

Winter 2016 No.187



The Harrier

Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

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Cover photograph:

Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) by Jerome Murray @JeromeMurray5

Contact email for articles, photographs, notes and observations is:

harrier@sogonline.org.uk

All material for the Spring Harrier should be received by February 27th please.

Subscription rates (2017)

SOG: Adults - £17.00; Family - £20.00

Joint SOG/Suffolk Naturalists' Society: Adults - £30.00; Family - £35.00

Website: www.sogonline.org.uk Email: info@sogonline.org.uk

Twitter: [@suffokbirds1](https://twitter.com/suffokbirds1) Text/Tel: 07951 482547

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Editorial

Welcome to Harrier 187 – I hope you thoroughly enjoy its contents. I've had some lovely birding experiences over the past few months. A delightful coincidence meant that my daughter is in class with the granddaughter of Reg Snook, the first Harrier editor. As well as being a renowned painter of birds, Reg takes every opportunity to encourage budding naturalists and he has boosted my daughter's feather collection with some corkers. We spent a wonderful afternoon recently with Reg and some of his family, hearing about their involvement in shaping Minsmere in the early days (you'll never guess what they had in their sandwiches...), as well as how the Harrier's predecessor, the SOG Bulletin, was first produced, compiled in Reg's front room and typed up by his wife Ann.

I thoroughly enjoyed Ed Keeble's talk on the Kakapo, which was accompanied by a life-size model. Indeed this was so lifelike (see picture) that a certain Mr. Lister has added Kakapo to his Suffolk list.

SOG council have been busy preparing for next year. The 2017 programme card is enclosed with its selection of indoor talks and outdoor trips; I hope very much to see you at the events. A massive thank you goes to all the speakers and trip leaders who lend us their support. The deadline for nominations for the Garrod Award is 31st January – we look forward to your nominations.

Also included is a membership renewal form. You can pay as always by cheque, or over the internet.

The 2015 Suffolk Bird Report has just been published. Available from the Ipswich Museum and from Minsmere, it is a monumental achievement by Nick Mason and the team of section writers, contributors and photograph and artwork assistants.



Photo: Peter Rutt

In this edition of the Harrier, you will find a range of articles to enjoy. Chris Keeling has supplied a follow-up to the scientific re-wilding article of the previous issue, where he imagines a re-wilded Britain.

Provoked by the return to the Stour of Billy-the-Boomerang, a 20 year old ringed Black-tailed Godwit, Graham Appleton has written about Icelandic colour-ringed waders, whilst an article from the cinematographically-named Inglorious Bustards about bird migration precedes their indoor talk in January.

As well as the usual field trip reports, including the ever-enchanting Orfordness, David and Margie Carter have an update on their garden birding following their move east; Michael Bamford is our SOG exile writing about his journey around the South Atlantic. SOG are indebted to Eddie Marsh who has compiled the Autumn Bird Review, which is accompanied by – as ever – by some fantastic photographs.

I'm looking forward to participating in the Suffolk Wader Strategy, whose workshop is on 21st January – there are still spaces if you too wish to take part.



Please feel free to send in observations, photographs or articles for publication. It's a real treat to go through all the images, though unfortunately I only ever have room for a fraction of them.

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and all the best for 2017.



The first SOG bulletin

Fundraising for SOG whilst you shop online

Whenever you're shopping on the internet, booking your birding holiday, or even switching providers, please go via the giveasyoulive.com website. At no cost to you, participating companies will donate a small percentage of their sale to your nominated charity, which we hope is Suffolk Ornithologists' Group! It is very easy to use and you can even add a reminder button to your computer toolbar. To date, nearly £200 has been raised for SOG with all funds going to benefit Suffolk birds & birders. Thank you!



Making room for the wild in a small island

An autumn morning somewhere in eastern England, sometime in the future. An angler following the course of the river climbs over a stile and enters a broad flood plain where a flock of twenty cranes – alarmed by his sudden appearance – rise heavily in slow, measured flight. The angler follows the river bank to a stand of willows where a family of beavers have excavated a narrow channel allowing water to flood a wooded hollow. A dam of sticks and mud holds back water in a pond covering about a hectare of alder and willow carr. The tangle of woody debris littering the pond makes it a natural nursery for the fry of roach, rudd, chub and bream. In the exposed root plate of a poplar felled by a winter storm, streaks of white lime betray the nest hole where a pair of kingfishers reared their nestlings on a ready supply of fry and minnows. Water voles, always vulnerable to predation by mink in the tamed and straitened river, also find a refuge in the complex of overspill channels. Some burrows are overlooked or missed entirely, the mink moving on in the manner of all predators when the effort is greater than the reward.

The beavers are not immune to predation; their young are vulnerable to mink, otters and pike. The thirty pound pike that snaps at the angler's lure has reached maturity in the beaver pond where it grows fat on the occasional beaver kit venturing beyond the safety of the lodge. Rotted stumps of trees felled by the beavers in the flooded woodland stand three or four feet higher than the summer drought levels, providing nesting sites for Willow Tits, while taller trees drowned by the flood rot where they stand, nest sites now for bats, Mergansers and Mallard.

The Cranes circle on their broad wings above the woodland, dropping back to the fen while keeping a small herd of Konik ponies

– five mares and a single foal – between themselves and the angler. These roam at will the length of the river corridor through a network of fen, reedbed and wet woodland. Their grazing helps to maintain the openness of the wet pasture for breeding Lapwing and Snipe. Cranes, Cattle Egrets and Little Egrets search ground churned to a muddy swamp by two stallions fighting over access to the mares.

A forager in the oak and ash woodland on the higher ground watches the Cranes rise up from the fen on the appearance of the angler, then sees them settle down and resume feeding. The bluebells and wood anemone have flowered and faded as the canopy of oak and ash closed over them; now it is time for wild mushrooms, found in greater variety than in previous years. This bounty is thanks to wild boar turning over the soil, transporting fungal mycorrhiza throughout the woodlands of high clay. Hunted to extinction by kings and poachers the boar returned in the late twentieth century as farmed livestock. Intelligent and adaptable, however, they resisted containment, and unrestrained by management plans the native boar has returned.

Another native absent for little more than a hundred years had returned only after much debate. As a predator, the pine marten was seen as an obstacle to maintaining stocks of Pheasant above the natural limit the woodland could support. Red squirrels were also shot and trapped by the ever-vigilant gamekeeper because of their opportunist foraging of eggs and nestlings, yet they survived in East Anglia and elsewhere until aesthetics and sport combined in a perfect storm of poor decisions to bring the grey squirrel from North America. Following their release into urban parks and country estates, the greys prospered in a predator-

free environment. Heavier, hungrier, and the unwitting vectors of a disease to which they were themselves immune, they resisted all attempts at control, while the native red squirrels succumbed to disease and possibly competition for food. It would be another hundred years before anyone would notice that pine marten will target the larger, heavier grey squirrel in preference to the smaller reds, which, light and agile, can escape to thin spindly twigs beyond the reach of martens.

A marten watches the forager from its vantage point in the nest of a Carrion Crow it raided for eggs back in the spring. The nest will serve as a den for the marten until wind and rain undo the work of two seasons. Carrion Crows' large nests, like those of Wood Pigeons, are easily located and worth raiding, although even Magpie nests, roofed with thorns and sticks are still vulnerable to an inquisitive opportunist. The Lapwings that nest in the wet pasture between the wood and the beaver pond raise more young now the marten has found the crows' nests. The Buzzards too have increased in number, taking in turn their share of fledgling crows.

This imaginary valley somewhere in East Anglia in a near or distant future is based on recent changes in the British countryside. Beavers have returned to Scotland and southern England while wild boar, having made their re-appearance in the 1980s, can now be found in most counties in England and increasingly in Scotland and Wales. The return of both wild boar and European beavers has been by turn celebrated and dismissed as folly. The argument against their return: that there is no room for 'wild' nature, must be tested against their presence in the here and now.

Rewilding is as much about our perception of nature and the countryside as it is about ecosystem functionality. Sensible discussion about the re-introduction of extinct species has been hindered by misinformation and stubborn resistance, demonstrated

for example by the attitudes of some landowners to the natural recovery of our bird of prey populations. The Sea Eagle was simply too big to go un-noticed, even as one sceptic described it to me 'akin to re-introducing the mammoth', despite breeding populations being established in both Holland and north Germany and occasional East Anglian sightings. Perhaps Sea Eagles re-introduced in Scotland's east coast will become frequent visitors to Suffolk and Norfolk, and help to establish them as an accepted member of our avian fauna.

Similarly it would be another hundred years before studies of predator-prey interactions between pine martens and squirrels in Ireland would suggest that the return of a native predator might actually aid the conservation of the red squirrel (Sheehy, E., Lawrence, C. 2014). As with the polecat, we should be alert to the potential for natural recovery of the pine marten and the reoccupation of the species' former range. Targeted re-introductions will very likely be subject to careful consideration because of possible adverse effects on vulnerable species, although personal experience suggests that there may be fewer crows and Magpies in areas where pine martens are known to be present. There are, and always will be, risks; at best likely outcomes, rather than absolute certainties.

The return of wild boar to our woodlands and beavers to our rivers and wetlands enables ecosystem resilience in the face of human impacts. For example, by returning European beavers to our river systems we can seek to build natural complexity into flood plains creating habitat for invertebrates, fish, amphibians and water voles. Their dams also sustain water flow, helping to prevent flooding when rivers are in spate, but also raising the water table which may improve growing conditions for pastures and crops as well as wetlands, essentially restoring eco-system resilience (Kitchener 2001). By rooting about in woodlands, wild boar aid

the dispersal of woodland flora and enhance species diversity, by carrying seeds in the mud and clay that clings to their feet and bristly snouts and by creating disturbed patches of earth which are in turn colonised by more species than are actually rooted up (Gould 2003).

The countryside, it is argued, is entirely man-made; even our best wildlife habitats are managed as a substitute for natural processes or to maintain the anthropogenic effects of past management, as in the case of heathland and chalk grassland. Rewilding demands new ways of thinking in order to allow habitats and species to adapt and change with minimal intervention. Sadly rewilding evokes images of abandonment and howling wilderness. The term 'ecosystem resilience' carries less dramatic weight, yet rewilding is no more than ecosystem resilience writ large. Heathland is effectively a woodland without trees – an extension of natural clearings created by centuries of browsing by domesticated animals. The abandonment of traditional grazing practices coupled with the gathering of resources such as bracken for fuel and thatch (Rackham 1986) mean that without continued intervention, our heathlands are quickly reclaimed by pioneer birch and eventually secondary woodland. The extension of grazing by large herbivores (feral goats, deer and rabbits in combination with wild ponies) may create the conditions for a self-sustaining heathland mosaic and provide a viable alternative to current management practices that require costly equipment and the availability of volunteers.

