8th June.

...but some losses too

It was generally another superb year for nesting species, although a further disappointing milestone was reached in the inexorable decline of the Red-backed Shrike in that this was the first year on record that the species failed to breed successfully in Suffolk. However, two species bred or attempted to breed in Suffolk for the first time; the first of these was Mandarin Duck of which single pairs bred at Wherstead (two juveniles reared) and Foxhall (unsuccessful). The second species was Mediterranean Gull – a pair attempted

to breed on Havergate Island but was forced away by Black-headed Gulls.

Breeding records in 1986 of species which are now either extinct as breeding species in Suffolk or very scarce included five pairs of Northern Fulmars, 28 pairs of Common Snipe (18 sites), six pairs of Black-tailed Godwits (four sites), 23 pairs of Common Gulls (Orfordness), 220 pairs of Little Terns (14 sites), Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers at 60 sites, 22 pairs of Black Redstarts, nine pairs of Whinchats (eight in the Brecks), 19 pairs of Northern Wheatears (coast – nine, Brecks – ten), a successful pair of Savi's Warblers and Willow Tits at 16 sites.

Golden Orioles were down to only three pairs at Lakenheath – two nests were disturbed by birders; another pair of Orioles bred at a second site and a singing male was at a third locality in July. Up to three Black-necked Grebes were on Thorington Street Reservoir during 9th to 19th May during which time a pair was seen displaying on at least two occasions. A pair of Common Buzzards at an undisclosed site in May was perhaps a sign of things to come.

Additional records of note during this period included a Northern Gannet found exhausted inland at Laxfield, 25th May, a Northern Fulmar heading north-eastwards over Eriswell, 5th June, a Sanderling inland at Cavenham GP, 27th April, a Jack Snipe flushed from an area of clear fell, Thetford Forest, Brandon, 19th April, and single Glaucous Gulls at Felixstowe throughout the period and at Minsmere, 22nd to 24th May.

Three-figure gatherings of Turtle Doves!

As many as 291 Turtle Doves, Elveden, 10th May – regrettably, memories of three-figure gatherings of these Doves are fading rapidly, the last such group in Suffolk being back in 1993 when 112 were at Glemsford on 22nd July.

News from the reserves

Alan Miller, SWT Coastal Sites Manager

Suffolk Wildlife Trust coastal reserves Spring 2011

The major issue for all our wetland wildlife this spring is following a long cold winter with little rainfall we are now close to being in a drought situation. There has been no appreciable rainfall for over 60 days and all the normal wet flashes across the marshes are bone dry. This has obvious consequences for our breeding waders, impossible ground to probe and no water for invertebrates on which the chicks normally feed.

At Dingle Marshes there are birds present, Redshank, Lapwing and Avocet, but only the Redshank so far are nesting. Better news for the shingle dwellers with good numbers of Ringed Plover displaying and Little Terns have arrived back and are prospecting. The usual joint effort to fence 1.5km of beach was carried out in late March with teams of staff and volunteers from SWT, RSPB and Natural England all pitching in and completing the job in a day.

The Hen Reedbeds are as busy as ever, Bitterns and Marsh Harriers are nesting. The heronry just opposite the reserve is thriving.

The presence of a pair of Buzzards who regularly fly over the wood succeed in flushing most of the birds and the current estimate is something like 18 pairs of Little Egret and 12+ pairs of Grey Heron. Bearded Tit numbers appear to have dropped following the winter, but the final surveys will give the true picture.



Sedge Warbler

Various migrants have dropped in, Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers along with Garganey. The first Sedge Warbler was singing on 5th April and numbers would appear to be up on last year. Two Grasshopper Warblers are holding territory and the surprise was to see the pair of Pintail that have over-wintered actually mating, time will tell.

Announcements

New Secretary for SORC

The Council of SOG are pleased to confirm that Lee Woods has accepted the role of SORC Secretary. This will not take effect immediately, but will be a steady process as Lee aims to fully pick up the ropes from Justin by the end of the year.

The Group would also like to thank Justin Zantboer for his dedication and sterling efforts for many years as SORC Secretary.

Richard Rafe

Chairman's Report for 2010 – as presented at SOG AGM, February 2011

I shall be brief – and this reflects the fact that I have been a stand-in chairman over this last year, waiting for someone to come forward and take on the job with a bit more drive; and that I shall give a chance for some of the other Council members to have a short say as well.

Council met the prescribed 4 times in the year. We have continued to function effectively and have delivered the full range of member services:

- four issues of The Harrier
- a full programme of indoor and outdoor events
- maintained and enhanced the Group's website
- continued to play a significant part in ensuring the delivery of survey work in Suffolk – not least The Atlas
- and played a key role in ensuring another successful Bird Report

We are making significant progress on enabling the Group to claim Gift Aid that will be a great bonus financially.

I am disappointed that we have not made more progress in links with other bird groups in the county – but then I confess I have not been particularly proactive this last year! However I am really pleased that SOG through The Harrier acts as a communication tool for SORC to the general birders of Suffolk; and I am pleased to have BINS here again sharing our evening.

It's been great to have some new blood active within Council during this last year, and there are many more changes coming now (which we will come to in electing the new Council) – I think this is good news for SOG – new people, new ideas – some of the older stalwarts have been leading SOG for about 20 years and perhaps it's time we stepped aside and let this new blood have its head.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has helped SOG have another successful year.

Members' Survey – latest news

Over 100 completed questionnaires were received by May 20th and all of the respondent's names received by this closing date were entered into our prize draw on Saturday 21st at Holywells Park. As a result of this draw Gary Plank duly received the £50.00 book token.