A comparison may be made here with the Dutch experiment in rewilding at Oostvaardersplassen, a nature reserve in the Netherlands managed by the State Forestry Service. Covering approximately 56 square kilometres, it is noted as an example of rewilding where herds of 'wild' cattle, Konik ponies and deer roam freely. However, in the absence of large predators questions

have been asked about future management, questions that are now being asked here in Britain, where it is proposed that the re-introduction of lynx to suitable areas may help to control deer in our woodlands. Beyond the theories underlying its changing patterns, Oostvaardersplassen is an example of how a country of 16 million people crammed into only 4.2 million hectares can nonetheless set land aside for large-scale habitat creation.

Rewilding demands new ways of thinking by reserve and site managers, farmers, gamekeepers, fishery owners and urban planners, in order to make room for natural systems in our agricultural and built environments, from making room for rough, untidy corners of farmland (particularly in the 'green belt') to maintaining connectivity between key sites. In the Stort Valley near Bishop's Stortford, work undertaken by local wildlife trusts has begun with the aim of restoring inter-connecting riparian habitat and continued with the successful re-introduction of water voles while Konik ponies graze lowland fens. Elsewhere in Europe, green bridges crossing motorways help to maintain species dispersal through the wider countryside and reduce accidents involving deer and boar.



Photo: Chris Keeling

Konik ponies in the Stort Valley

It is arguable that wilderness as opposed to 'wild' is a flawed concept, that 'wilderness' has not existed since humans learnt to hunt and kill large animals and adopt slash and

burn agriculture. Our impact on ecosystems can be seen everywhere, from the extinction of the North American mega-fauna to evidence of ancient secondary forest in the Amazon. The 'wild' must be defined by its functionality and ability to be self-sustaining with minimal human intervention. If we seek to progress the concept of rewilding as a management tool, whether minimal or non-intervention, we inevitably attach an emotional value to wildlife and the natural environment. I was around ten or twelve when I found a copy of F.H. Van Den Brink's 'Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain and Europe' in the local library. I would admire the technically perfect illustrations of wolf, bear and boar and the ink black amoeba spreading across the maps marking these species' distribution in continental Europe and so clearly absent from Britain, their past existence marked by a small cross. In my 'Hamlyn Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe' by Bertel Bruun and Arthur Singer, the amoeba had evolved shades of grey but still marked the same sad story of loss and retreat. In later years, working on a dairy farm in the French Jura, I would walk to the head of the valley late at night and sit with my back against a tree to wait for wild boar to come to root and snuffle in the muddy hollow by the field gate. The boar were attracted to a field of maize protected by an electric fence. I would listen for the snap and twang of the wires as the boar –

impervious to the 12 volts pulsing uselessly against their rough bristled hides – slipped effortlessly through the fence despite their muscle and bulk. One night, there was enough moonlight to track the progress of a wild boar making its way along the fence line directly towards me. Neither fight nor flight was a realistic option which left only stillness and observation: the boar and me. I can't be certain whether the boar caught my scent, only that it paused, so close, so very close, only to turn and trot quickly away, back the way it had come. When the boar was gone there was the joy of it, the visceral thrill of wild nature. Later I had the good fortune to find footprints and tracked a lynx in the forest behind the farm. The hoped-for encounter never materialised, despite my focusing only on the cat and the spells I might cast to summon its shape from the sunlight, leaves and rocks. I returned to the Jura many times but have yet to see a lynx. Van den Brink's 'Mammals of Europe' never made it back to the library and I still have my old copy of the 'Hamlyn Field Guide'. I like to compare the old maps in both books with newer field guides noting that, whatever colours the species distribution maps employ, there is still the same sad story of loss and retreat; but just sometimes, the colours spread back across the Channel and into our crowded island.

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Inglorious Bustards

Photo: Inglorious Bustards



What does bird migration mean to you? A quick dash to the nearest headland to catch a glimpse of a wayward migrant? The marking of the seasons? Questions about where they are coming from or going to? Or just simply the wonder of it all?

For us it's all of those things but also importantly it's a promise of return – yet it's a promise that increasingly is failing to be fulfilled.

Migrant birds traverse huge distances on their perilous journeys and they unite nations with their borderless movements. Yet despite their epic and wondrous annual marathon, we often fail to show them the admiration and respect they deserve, instead placing ever-greater obstacles in their way, including hunting, deforestation and changes in farming methods, all of which have deleterious impacts on their populations.

We know that many of our UK migrants pass through countries such as Cyprus and Malta, where infamously birds are shot and trapped without mercy and without any feeling for the splendour of migration. A good number of long-distance migrants however pass over the narrow stretch of water between Spain and Morocco that is the Strait of Gibraltar. Whether it is a thermal-loving raptor or Stork, relying on the land to give uplift, or a small bird needing cover and food; this perilous sea crossing is one of the biggest natural obstacles they face on their long journeys.

Whilst at just 14km the crossing point at the Strait is narrow, it is fraught with danger. Strong cross-winds can blow birds off course, making the journey much longer, and tired migrants often drown, whilst raptors can be harassed by Gulls requiring from them an even greater expenditure of their precious energy reserves.

However, this meeting point of the continents of Europe and Africa offers some of the best birding in the world: Eagles, Vultures, Storks and European Bee-eaters fill the skies and cross to their new homes in various parts of Africa.

To witness huge numbers of migratory birds soaring just metres above your head is a truly spectacular event that cannot easily be matched. We recently were lucky enough to experience this event with raptor guru Dick Forsman and urban birding celeb David Lindo. The latter, when asked what he thought when 20,000 plus Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, White Storks, Short-toed and Booted Eagles swirled overhead with supporting groups of Black Stork, Egyptian and Griffon Vulture replied simply: "leave me here".

The 'Inglorious Bustards', Niki Williamson and Simon Tonkin, are giving a talk to SOG about their experiences and tours in Spain and North Africa, on January 26th at The Cedars Hotel in Stowmarket.



Photo: Inglorious Bustards



Photo: David & Margjie Carter

Grey Wagtail on a Stowmarket roof

David & Margjie Carter

West to East update

It is now fifteen months since we moved from rural Brettenham into semi-urban Stowmarket. The garden we inherited was just a blank square of grass, bordered by wooden fences and backing onto a small deciduous copse with two mature oak trees overhanging the lawn. We have set about creating flower beds and planting a mixture of shrubs and climbing plants, but all this will take time to get established. We have put up some bird boxes and Blue Tits successfully fledged a family.

Summer migrants visiting the garden have included Chiffchaff, Blackcap and a Willow Warbler. A Spotted Flycatcher was present just for one day.

On the nearby River Rat we can see Little Egret, Kingfisher and Grey Heron, also a Grey Wagtail which has been visiting our roof to catch flies.

We manage to attract to our feeders all the common garden birds including four members of the tit family with the occasional Marsh Tit making five. Finches have been a bit disappointing, but we do get regular Chaffinches and Goldfinches in the winter with a few Greenfinches. An occasional Bullfinch is seen in the hedgerow. Other winter visitors have included Siskins, Lesser Redpoll, Reed Bunting and Redwings.

Surprisingly we haven't yet recorded any House Sparrows, but on the plus side is the almost daily sighting of Treecreepers; these delightful little birds are seen on the trunks of the oak trees.

Flyover sightings have included Buzzard, Red Kite, Osprey, Hobby, Cuckoo and more recently a Short-eared Owl, giving us a respectable garden list of 67 species, so far!



Photo: David & Margjie Carter

Treecreeper

Colour-rings from the land of Ice

Each autumn, birdwatchers look forward to the return of flocks of waders to East Anglian estuaries. It's a truly international gathering, with Knot from Greenland, Russian Bar-tailed Godwits, Turnstones from Finland and Canada, Norwegian Oystercatchers and, of course, Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits. One of the things that makes the Black-tailed Godwits special is that some are wearing colour-rings, enabling birdwatchers to get to know individual birds and, through reporting their sightings, to engage with some exciting migration research.

Black-tailed Godwit studies are highly collaborative; not only do they involve partnerships between scientists, bird ringers and birdwatchers, they cross national borders. The Icelandic birds that visit Suffolk may be wearing colour-rings put on in Spain, Portugal, France, the UK, Ireland or, of course, Iceland. Occasionally one of the *limosa* subspecies will drop in on its way between the Netherlands and Africa and these are well-studied too. There are conservation imperatives driving research into the declining *limosa* Black-tailed Godwits, whilst the currently more successful *islandica* subspecies is a major focus of migration studies. Comparisons of the two subspecies are helping to explain the different trajectories of their populations, and assessing the role of hunting, agricultural practices in the breeding season and habitat changes for *limosa* in west African countries, such as Senegal.

Billy and his friends

The most famous colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit in East Anglia is 'Billy the Boomerang' or Lime Yellow - Yellow White (LY-YW), specifically (L)ime green over (Y)ellow on his left leg and (Y)ellow over (W)hite on his right leg. Other colours used are (O)range, (R)ed, dark (G)reen, black (N) for Niger) and dark (B)lue. In addition, the

white rings can have a black X or stripe and plastic flags (recorded as f) are also used to give each bird a specific combination that is easy to read from as distance.

His name, bestowed on him by Stour watchers Ed Keeble and Mark Nowers, reflects the fact that he keeps coming back. As well as making numerous sightings of Billy on the Stour, Mark spotted Billy in Iceland on 20th April 2004 and also saw him from Mistleay Quay on 14th April 2008, just four days before he was re-found at Eyrarbakki in southern Iceland. Billy visits the Stour estuary every year, moulting out of his summer plumage in the autumn and preparing for his return to Iceland in the spring. In between times, he often spends the mid-winter period in Kent. East Anglian estuaries seem particularly attractive to Godwits in the post-breeding period, with many birds spending the warm late-summer here before moving on to other wintering areas, mainly in France, Portugal and other parts of England. Black-tailed Godwits rarely change their established annual patterns; while one bird might enjoy the relative warmth of the mudflats, salt-pans and rice-fields of the Tagus estuary in Portugal every year, another (perhaps even its brother, sister or mate) only knows about East Anglia



Billy-the-Boomerang

Photo: Liz Cutting

– where it may experience cold, easterly winds, short days, depleted food supplies and February feeding trips to the flooded washes. One feeds alongside flamingos while the other may be hunkering down in a blizzard.

Billy was ringed on the Wash in September 1998 and he's still going strong. He was a full adult when his colour-rings were put on, so he's at least 20 years old. He'll have to keep going for a while if he wants to challenge the age record for a BTO-ringed Black-tailed Godwit, which currently stands at 25 years. He is already a Black-tailed Godwit with a claim to fame, however, having appeared in *World on the Move*, a BBC Radio 4 programme on migration. As part of the series, the production team wanted to have live links to people who were studying migration. As I was in Iceland with Professor Jennifer Gill, of the University of East Anglia, to monitor the spring arrival of marked godwits, I volunteered to be interviewed from the south coast and to describe the birds that were flying in from the UK. The wind was in the right direction so there were wisps of Snipe, flocks of Pink-footed Geese, a few Black-headed Gulls and two early Arctic Skuas coming in off the sea during the broadcast. Most exciting, however, was the appearance in a nearby pool of Billy, who was feeding with a flock of over 200 other godwits. Four days previously he had been seen feeding on the Stour estuary by Mark Nowers, and was also photographed by Steve Plume.

One of the wonderful things about Black-tailed Godwits is that they attract such dedicated colour-ring readers. This can mean that some birds are observed daily. These repeat records are really important, for example in establishing timings of movement. Birds from the east coast will often move inland for perhaps a fortnight to take advantage of flooding on the Ouse and Nene Washes. Rapid movements can add to the excitement for observers such as Simon and Pat Cox. Here's one of their

stories. *"GO-OfW (green orange – orange-flag white) was ringed in France near La Rochelle on 23 September 2009 and had been seen on 30 occasions, twice in Iceland and the remainder in France before I saw it in Alresford Creek on 27 July 14. Vincent Lelong kindly emailed me to say it was back in France the following day."*

Cutting-edge research

Colour-ring sightings provide really fascinating information about individuals and help to establish how different migratory strategies impact upon the lives of birds. One of our earliest discoveries was that Black-tailed Godwits wintering on east coast estuaries in the 1990s were almost twice as likely to die in any given year as those wintering on south coast estuaries, just 150 miles away. However, survival rates have improved since the 1990s, perhaps suggesting that milder winters and more frequent movements between estuaries and inland wetlands of the Washes have improved the lot of birds wintering in Essex.

There are other two other features of east-coast Black-tailed Godwits: they tend to get back to Iceland later than birds from further south and many breed in the colder and newly-colonised north and east of Iceland. The two factors are probably linked, as the northeastern part of Iceland warms up later than the southwest. Birds wintering in different parts of the range can therefore also be on different annual schedules. Those wintering in Portugal and France tend to leave their winter sites in March and head to the Netherlands, where they stage for a few weeks before migrating to Iceland in April. By contrast, birds from the east of England often don't arrive back in Iceland until May.

Like many migratory bird species, the spring arrival of Black-tailed Godwits in Iceland has been getting earlier over the last two decades, and these advances are widely assumed to result from individual birds choosing to migrate earlier in warmer springs which are becoming more frequent,

as a result of climate change. Having so many colour-ringed individuals has allowed us to record arrival dates of individuals every spring over many years. These sightings show that adult birds have remarkably fixed arrival times in Iceland (to within a few days), and therefore the advancing arrival of the godwit population can't be the result of individuals changing their migration timings. Instead, it is the young birds travelling to Iceland for the first time (usually at 20 months old), that are making the difference, as birds hatched in recent years are migrating earlier than birds hatched during the late 1990s.

Unlike many migratory waders at present, the population of Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits is increasing, and has been for over a century. Godwits were restricted to the south of Iceland only in the early part of the twentieth century, but have since expanded to colonise new areas all around lowland Iceland. However, the landscape of lowland Iceland is changing quite rapidly and two new developments in particular have the potential to reduce the amount of land available to Black-tailed Godwits and other breeding waders – forestry plantations and summer cottage construction, both of which are increasing quite rapidly. Aldís Pálsdóttir is a new PhD student who will try to understand the impacts of these recent changes on breeding waders in lowland Iceland.

Iceland hosts very large breeding wader populations in landscapes that are typically a mosaic of marsh, bog, heathland, riverplains and grasslands for grazing horses, cattle and sheep. The open nature of these habitats can change rapidly when trees are planted and summer cottages are constructed, and there is concern that these changes could impact breeding waders through, for example, changes in predator distribution. Woodland patches are often rapidly colonised by Ravens, which are highly effective nest predators, and could also provide shelter for Arctic Foxes.

Summer cottages are often surrounded by a shelter-belt of trees that can have a similar effect, and cottage owners often bring pet cats which roam freely through these landscapes. Consequently, in addition to the direct loss of space available to breeding waders that results from plantations and cottage developments, there may be additional costs if waders avoid areas close to woodlands and summer cottages and/or if nest predation rates are higher in these areas. Working with Tómas Gunnarsson of the University of Iceland, Jenny Gill from UEA and José Alves from the University of Aveiro in Portugal, Aldís will study the effects of woodland and cottages on the density and productivity of Black-tailed Godwits and other waders nesting close to and further away from these developments. As Iceland continues to grow as a tourist destination, the pressure for development is likely to increase. We hope that this study will help us to inform the future planning of settlements and forestry plantations in Iceland, and to safeguard the country's internationally important wader populations. Hopefully, this should ensure that there are plenty of Black-tailed Godwits on the Suffolk coastline for decades to come – and some of them will be wearing colour rings.

Graham Appleton (@grahamfappleton) is the former Communications Director of the BTO. He is now a freelance writer and blogs about waders at wadertales.wordpress.com/about.



'Billy-the-Boomerang'

Photo: Steve Plume

A South Atlantic Odyssey

36 Tubenose species and counting

A trip from Patagonia to Ascension Island March/April 2016

I had been lately starved of the sea, so took up this voyage organised by Wildwings with Oceanwide Expeditions, on the Dutch ship *Plancius*, as it made its way from its Southern Ocean voyages in the Antarctic summer, to its North Atlantic summering ground. We boarded the ship on the 26th March, after I had spent a couple of days by the beautiful Beagle Channel seeing many Patagonian birds, including my first Magellanic penguin, Antarctic Fulmar, Chilean Skua, Sooty Shearwater, Kelp Gull, Dolphin Gull, Imperial and Rock Shag as well as many goose and duck species.

The ship was not entirely full. For economic reasons I had taken a berth in a 3-man cabin, however I found I had it to myself. Amongst the 70 or so passengers there were some die-hard birders, but many travellers with different interests, which made the trip a varied experience. There was a full complement of expert support, and our group was led by Simon Cook who mixed experience, expertise, patience and humour in a very helpful blend.

The first leg of the trip was from Ushuaia to South Georgia – four days at sea in the latitude 50s, which made for some impressive ocean swells and at times fewer folk at breakfast. Ample access to the decks produced our first Wandering, Southern Royal and Black-browed Albatross, and, as we neared South Georgia, Grey-headed



Photo: Michael Bamford

and then the charismatic Light-mantled Sooty Albatross. We were accompanied by Southern Giant and Cape Petrel, our first prions – Antarctic and Slender-billed. Petrels included: White-chinned, Soft-plumaged and Wilson's Storm Petrel plus both Magellanic and Common diving Petrels, and at South Georgia Grey-backed and Black-bellied Storm Petrel as well as Antarctic Tern.

Three days on and around South Georgia made for a remarkable experience, with unseasonably sunny weather; visiting the old whaling station at Grytviken and the grave of Ernest Shackleton. We made two RIB landings on the King Penguin colonies at Salisbury Island, and St Andrew's Bay, where huge colonies of late season birds and chicks mixed with Antarctic fur seals, and were remarkably tolerant of our presence. The colonies were accompanied by scavenging Pale-faced Sheathbills, Brown Skuas and Giant Petrels, including white phase birds. Small numbers of Gentoo and Macaroni Penguins were seen at different colonies, and we saw the endemic South Georgian Pintail and South Georgian Pipit – the most southerly passerine in the world. A landing at Prion Island showed nesting Wandering Albatross and Southern Giant Petrel. Apart from its rugged beauty and history, South Georgia has recently been declared free of rats following an extended eradication programme, and bird populations are

already beginning to respond, with the main island breeding of South Georgia penguins restored.

A trip before leaving to the increasingly stormy Drygalski Fjord brought our first icebergs as well as glimpses of Chinstrap Penguin and Blue Petrel.

Leaving South Georgia towards Tristan da Cunha, the ship took a course close to the Antarctic Convergence, where nutrient-rich water gave our first cetacean views – Hourglass and Dusky dolphin, Fin whale, Orca, and Southern Right whale.

We sailed to Gough Island, a wildlife reserve and UNESCO World Heritage site, but whose breeding population of Tristan Albatross is being ravaged by predatory mice, which eat the chicks alive. Rough weather made it impossible to sail too close to the shore, but we began to see breeding specialities, including Atlantic, Great-winged, Spectacled and the spectacular swooping flight of Kerguelen Petrels, Yellow-nosed and Sooty Albatross, Broad-billed Prions, White bellied Storm Petrels and Great Shearwaters. We were close enough to see a raft of Northern Rockhopper Penguins in their northernmost breeding habitat. Tristan Albatross were more problematic to identify at sea, but were undoubtedly in the mix! The additional ID problem was the potential new 'split' subspecies of Broad-billed Prion, which appears to be a relative of MacGilvray's Prion, and which some managed to photograph at sea.

The weather improved as we neared Tristan da Cunha, which made a landing at Edinburgh of the Seven Seas more likely (a third of these trips fail to make a landing).

Tristan da Cunha is a unique and charming island: the most remote populated island on the globe, with around 360 inhabitants, subsisting on farming and the export of Tristan rock lobster via South Africa. We were very hospitably entertained, and I managed a game of golf on this most

remote of golf courses. Whilst there we were denied a landing by sea conditions on the aptly named Inaccessible Island although we clambered ashore and climbed the steep tussock grass hills of Nightingale Island, where we were bombarded by nesting Great Shearwaters struggling into the air, as we walked past nesting Yellow-nosed Albatross, having our kit inspected by the endemic Tristan Thrushes. At the apex of the hill was a clump of *Phyllica arborea* bushes, which harbour the exceedingly rare endemic Wilkins's Finch, which showed well and obliged for photographs.