Since the draw further questionnaires have

crept in and all of these have been included in the analysis – the more the merrier. We're pleased to say that the final total is approaching a third of the membership having contributed to the exercise, so it is reasonable to assume that their opinions and wishes will provide a fair reflection of the Group's membership as a whole.

Now the hard work begins. A small team of Council members have 'volunteered' to analyse the responses and we plan to report back on the results to Council by September and then publish the survey results in the December issue.

It is already clear from the initial analysis of your answers that this survey will prove highly useful to the Council. So many thanks to all of you who have participated in it.



Please record Harbour Porpoise off the Suffolk Coast

blunt head without a prominent beak and rarely leap from the water, which helps distinguish them from Dolphins.

The North Sea Harbour Porpoise population is thought to number around 280,000 animals, but they have suffered a noticeable decline since the Second World War. Most of the animals washed up have been killed by



How many times have you been sea-watching hoping for a rare Gull, Skua or Petrel and a Harbour Porpoise has come into view? If you look at the number of records held by SBRC and the Sea Watch Foundation it would seem this is a rare occurrence with only one sighting since 2007.

Talking to birders, although Harbour Porpoise are seen regularly, it seems that no one thinks to submit records. At less than 2 metres in length it is the smallest and most numerous of the cetaceans found in northwest European continental shelf waters. They have a short,

contact with ships' propellers, but many others are drowned at sea through being trapped in fishing nets. Increases in shipping and continued pollution, particularly oil, are a constant threat to the population.

Currently, there are a number of local threats to our marine mammals: further off shore wind farms are planned, as are two new nuclear power stations and the ever present oil tankers anchored off shore. All result in increased shipping and the potential threat of pollution. Without continuous records of our marine wildlife to inform decisions being made by planners and ministers, they will only have the evidence supplied by a few snap-shot surveys. Continuous recording will

give us data to enable protection measures to be put in place.

If the seas are healthy for cetaceans, which are some of the top predators, then it will support all other life forms, including birds.

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the Suffolk Mammal Group are keen to receive records of Harbour Porpoise both past and present. So the next time you are noting a Sabine's Gull flying past Southwold and at the same time a Porpoise is swimming by, please submit both records to SBRC or alternatively email the Harbour Porpoise record to alan.miller@suffolkwildlifetrust.org

Thanks in advance for your co-operation.

Subscription Rates:

SOG: Adults – £13.00; Family: £15.00

Joint SOG/Suffolk Naturalists' Society:
Adults – £26.00; Family – £30.00

To join SOG, contact: Bill Stone,
27 Draymans Way, Ipswich IP3 9JT

Photo credits:

Audouin's Gull, John Barme (page 16); Barn Owl, Bill Baston (page 14); Nightingale and Waxwing, Ian Goodall (page 32); Greenfinch, Danny Porter (page 12); White-winged Black Tern, Jon Evans (page 16); Harbour Porpoise, Florian Graner – Natural England (page 31); Suffolk views, Natural England (pages 7 & 9)

Illustration credits:

Black Woodpecker, Kokay Szalboics (pages 2, 3 & 4); Various warblers, Su Gough (pages 10, 22, 23, 24 & 28)



Late leavers from the Brecks this spring



Fewer Nightingales joined us this summer

Council for 2011:

Officers

Honorary President: **Steve Piotrowski**
Chairman: **Roy Marsh**
Vice-Chairman: **Steve Abbott**
Secretary: **Phil Whittaker**
Treasurer/Membership Secretary: **Bill Stone**
Project Officer: **Mick Wright**
Bulletin Editor: **Phil Brown**
Website Co-ordinator: **Gi Grieco**
Bird Report Editor: **Nick Mason**
Events Organiser – Outdoor: **Jean Garrod**
Events Organiser – Indoor: **Adam Gretton**

Members

Jean Garrod [to 2014]
Robin Harvey [to 2014]
Adam Gretton [to 2012]
Roger Walsh [to 2012]
Jon Warnes [to 2013]
Paul Gowen [to 2013]
Richard Rafe [Co-opted]

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean & Ken Garrod
Mike Jeanes
Mike Hall
Robin Hopper



Bird Recorders

North East Area Recorder:

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Tel: 07766 900063 Email: andrew@waveney1.fsnet.co.uk

South East Area Recorder:

Scott Mayson, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY
Tel: 01394 385595 Email: s.mayson@fsmail.net

West Area Recorder:

Colin Jakes, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN. Tel: 01284 702215



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

Who we are and what we do

SOG, as a Group provides a network and a voice for birdwatchers in the county. Administered by Suffolk birdwatchers, on behalf of Suffolk birdwatchers, this Group keeps them in touch with what is going on and with each other.

Through the Group's Council, SOG has links with other naturalist and conservation organisations throughout the region.



Trips and meetings

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 also arranged in Ipswich with quality speakers entertaining members with stories of

birds and birdwatching, both local and from around the world.

Media

The Group has a strong web presence, www.sogonline.org.uk. The site is regularly updated and is chock full of photography and sightings news



The Group's bulletin, *The Harrier*, is published quarterly and keeps members in touch with what's going on – with a mixture of articles about birds, conservation, reserves, organisations and people.



Once a year the Group and its team, with the support of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society, produce the Annual Bird Report.

Support

SOG organises and promotes surveys and projects about the birds of Suffolk and provides 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.

About birds and birding – for birders