Leaving Tristan we headed for the warmer waters towards St Helena. Species numbers declined. The last tubenoses to leave our wake were the Spectacled Petrels, but as we neared St Helena, Madeiran Storm Petrels and Red-billed Tropicbirds put in an appearance. Closer to St Helena a sperm whale surfaced and fluked, and at anchor we were accompanied by rough-toothed and pantropical spotted dolphin and a leisurely appearance was made under the ship by an enormous whale shark.

On shore were the obligatory St Helena Plover – the 'Wirebird' – which has recovered numbers following the removal of feral cats, and White Terns around Napoleon's first tomb. An inshore sea trip brought Brown and Black Noddy, as well as Brown and Masked Booby.



Photo: Michael Bamford

Grey-headed Albatross



Our leaving St Helena coincided with the inaugural flight to the ill-fated new St Helena airstrip, which was immediately closed because of unforeseen air turbulence. If it reopens for passenger flights, St Helena will be a delightful destination with much to offer.

The sea passage towards Ascension Island was a calmer and altogether warmer passage with few pelagic bird species, however a pod of false killer whales and numerous flying fish – as well as the novel neon flying squid – maintained interest and photo opportunities.

Ascension Island is a very barren tropical volcanic island, but it has a spectacular breeding colony of Sooty Terns, and the densely populated Boatswain Bird Island has extensive breeding colonies of the endemic and dramatic Ascension Frigate birds, as well as Red-footed Boobies and White-tailed Tropicbirds.

I and several others left the trip after a hugely enjoyable month at sea, and flew by



Neon flying squid *Ommastrephes bartramii*



Red-footed Booby

RAF transport back to Brize Norton. Others travelled on to the Cape Verde Islands, where further birding opportunities were promised.

The trip was very efficiently arranged through Wildwings: www.wildwings.co.uk, and Oceanwide expeditions: www.oceanwide-expeditions.com 26th March – 22nd April 2016.

For information on the RSPB programme to restore Gough Island: <https://rspb.org.uk/whatwedo/projects/details/419512-gough-island-restoration-programme>

I have appended a personal species list, which is not exhaustive, as others saw more than I did.



Broad-billed Prion

Bird species:

1. White tufted grebe..... *Rollandia rolland*
2. King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*
3. Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*
4. Northern Rockhopper Penguin *E. moseleyi*
5. Macaroni Penguin *E. chrysolophus*
6. Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*
7. Chinstrap penguin *Pygoscelis Antarctica*
8. Black-browed albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*
9. Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*
10. Tristan Albatross *D. dabbenena*
11. Southern Royal Albatross *D. epomophora*
12. Grey-headed Albatross *T. chrysostoma*
13. Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *T. chlororhynchus*
14. Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca*
15. Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *P. palpebrata*
16. Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*
17. Northern Giant Petrel *M. halli*
18. Southern (Antarctic) Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*
19. Cape Petrel (Pintado) *Daption capense*
20. Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*
21. Atlantic Petrel *P. incerta*
22. Kerguelen Petrel *P. brevirostris*
23. White-headed Petrel *P. lessoni*
24. Soft-plumaged Petrel *P. mollis*
25. Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*
26. Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*
27. MacGillivray's Prion *P. macGillivrayi*
28. Antarctic Prion *P. desolata*
29. Slender-billed Prion *P. belcheri*
30. Fairy Prion *P. turtur*

31. White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*
32. Spectacled Petrel *P. conspicillata*
33. Grey Petrel *P. cinerea*
34. Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*
35. Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*
36. Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus*
37. Sub-Antarctic Little Shearwater *P. elegans*
38. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
39. Grey-backed Storm-petrel *Garradina nereis*
40. Black-bellied Storm-petrel *Fregatta tropica*
41. White-bellied Storm petrel *F. grallaria*
42. Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*
43. Common Diving-Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*
44. Magellanic Diving-petrel *Pelacanoides magellani*
45. South Georgian Diving-Petrel *P. georgicus*
46. Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*
47. White-tailed tropic bird *Phaethon lepturus*
48. Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*
49. Brown Booby *S. leucogaster*
50. Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*
51. Imperial Shag *Phalacrocorax atriceps*
52. Neotropical Cormorant *P. olivaceus*
53. Rock Cormorant *P. magellanicus*
54. South Georgia Shag *P. georgianus*
55. Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*
56. Kelp Goose *Chloefaga hybrid*
57. Upland Goose *Chloefaga picta*
58. Flightless Steamer duck *Tachyeres pteneres*
59. Flying Steamer duck *T. patachonicus*
60. Crested Duck *Lophonetta specularioides*
61. South Georgia Pintail *Anas georgica*
62. Speckled Teal *Anas flavirostris*
63. Red Shoveller *Anas platalea*
64. Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*
65. Chimango Caracara *Milvago chimango*
66. Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*
67. Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*
68. S. American Snipe *Gallinago paraguayae magellanica*
69. Pale-faced Sheathbill *Chionis alba*
70. St Helena Plover *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*
71. Brown Skua *Catharacta antarctica lonnbergi*
72. Tristan Skua *C. a hamiltoni*
73. Chilean Skua *C. chilensis*
74. Dolphin Gull *Larus scoresbii*
75. Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*
76. Brown-hooded Gull *L. maculipennis*
77. Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*
78. Arctic Tern *S. paradisaea*
79. Sooty Tern *S. fuscata*
80. White Tern *Gygis alba*
81. Black Noddy *Anous minutus*
82. Brown Noddy *A. stolidus*
83. Dark-bellied Cnclodes *Cinclodes patagonicus*
84. Fire-eyed Diucon *Xolmis pyrope*
85. Austral Blackbird *Curaeus curaeus*
86. Long-tailed Meadowlark *Sturnella loica*
87. Patagonian Sierra-finch *Phrygilus patagonicus*
88. South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus*

89. **Introductions:**
90. Barred Ground-Dove *Geopelia striata*
91. Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*
92. Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*
93. Common (Indian) Mynah *Acridotheres tristis*
94. Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora*
95. Yellow Canary *Serinus flaviventris*

Photo: Michael Bamford



King Penguin and chick

Autumn Bird Review

September 2016

Weather report: September was a dry month with twenty days with no rain; of the ten days when rain did fall the heaviest was 25mm on the 16th and the minimum rainfall was 1mm on both the 5th and 11th. High temperatures got up to 30° on the 13th and 15th followed closely by 29° on the 14th. The lowest night-time temperature was a surprising 6° on the 23rd, otherwise generally remaining in double figures. It was a good month, with daytime and nighttime temperatures above average for September.

Spoonbill sightings continued throughout the county during the month, with a bit of dispersal. In detail, two at Levington on the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 9th, 10th and 14th, Trimley on the 4th, 8th, 13th, 16th, 18th and 20th one juvenile. At Hazelwood there were 23 on the 2nd, two on the 9th and 11th, one on the 15th, three on the 18th and two again on the 29th, with two at Havergate on the 15th, three at Bawdsey going north on the 17th and 25 at Orfordness seen, coincidentally, on the 25th.

Great White Egret made a comeback after a very poor August, reported throughout the county during the month, but mainly at the usual coastal sites as in previous months earlier this year.

There was a bit of **Dark-bellied Brent** movement on the 27th with 800+ passing LBO. **Garganey** were still being seen during the month from Covehithe Broad, Minsmere, Hollesley and Trimley Nature Reserve – not so easy to find in eclipse plumage. A **Goosander** was over Pakefield Beach on the 11th.

The only sightings of **Wood Sandpipers** came first from Carlton Marshes with one on the 7th and then Minsmere with one on the 15th and two reported on the 16th. **Spotted Redshank** numbers decreased during the month with 35 being reported throughout the county; highest counts were 14 from Minsmere on

the 1st and the same again on the 16th. Not many reports of common waders: 300 **Dunlin** on Havergate on the 4th; three **Ruff** on the Blyth Estuary on the 9th and **Little Ringed Plover** sightings only from Hollesley RSPB Reserve, namely one on the 3rd, two on the 12th and two on the 13th.

A few **Caspian Gulls** were seen during the month with most reports from Southwold/Walberswick. During the month **Little Gull** sightings included 12 at Sizewell on the 2nd, three on the 3rd and nine on the 15th, three at Southwold on the 3rd, 18 at Thorpeness on the 6th, 26 on the 7th and 30 on the 9th. An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was seen at Levington Creek on the 10th. A poor month for **Arctic Terns**, the only sightings being a juvenile on the 3rd and 5th at Southwold and one at Bawdsey on the 17th. The only sightings of **Black Tern** came from one past LBO on the 1st and one at Thorpeness on the 7th.

There was good movement of common migrants throughout the county during the month with too many species and locations to mention in great detail. A **Nightjar** was trapped and ringed in a private garden in Hollesley on the 3rd. A **Ring Ousel** was at Bawdsey Lagoons on the 24th and one on the Alde Estuary on the 25th. Excellent numbers of **Whinchat** at coastal sites with 75+ being reported to BINS during the month, highest counts being 10 at Southwold on the 5th, six at Bawdsey Cliff on the 7th, seven in the Lowestoft area on the 7th, seven at Aldeburgh Marshes on the 11th and six at Orfordness on the 25th. Fewer **Wheatear** were reported during this month. A trickle of **Redstart** appeared throughout the month, plus a few **Black Redstart** in the later part of the month. Other common warblers including **Whitethroat**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Garden Warbler**, **Blackcap**, **Reed Warbler**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Willow Warbler** and **Chiffchaff** passed through, although these didn't make

the BINS hotline. LBO recorded **Firecrest** on the 23rd, 27th and 28th. Fourteen reports of **Pied Flycatcher** came from coastal sites. **Spotted Flycatcher** were very scarce with the only report coming from LBO on the 23rd. **Tree Pipits** – a rare bird these days – were seen at Bawdsey with three on the 17th and two on the 18th. Even rarer, a **Turtle Dove** was seen on the approach road to Levington Marina on the 18th – one of worryingly few these days, where a few years ago these beautiful birds were a common sight. Finally, a **Hobby** was seen at Trimley Marshes on the 30th.

Scarcer and Rare Sightings:

At Trimley SWT Reserve a **Black-necked Grebe** was found on the 24th and was reported there again on the 26th, 27th and 30th. One was also seen on the 25th from Stutton Ness. At Minsmere Sluice, a **Shag** was reported on the 5th and seen again on the 6th. A **White Stork** was seen at Crest Hill Fressingfield in a ploughed field on the 12th. There was a **Pale-bellied Brent Goose** at Trimley Nature Reserve on the 10th, 12th and 13th. On the 29th a **Scaup** was reported going north at 3.15pm at Minsmere.

A few **Honey Buzzards** were seen passing through: one SW over Brantham at 10.20am on the 9th; one in the Lowestoft area flying over the Somerleyton Estate at 12.30pm on the 10th; a juvenile over Easton Bavents at 9.10am on the 13th; a Dark Phase juvenile south at Southwold on the 18th and a late Dark Phase juvenile south over the Aldeburgh Road on the 28th. September continued from August to be a fantastic month in Suffolk for **Ospreys**, with the Blyth Estuary excelling. Sighting details included: one on the 2nd, 9th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th and 25th and three on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th and 10th. An amazing day was the 6th with four recorded, seen from various locations from the White Horse PH (honest!), Tinkers Marsh and Hen Reed Beds. One was reported circling over Alan Road in Ipswich on the 1st and one south over LBO on the 1st. Minsmere saw one over the levels

on the 1st and then one was again reported on the 4th. One was seen south on the 2nd at Southwold Harbour south with two then seen on the 11th. At Stowmarket one flew over on the 8th and at Lakenheath one showed well on the 13th. Singles flew over the Stour Estuary at Cattawade on the 14th, Bawdsey Cliff south on the 16th; and the Hen Reed Beds on the 17th with the last one reported for September over Dunwich on the 23rd.

September seawatching produced the following seabirds: **Balearic Shearwater** – two in Southwold on the 5th and singles at Thorpeness on the 12th and Lowestoft on the 17th and 18th. A single **Manx Shearwater** was seen at Thorpeness on the 7th and Minsmere on the 24th. **Sooty Shearwater** sightings included Southwold on the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 25th and 29th; three at Lowestoft on the 5th; singles at Thorpeness on the 17th and 18th, LBO on the 27th, and Bawdsey on the 18th and 30th. There were sightings of **Arctic Skua** – two at Southwold on the 3rd and three on the 5th with nine at Lowestoft on the 5th. At Sizewell there was one on the 15th and then three at Bawdsey on the 17th. **Long-tailed Skua** sightings were one juvenile at Southwold on the 5th and another juvenile on the 6th; at Lowestoft a single juvenile on the 5th, and two on the 6th. At Thorpeness there was one juvenile on the 7th and two on the 17th. Only two **Bonxies** were seen at Southwold on the 5th. A **Leach's Petrel** was seen at Minsmere on the 24th and 25th. A rare sighting for Suffolk was a **Puffin** seen off Lowestoft on the 18th.

It was a very quiet month in Suffolk for rare waders with only two American species report to BINS during September. A brief bit of excitement happened on the 12th at LBO when a rare wader in the form of a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** made a very fleeting touchdown onto the Landguard Common. Luckily someone just had time to get a digi-scope shot before it got up and headed south. What a shame that this good looking American Wader could not have hung around

for a couple of hours or so! Only two sightings of **Pectoral Sandpiper** this month, both from Minsmere: one very brief at 7.55am on the 17th on West Scrape before it flew off high to the south, then one on the scrape daily from the 28th-30th. Despite the general quiet, it was a cracking month for **Curlew Sandpiper** with at least 130 reports to BINS, the highest counts being: 29 at Havergate on the 4th, seven at Breydon Water on the 6th, seven at Hollesley RSPB Reserve on the 10th and 11th and nine at Trimley SWT Reserve on the 27th. There were sightings the whole month, mainly from the coast, with four reported on the 8th at Micklemere.

It was also a very good month for **Little Stint** with 34 sightings from the 1st to the 22nd. Highest counts at Minsmere were nine on the 4th, three on the 15th, two on the 19th and one on the 22nd. Three were seen at Hollesley RSPB Reserve on the 1st, same again on the 3rd and 5th, three at Trimley SWT Reserve on the 2nd, two on the 4th and one on the 5th.

At Corton old sewage works the **Wryneck** continued into September, showing on the 1st, 5th, 6th and 17th but there was no sign of this elusive and long-staying bird after this date. On the 4th an individual was reported on the grassy bank between car park and entrance of Heath Road Hospital and at Hollesley a single was trapped and ringed in a private garden on the 6th. One was at Kessingland sewage works on the 6th and at Trimley Nature Reserve one was seen at early evening near the visitor centre on the 7th. At LBO one was found on Icky Ridge on the 12th and at Hollesley RSPB Reserve on the 13th and 14th, a very obliging bird was found by John Richardson. At LBO one was found by the cottage garden mid-morning on the 24th. LBO also produced a nice **White Wagtail** on the 22nd.

Furthermore, LBO had a nice surprise on the 20th when an **Arctic Warbler** was found in a net in the compound; the bird was also seen again on the 21st but remained very elusive! Also there on the 20th, a

Barred Warbler was very briefly seen on the common. At Hollesley on the 7th, a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** was trapped and ringed in a private garden (subject to acceptance). An elusive **Icterine Warbler** found by Dave Thurlow made a brief showing early morning near the allotments at Thorpeness on the 12th, but despite a lot of searching was not seen again. Another **Icky** was found on the disused railway track at Gunton on the 17th.

A nice flurry of **Yellow-browed Warblers** occurred, the first being on the 18th at Corton allotments, the second at LBO on the 19th, one at Thorpeness on the 19th, with the 20th producing one at Worthing Road in Lowestoft and one at Bawdsey Manor, one trapped and ringed at Bawdsey Hall. The last reported sighting for the month was one found behind Zak's Cafe, South Beach, Lowestoft on the 23rd. Always a great autumn treat to see these eastern gems.

The managed retreat at Trimley produced a **Red-backed Shrike** on the 7th. **Ravens** made an appearance again this autumn with one on the 18th, two on the 20th and one on the 23rd at Cavenham Heath. A further single was seen circling over Hollesley Prison Café on the 26th, being mobbed by corvids. At Bawdsey Cliff, a **Serin** was reported south on the 18th. LBO had three **Tree Sparrows** arrive on the 22nd; these remained at least until the 29th. A sprinkling of **Lapland Buntings**, with sightings from Minsmere on the 15th, one or more at Hollesley RSPB Reserve on the 21st, one at Easton Bavants on the 21st, one at LBO on the 21st and finally one at Sizewell on the 27th.



Photo: Bill Baston

October 2016

Weather report: October was a dry month on the whole with 10 totally dry days and another 13 days with 2mm or less rain. Significant rainfall between 4mm and 7mm occurred on seven days. The highest temperature was 18° recorded on the 3rd and the high average for the the month was 15°. The lowest temperature was 3° on the 11th and the low average for the month was 7°, making October was a mild month overall.

Spoonbill sightings still continued throughout the county during the month from sites mentioned in previous roundups as well as an interesting sighting from the River Deben on the 1st where 14 were seen between Bawdsey and Ramsholt.



Photo: Phil Whittaker

Great White Egret

Sightings of **Great White Egret** were again reported throughout the county and some winter wild birds began arriving, with **Great Northern Diver** was seen off LBO on the 13th. At Minsmere, **Bewick's Swans** were seen flying towards Island Mere on the 26th. **Garganey** were still being seen during the month from Covehithe Broad and Trimley Nature Reserve with a late record from Micklemere on the 31st. A **Red-crested Pochard** was reported from Pippis Ford on the 1st. From Stutton Ness a **Greater Scaup** was seen on the 27th and 28th and two more from Benacre on the 28th. A **Velvet Scoter** passed Bawdsey on the 13th, then on the 19th another was seen from LBO and one reported from



Eider

Photo: Danny Porter

Lowestoft, along with 12 **Eider** again from Lowestoft on the 20th. From Covehithe on the 4th **White-fronted Geese** were seen starting to arrive from the 14th with four going south at Westleton and then 37 south at Bawdsey on the 14th. At North Warren, 110 were counted on the 14th, 25 on the 15th and 30 on the 21st. Trimley SWT Reserve recorded 22 on the 29th and four at Livermore on the 30th. At North Warren there were 11 **Tundra Bean Geese** on the 14th, then four at Havergate on the 20th. At Minsmere on the 21st, 20 **Pink-footed Geese** were seen offshore.

There were very few reported wader sightings this month: the **Pectoral Sandpiper** continued at Minsmere till the 5th, the rush of **Curlew Sandpiper** has passed, with just four at Trimley SWT Reserve on the 1st; 11 **Spotted Redshank** were reported from Minsmere on the 1st and then **Little Stint** from the 18th to the 30th. A **Purple Sandpiper** was seen at LBO on the 12th and reported on and off up to the 28th. There were three **Jack Snipe** at Pippis Ford on the 8th, one at Minsmere on the 15th and two at Trimley on the 29th.

Caspian Gulls were still being reported during the month and as usual most reports were from Southwold/Walberswick along with **Yellow-legged Gulls**. A few **Little Gulls** still lingered with three at Gunton on the 19th and four at Southwold on the 20th and 21st.

Another winter visitor was a **Water Pipit** seen at Minsmere on the 22nd, this followed by a **Tree Pipit** at LBO on the 11th. Only two **Whinchat** sightings, both at Walberswick near the Bailey bridge on the 1st. Just one **Wheatear**

sighting during the month, at Hollesley on the 31st. A few **Black Redstarts** sightings: two at LBO on the 21st, one at Boyton on the 23rd and one at Kessingland on the 28th. There were 17 **Firecrest** sightings between the 5th and the 30th at various sites including Bawdsey, Minsmere, LBO, Southwold and Corton Churchyard. At Minsmere a late **Common Redstart** was sighted on the 28th. The only **Pied Flycatchers** seen were at Lowestoft on the 1st and Southwold campsite on the 3rd.

Scarcer and Rarer Sightings:

A **Black-throated Diver** was seen offshore at LBO on the 8th. At Trimley SWT Reserve the **Black-necked Grebe** continued and was reported again on the 1st and 2nd and two were reported from Stutton Ness on the 16th and 19th. On the 4th, one was seen flying north from LBO.

There were several sightings of **Slavonian Grebe** during the month, one from Lake Lothing showing well on the 4th, one on Mutford Lock, Lowestoft on the 7th, 9th and 11th and one from Stutton Ness on the 31st. At Dunwich, a **Cattle Egret** was reported on the 30th. A single late **Honey Buzzard** was sighted east over North Gree, Stoven at 1pm on the 22nd. Hazelwood Marsh produced an **Osprey** on the 1st, the only sighting for October.

A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was seen on the 9th over south levels at Minsmere and another, probably the same bird over Westleton Heath at 3.30pm on the 10th. A **Hobby** flew over Bawdsey on the 8th. **Short-eared Owls** started to arrive with sightings from Lowestoft to Landguard during the month, the highest count being at Shingle Street on the 27th.

October sea watching produced the following seabirds: one **Leach's Petrel** past LBO on the 4th, one off Minsmere also on the 4th and one from Bawdsey on the 13th; two **Balearic Shearwater** past Bawdsey on the 4th and one off Minsmere on the 12th. **Sooty Shearwater** sightings included one from Covehithe on the 4th, two past Southwold on the 13th and one at Lowestoft on the 20th. One **Long-tailed Skua** was sighted off Bawdsey on the 4th and 10th. **Arctic Skua** sightings were two past Lowestoft on the 20th and one at Southwold on the 21st. At LBO, three **Pomarine Skuas** passed on the 4th, two were seen off Thorpeness on the 5th and one from Southwold on the 20th. Regarding **Bonxies** there were two off Southwold on the 19th, one on the 21st and two from Gunton on the 19th. A **Black Guillemot** was reported off Gorleston on the 19th. At Southwold on the 20th, two **Little Auks** were seen on the 20th and one at Dunwich on the 22nd.



Photo: Ian Goodall



Photo: Stephen Whayma



Hoopoe

On the 27th BINS got a late evening report of a **Hoopoe** being seen on the footpath to the hide at Hazelwood Marshes. It was located there again on the 28th where it remained until at least the 30th. Good to see some **Shorelarks** arriving – once a common winter visitor to Suffolk although not in recent years. Sightings occurred at Carlton Scrape, Minsmere, Lowestoft, Kessingland and Dunwich with a showy one at LBO from at least 20th to 23rd.



Black-bellied Dipper

On the 20th a **Dipper** species was reported on a stream at Hawkes Mill in Needham Market at 3pm but in fading light the ID was not confirmed. Luckily it was still there the next day and confirmed as 1st winter **Black-bellied Dipper**. It showed well in the river opposite the Mill on and off during the next few days and also favoured other tributaries nearby, being often seen at three different

weirs located along the river footpath behind the Mill. It remained till the month's end, although some days being very elusive and odd days not being located.



Waxwing

It is always a great joy when **Waxwings** arrive to brighten up our winter months. Singles were sighted from 23rd at Boyton, Lowestoft area, Leiston and Dunwich. Hopefully this will be a good year for Waxwings with good numbers being reported arriving in the UK already.



Siberian Stonechat

A **Siberian Stonechat** (Probably *Stejneger's Stonechat*) was trapped, ringed and released at LBO on the 7th and it remained till the 8th but was often mobile – this will be another Suffolk first if DNA confirms this race and it is a potential split!

What a great month for **Ring Ousels** with 80+ reported sightings, high counts of 16+ from the Bawdsey area on the 6th and 16 on the 8th, plus good numbers at Hollesley area on the

6th, LBO 8th and 9th, Peewit Hill same dates, and Minsmere on the 15th. At LBO on the 6th a **Radde's Warbler** was reported in but no sighting reported after a lot of searching all day. On the 9th, a **Lesser Whitethroat** (probably **Blythi Race**) was reported at East Lane on the 9th with another at LBO from the 15th - 19th at least. A nice **Blyth's Reed Warbler** was trapped and ringed at LBO on the 10th - a couple of Suffolk's bigger county listers were grateful to catch this one at last! Unfortunately it disappeared from brambles on the common at 10.30am and no further sightings were made. Late autumn is the time for **Dusky Warbler**, and sure enough there was one at Corton Old Sewage Works on the 14th, then possibly three on the 15th; one remained at the Works, one was seen nearby along the disused railway track and one along Flycatcher Alley. Then another arrived at Warren Lane, Gorleston and showed well on and off from the 26th - 28th.

Sightings of **Yellow-browed Warblers** continued into October from the north to the south of the county, with far too many sightings to list, however there was a massive count of 10 in the Lowestoft area on the 9th and again on the 10th, numbers dropping to two the next day and then two to three on and off until the 22nd. There were four excellent inland records: Great Livermore on the 2nd, Cavenham Heath on the 15th, Long Melford on the 17th and Great Cornard Mere SWT on the 22nd and 23rd. The last YBW reported for the month to BINS was a single from that stronghold of sightings, the Lowestoft area, Gunton Woods, on the 26th and Aldeburgh Town Marshes. It must be one of the best years in recent times for this fantastic little bird from Asia with BINS receiving 80+ sightings during the month.

Another amazing gem from the east that we wait in hope for during October/November is the amazing tiny **Pallas's Warbler** and they never disappoint when they arrive. This year, the first one was found on the 9th by



Photo: Eddie Marsh

Pallas's Warbler

Mark Cornish at East Lane, Bawdsey, where it showed well all afternoon to the delight of many Suffolk birders. One was then seen at Lowestoft Corton area on the 15th, and more sightings of mainly singles at Link Hill, Orfordness, LBO and Havergate with one finally ringed in a private garden in Hollesley on the 29th. With up to 12+ sightings reported into BINS I am sure most of the county caught up with one of these cracking gems.

Possibly the only reported **Red-backed Shrike** this autumn was found at Westleton Heath on the 11th. It was a long stayer and was last reported on the 23rd. On the other hand, **Great Grey Shrikes** put on a good showing with singles at Covehithe on the 4th, LBO on the 7th, Lowestoft on the 8th and 17th, Eastbridge on the 14th, Southwold on the 20th and two at Dunwich on the 21st. Then a real long-staying bird was again at Westleton Heath from the 12th to the 23rd at least. A **Raven** again made an appearance on the 31st over Hollesley Prison.

The **Twite** returned to Dunwich Shore Pools with a highest count of 62 being seen on the 23rd. On the 9th, two nice **Mealy Redpolls** were seen at Gunton and five seen briefly by the sluice cottage before flying north on the 15th.



Photo: David Bordenick

Mealy Redpoll



Hawfinch

Nice to have some **Hawfinches** reported in, with a single sighted from LBO on the 7th, two at Lowestoft, Furze Wood on the 15th and one over Sizewell Hall on the 22nd.

An immature **Common Rosefinch** was seen in fallow arable field / hedge off Keen's Lane at Reydon on the 8th although distant. A little flurry of **Snow Bunting** occurred at the end of the month with two at LBO, two at East



Lapwing Bunting

Lane and three at Dunwich on the 30th and three again flying over North Warren on the 31st. There was still a scattering of **Lapland Buntings** with up to 14 reports, the highest of three coming from Dunwich on the 30th and then two from Hollesley on the 31st, with singles being seen regularly amongst the Twite flock at Dunwich shore pools.



Snow Buntings

November 2016

Weather report: November was again a fairly dry month with a total of 11 dry days and 8 days with 2mm or less rain. Significant rainfall of over 5mm fell on five days, with 29mm recorded on the 20th. Only 8 days reached above 10°, with the highest of 14° recorded on the 15th, whilst a low of -4 was recorded on the 30th with six nights at zero or below. The averages were normal for November.



Photo: Steve Babbs

The **Mega** button was pushed again in Suffolk, at Minsmere on the 4th, when an American **Cliff Swallow** was finally clinched around 2.30pm – another first for Suffolk. On what was until then a dull day, Steve Piotrowski and the D’Weasel (Eric Patrick) found a Hirundine sporting a whitish rump and squarish tail associating with Barn Swallows between the North Wall and the Visitor Centre. The bird was often distant, and in bad light getting good views was difficult, but eventually, when closer and better views were obtained by Steve and Eric as well as Richard Drew and Paul Green, the bird was confirmed as a first-winter Cliff Swallow. It showed well around the visitor car park till 4.10pm, when it flew off with Barn Swallows to roost, probably in the reedbed in front of Bittern Hide. Being so late in the day, only a handful of Suffolk birders who happened to be at Minsmere or



Photo: Steve Gantlett

Cliff Swallow pictured with a Barn Swallow

who lived very locally connected with this great find.

Most of the County were nervously hoping that it would roost and then perform the next day and after a lot of chatting that evening amongst the Suffolk birding fraternity, a plan was put in place for those that had a high Suffolk List, namely to be at Minsmere before first light and plant themselves on the path between West and South Hides so the reedbeds towards Bittern Hide could be scanned in detail. On the morning of the 5th, a large number of Suffolk Listers and Twitchers from around the country were in position in the dark, but as the light grew no swallow activity was happening. Then, just after 7am, news filtered through to birders scanning the reeds that the **Cliff Swallow** was showing well around the visitor car park with six or seven Barn Swallows, creating a sudden it was a mass exodus to the car park. The **Cliff Swallow** was showing well here, but also ranging as far as the North Wall. After a while it started to perch with the swallows in various bushes near the North Wall giving excellent views to all the early birders and to birders who were now arriving continuously. Discussions led to the assumption that the birds must have roosted in the North Marsh reedbeds. As the sun got up and the temperature rose, the Cliff Swallow and Barn Swallows started ranging from the field behind the Visitor Centre to the Dunwich coastguard cottages and cliff, where it remained all day and showed well on and off till dusk when presumably it went to roost. On Sunday 6th, the **Cliff Swallow** was seen at 7.15am for just a few minutes before it flew off south with Barn Swallows and was not seen again, despite lots of people searching Minsmere all day. I am sure there were a lot of disappointed people who could not make it on Saturday and dipped the great bird on Sunday. Well done to Steve and Eric on a magnificent find and thanks for making happy bunnies out of lots of birders. Also on

behalf of all the birders both visiting and local I would like to give special thanks to Adam Rowlands and his staff at RSPB Minsmere for accommodating the vast numbers and allowing access to areas of the reserve that are normally out of bounds.

Yet another **Mega** alert for Suffolk occurred early afternoon on the 19th: a **Forster's Tern** had been found at Mistley – another first for Suffolk. You may be thinking that Mistley is in Essex and you would be correct. However, the Essex/Suffolk boundary at Mistley Quay runs through the middle of the channel, making it an easy matter to see when the Tern was in Suffolk. Once it left there and was at the Walls, it could not be counted. The Tern remained until dusk and was present again on the 20th, ranging more and spending long periods east of the quay. The Tern was not seen in the Mistley area all day on the 21st, but there was a report of it in the Dock Basin at Felixstowe where it was distantly observed from Shotley Marina. Coincidentally, around 3pm, Steve Piotrowski was around the Felixstowe Ferry area looking for Merlin for his year list battle with Eric (D'Weasel), when, stumbling upon a few Black-headed Gulls roosting on the salt marsh, he scoped them to check numbers for his Birdtrack records and – to his amazement – the **Forster's Tern** was roosting with them! He raced the news out and a few local birders managed to get there before the light had gone, Will Brame getting a good digiscope shot. I expect Steve

though
all his
Christmases
had come
at once,
with Cliff
Swallow
and Forster's
Tern both
in the same
month!

Another extremely rare bird for Suffolk was a **Little Bunting** flushed by Mark Cornish from the weedy field by the MOD compound at Bawdsey on the 13th. It was very elusive and last seen at 11.30am perched in hedgerow before flying north; only a handful of birders having connected. Luckily for Mark, others saw it and Ollie Slessor managed to get digiscope shot. It was flushed again on the 14th by one birder (Steve Abbott) and heard calling as it flew across the road. This was the last sighting, although the bird may have been present for over week – I personally had had a small bird go through the fence at the nearby plantation, and my gut instinct, having seen several on Shetland late September and early October, was that it was Little Bunting.

Sea Duck Bonanza: Suffolk had its second biggest ever Sea Duck assembly since 1955. Back then, 5,000 were off Hopton and since then no other flock over 2,000 has been seen until now. The beginning of this massive gathering of **Common Scoter** in the bay off Dunwich started on the 15th with a count of 500 birds; by the 23rd it had increased to 1,200; on the 25th BINS had a count reported of 4,000 but this did not represent other counts of 2,500 on the 29th and 2,800 on the 30th. It has been an amazing sight to witness and it has been well worth the effort to see this spectacle. Adding to the excitement, this flock entertained good numbers of **Velvet Scoter** with 24 on the 19th, 43 on the 26th (highest count), 15 on the 28th, 33 on the 29th and 14 on the 30th. Other sightings came in from Bawdsey: one on the 13th and 14th with Common Scoter; eight at Southwold on the 24th; and two at LBO on the 28th. November was also a fantastic month for **Long-tailed Duck** with 45+ being reported to BINS from the north to the south of the county, with three off Dunwich on the 26th and five on the 29th with the Scoter flock. A report of a **Surf Scoter** from Dunwich came in on the 27th.

Birds: The only **Spoonbill** sightings this month came from Havergate RSPB Reserve



Forster's Tern

Photo: Lee Woods

(two on the 3rd) and Hollesley RSPB Reserve (four on the 14th), indicating that the majority have moved south for the winter although sightings of **Great White Egret** were still evident throughout the county during the month. **Bewick's Swans** were sighted as follows: 11 at Minsmere on the 5th, 14 south at Bawdsey Ferry on the 7th, six at Minsmere on the 20th, six at Hollesley RSPB Reserve on the 23rd, six in-off at East Lane on the 25th, two west through Seafeld Bay on the 24th and four at Minsmere on the 27th. The only **Whooper Swan** was a juvenile that flew over Broadwater Lake at Needham Market on the 6th. Thirteen **Greater Scaup** were seen going south from Gunton Cliffs on the 1st, then three off Stutton Ness on the 7th and 8th and four off Holbrook Bay on the 13th and 14th. At Benacre Broad there were two on the 4th and 13th, three at Broadwater Lake on the 8th-13th. The wintering geese are being seen regularly now at their known sites with mostly **White-fronted Geese**, a few **Tundra Bean Geese** and the odd **Pink-footed Goose** around. On the 5th at Minsmere, a 'redhead' **Goosander** was seen, followed by a male at Dunwich on the 27th. **Purple Sandpipers** were seen all month at Lowestoft, Southwold, Minsmere, Bawdsey and LBO with a high count of nine on the 17th at Ness Point. There were still plenty of **Caspian Gulls** being reported during the month, the reports mainly coming from Southwold, Walberswick, Minsmere and Felixstowe, along with a few **Yellow-legged Gulls**. A few **Water Pipit** sightings included one at Southwold boating lake on the 1st, and singles at Covehithe on the 15th, Easton Broad on the 16th, Minsmere on the 20th, Dunwich on the 26th and 27th and Levington along the creek on the 29th.

At Minsmere two **Sand Martins** were seen on the 6th and Suffolk's latest **Sand Martin** was seen at Livermea Lake going south on the 27th with a **Swallow** for company. There were still **Black Redstart** at LBO on the 1st and 2nd.

Scarcer and Rarer Sightings:

A **Great Northern Diver** was seen offshore at Southwold on the 4th, with two going south at Bawdsey on the 8th. A **Black-throated Diver** was off LBO on the 8th. A **Red-necked Grebe** was seen on the River Stour from Stutton Ness on both the 8th and 13th.

On the 13th, three **Cattle Egrets** were reported from the Lowestoft area, South Wall Marshes, Breydon Water where they remained till the 30th. Presumably the same **Cattle Egret** from last year returned to Sandy Lane, Iken from the 14th to 26th. On the 14th, 18th and 25th, a first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was seen off LBO and then again first-winter gulls were seen on the 16th off Corton Old Sewage Works, at Trimley on the 22nd, at Minsmere on the 24th and Southwold on the 24th. At Kingsfleet on the 4th were an adult male and female **Merlin**. Regarding **Hen Harriers**, a Ringtail was seen at Boyton on the 24th, a nice male at Dunwich on the 24th and a Ringtail at Orford on the 29th.

November Sea Watching: with the arrival of some good northerly winds there was a nice influx of **Little Auks**. Many sightings were made, first count of four on the 2nd and highest count of 33 on the 3rd both from Ness Point. A single bird was found dead on Benacre clifftop on the 14th. Two sightings of **Sooty Shearwater** occurred, one each from Southwold and Corton Cliff. A few **Pomarine Skuas** were seen from Thorpeness, Minsmere, Bawdsey, East Lane, Corton Cliff, Dunwich and LBO. Odd **Bonxies** were seen from Southwold, LBO and Dunwich.

A late **Turtle Dove** was discovered at LBO on the first and good numbers of **Short-eared Owls** continued to arrive, with some showing at the usual SEO sites in Suffolk. The highest count of nine was at Shingle Street on the 13th. A good sighting of a **Long-eared Owl** came from within the Felixstowe Dock Complex on the 10th. The **Black-bellied**

Dipper continued at Hawkes Mill, Needham Market into November where it was seen from the 1st up to the 23rd. During the day on the 23rd it was seen at Pippas Ford and was reported there the 24th and 25th, returning to its favourite location at Hawkes Mill, although it has not been reported again since then!

More **Waxwings** have been arriving and numbers increased during the first half of November with around 140+ being seen and reported to BINS. Highest counts included: 10 at Kessingland (2nd), nine at Rectory Road Carlton Colville (3rd), Church Lane Gunton (5th), 35 in off at Thorpeness (11th), 40 Santon Downham picnic area (14th), 20 in Frostenden Way (14th) and 16 again Santon Downham (15th). The only report of **Yellow-browed Warbler** this month was at a private garden in Bucklesham on the 5th. Aldringham Walks had two **Firecrests** on the 19th. The rush of **Great Grey Shrikes** slowed down after a good showing in October to just one at Minsmere on the 16th and 17th in the North

Bushes/North Wall. Then, on the 23rd, one was found past Sutton Heath on roadside wires just before the village. It remained till at least the 27th, often showing very well on the dog walking area on Sutton Heath. At Melford Hall Park two **Ravens** were seen on the 19th. The **Twites** continued at Dunwich Shore Pools with 60+ being seen on the 19th – the highest count of the month. **Hawfinches** were reported in from Santon Downham with two on the 27th and 28th and 210 **Bramblings** on the 28th. The small flurry of **Snow Buntings** continued, with Dunwich the hot spot where birds were seen from the 20th to the 28th. The highest count (of 18) was on the 23rd, whilst at Bawdsey birds were seen from the 8th to the 14th with seven on the 13th being the highest count. Still odd **Lapland Bunting** reports came in from Bawdsey: one on the 3rd and 4th and two at Hollesley on the 23rd. On the 18th there were five **Corn Buntings** seen north of the East Lane Lagoons.



Photo: Lesley Starbuck

Brambling



Photo: SWT

Matt Gaw

The Suffolk Broads National Nature Reserve

Sir David Attenborough, President Emeritus of the Wildlife Trusts, has launched an appeal to raise £1m to enable SWT to purchase 1,000 acres of land flanking the existing SWT Carlton and Oulton Marsh reserves.

The land purchase – the biggest in the Suffolk Wildlife Trust’s history – will create wildness as far as the eye can see. It will lead to the creation of a mix of wet habitats that so many nationally rare plants and animals depend on.

The new reedbed will be the largest in the Broads, supporting breeding Marsh Harriers, Bitterns and Grasshopper Warblers as well as lesser known species such as the white mantled wainscot moth, which is found only in Suffolk.

A 10km network of restored freshwater ditches will allow broadland species including plants, water voles and the rare fen raft spider to spread across the landscape. One hundred and fifty acres of marsh, fen meadow and shallow pools, along with areas of muddy edges will provide feeding grounds for both over-wintering wildfowl and nationally declining waders such as Lapwing and Redshank.

It is hoped the site will eventually become known as The Suffolk Broads National Nature Reserve.

Proceeds from the inaugural Derek Moore memorial lecture on 15th November 2017 will go towards this appeal. It would be great to see you there.



Photo: Chris Courtney

Field Trip Reports

Steve Fryett

Shingle Street

17th September

Leader: Steve Fryett

As usual darkening clouds overhead lay in wait for this autumn field meeting at Shingle Street however precipitation was luckily just a few drops. Amongst the 11 members it was good to see new faces, including a junior, and a few old friends from the past too. Autumn migration was in full swing as good numbers of Swallows and House Martins headed south with at least four Reed Buntings in the bushes near the car park. Meadow Pipits continued to pass overhead during the course of the morning with at least 200+ noted. A Snipe flew overhead as we noted Kestrel and Hobby. Yet more evidence of incoming migration was noted with a Mistle Thrush dropping in to land on the overhead wires in front of the cottages. Around the tennis courts we could only locate a Chiffchaff before moving on to the allotments where we noted another Chiffchaff and a Lesser Whitethroat. Still heading south a female Marsh Harrier provided good views with three Buzzards noted over Alderton. The only Wheatear of the day did not show very well as we headed for the beach to complete the round trip. Looking out to sea proved worthwhile with several Brent Geese heading south, and Gannet, Wigeon and a single Grey Plover heading north. Back near the allotments a Willow Warbler provided a few brief glimpses

together with another Chiffchaff. The local tennis court stoat was seen bounding along before disappearing down a rabbit burrow. The call of a Whimbrel from Oxley Marsh was noted before the individual took flight heading south.

We decided that as RSPB Hollesley Marshes had had little water on the scrape and the stiff breeze would be in our faces, it would be best to head for East Lane instead. Our brief lunch in the car park was noteworthy with three Spoonbill heading north and a Kingfisher heading south straight through the car park. More sea watching provided Gannets, Great Skua and a wandering Peregrine heading south close in. The lagoons held a number of Wigeon, Shoveler, Gadwall and Little Grebe but little else so we turned around and headed south around the hedges by the Martello tower. The garden lawn provided a good place for a Yellow Wagtail to feed up prior to continuing its migration. As we returned we noted another Hobby chasing hirundines before we headed off to complete the day at Bawdsey. No warblers were around the car park but we did locate two more Whimbrel that offered good views upstream on the Deben marshes. The great day ended here with yet another Hobby flying over the Holm oaks.

Orfordness

24th – 25th October 2016

Leaders: Gi Grieco and Eddie Bathgate

This annual trip to the National Trust's nature reserve Orfordness is always eagerly anticipated – particularly now that we can stay overnight on the Saturday, going over after the last daytime visitors have left, which allows us several hours of birding before dark. Indeed the overnight stay in the digs is perhaps what makes it so popular amongst younger members of SOG, with this year no exception: half of the 10 who went over on the Saturday were accompanying their parents. The overnight facilities there are excellent, with a fully equipped kitchen, lounge with games and books, bunk rooms, hot showers and flushing toilets. It's a great place to stay.

We met at Orford Quay, provisioned with sleeping bags, food and drinks for the evening and raring to go. Already from the quay we saw a number of Herring Gulls although with the tide so high there were no waders to be seen. After crossing over onto Orfordness, two of the group were transported with our kit to the dormitories while the rest of us walked the route between the lagoons, birding along the way. One of the young members, Tom, showed what sharp eyes he had by picking out Common Tern along the river wall and Sandwich Tern on the edge of a pool amongst some Black-headed Gulls. Waders around the pools and marshes included five Greenshank, plus Ruff and Snipe, with the majority of ducks Wigeon and Teal, counts of 60 and 25 respectively. Several Little Egrets flew by and alongside the tracks were Stonechat, Whinchat and a couple of Wheatears. In the scrub close to the old buildings we found a Lesser Whitethroat whilst small numbers of

Swallows and House Martins were passing over migrating south.

After our evening meal we went for a short walk. A long way from any light pollution, night-time on Orfordness is incredibly dark. We stargazed, admiring the Milky Way above and pointing out some of the constellations and planets.

On the Sunday morning we woke early to a beautiful sunrise and after a quick breakfast walked down to meet the rest of the group who were arriving by boat. We admired a single Spoonbill that was flying south over the river. With the whole group congregated, we set off. After seeing two Green Sandpipers in a ditch by the dock, we headed towards the coast, encountering many of the waders species seen the previous evening, except the Ruff, adding a further Greenshank and four Avocet to the total.

In the tidal channel we saw Bar-tailed Godwits, Redshanks, Curlews and Ringed Plovers along with a Common Seal. In amongst the scrub and on the grassland adjacent to the tracks there were Stonechats, Whinchats, Wheatear and Meadow Pipits as well as two Whitethroats. We also had great views of a Barn Owl and then a Hobby in quick succession. We'd seen few raptors so far but we did spot a Buzzard over a distant woodland and a Marsh Harrier hunting low over the grazing marshes.

We stopped off at the ringing station which is located next door to the facilities. The ringers operate a moth trap too and we were shown some of the species trapped overnight, such as L-album Wainscot and

Autumn Rustic close up. A Cetti's Warbler was one of the interesting birds that we were able to observe being ringed. Normally a difficult species to see in the field, few of us had seen one in the hand before. Continuing towards the coast by the lighthouse we saw hares and Chinese water deer on the shingle ridges. Having lunch by the sea gave us time to scan, although sea-watching proved quiet with just a few Gannets and Brent Geese offshore along with two Dunlins flying south.

We headed back, stopping off at the building that gives a view of the whole site and were rewarded with the fantastic sight of 25 Spoonbills on a pool, many of them feeding. A number of Little Egrets, a big flock of Wigeon and some Shoveler ducks were also present. Continuing on and passing the ringing area,

the over-nighters quickly packed and left their bags by the NT Land Rover. The group found a female Redstart amongst the brambles and in a patch of sunshine we saw a couple of butterflies: peacock and red admiral. Finally back at the landing area we had superb close views of a very young hare, which had clearly decided that keeping still was the best way to avoid detection. And so another great trip came to an end. A nice selection of birds overall, despite both migration and sea-watch being on the quiet side; the reserve is always a spectacular place to visit, enhanced by its remoteness and enchanting atmosphere at night. SOG are back there in 2017 on September 23rd-24th, just after the new moon.



Whinchat

Photo: Chris Courtney

Corton

15th October 2016

Leader: Gi Grieco

We met in the murk looking forward to a great day's birding. A Dusky Warbler had been reported down by the old sewage works, so we headed straight there. The bird was very mobile and vocal, working its way back and forth along the back edge of the vegetation, only briefly pausing and giving good views. After the bird was seen by all, we passed the COSW taking in a Blackcap in the tamarisk and strolled over to the clifftop for a seawatch.

Visibility was poor and sea birds weren't moving, so our next stop was north up to the Radar Lodge. We enjoyed plenty of Meadow Pipits, and Linnets and both Song Thrush and Fieldfare were lingering around the fence line.

Heading back we went past the Dusky Warbler site, which unfortunately for the waiting birders hadn't been seen for a while. There were two Chiffchaffs in the church car park hedgerows and a Grey Wagtail called overhead as we made our way over towards the old railway line.

Some birders there had either re-located the Dusky Warbler or found a new bird, which we heard but did not see. There were Goldcrests in the trees along with Long-tailed and other Tits. Eventually, after much patience, a Pallas's Warbler was located amongst them, and was both seen and heard. Twelve Pink-footed Geese and a Marsh Harrier flew over whilst we waited, but the tit flock had moved on.



Photo: Gi Grieco

Mediterranean Gull

Lunch was taken in the Gunton Links Road car park. Both ringed Mediterranean (E861 White) and Black-headed (J2TK) Gulls were observed and a Short-eared Owl flew in off the sea and circled us. There were few migrants in the bushes there, though we observed Jays busying for autumn and a pair of Stonechats. The Med Gull was originally green ringed 3XA9 as a 3CY (2nd summer) on 17/5/2004 at Zeebrugge, Belgium and re-ringed white E861 on 20/5/12 near Antwerp, Belgium. It has been sighted 110 times over the years and its log shows a clear tendency for a summer westward dispersal from the Belgium breeding colony.

We ended the day around Ness Point. A Wheatear was on the fence by North Denes; Purple Sandpipers and Turnstones were around the point and a flock of seven Grey Herons flew south about 100m off shore. Our last bird was a Woodcock that came in off. It was a fun day, with two lifers for me, great banter and interesting birds.

Council for 2017

Officers

Honorary President:

A formal proposal will be submitted to the 2017 AGM

Chair: **Gi Grieco**

Vice Chair: **Roy Marsh**

Secretary: **Edward Jackson**

Treasurer: **Matthew Deans**

Membership Secretary: **Kevin Verlander**

Communications Officer: **Alex Rafinski**

Publicity Officer: **Eddie Bathgate**

Projects Officer: **Chris Keeling**

Harrier Editor: **Eddie Bathgate**

Suffolk Bird Report Editor and SORC Link: **Nick Mason**

Outdoor Events Coordinator: **Gi Grieco**

Indoor Events Coordinator: **Adam Gretton**

Members

John Grant

Robin Harvey

Nick Mason

Ed Keeble

Samantha Lee

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Jean Garrod

Mike Hall

Robin Hopper

Mike Jeanes

Mike Marsh

Philip Murphy



Bird Recorders

North-east Area Recorder:

Andrew Green, 17 Cherrywood, HARLESTON, Norfolk IP20 9LP

Tel: 07766 900063 Email: bird-ne@sns.org.uk

South-east Area Recorder:

Scott Mayson, 8 St Edmunds Close, Springfields, WOODBRIDGE IP12 4UY

Tel: 01394 385595 Email: bird-se@sns.org.uk

West Area Recorder:

Colin Jakes, 7 Maltwood Avenue, BURY ST EDMUNDS IP33 3XN

Tel: 01284 702215 Email: bird-w@sns.org.uk

Membership Secretary

Kevin Verlander 9 Heron Close, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1UR



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group



Who we are

- Founded in 1973 by a group of Suffolk birdwatchers
- Associated with the Suffolk Naturalists' Society
- SOG remains an independent birding group and is a registered charity

What we do

Networking

- A voice for Suffolk birdwatchers
- With established links to many naturalist and conservation organisations

Media

- Strong web presence - www.sogonline.org.uk
- Active Twitter feed - @suffolkbirds1
- Quarterly magazine - **The Harrier**
- Annual review - **Suffolk Birds** report

Trips and talks

- Annually (20+) field trips - ideal for novices or experts and young or old alike
- Opportunities to visit hot spots and receive practical ID tips in the field
- Programme of talks and presentations - variety of topics (county, national, or international) with quality speakers



Protecting birds

- Actively lobbies to protect habitats and birding amenities
- Provides a county-wide field force of bird surveyors (50+)
- Organises and promotes bird surveys
- Inspires and undertakes conservation projects
- Bursaries available
- Numerous conservation achievements:
 - Contributed to several species breeding successes (Barn Owls, Peregrines, etc.)
 - Undertakes monitoring and ringing
 - Involvement on community and education projects
 - Organises and hosts dawn chorus walks
 - Assists with fund-raising for bird hides
 - On-going participation in key bird surveys for the BTO, such as BBS, the Bird Atlas, various species surveys and WeBS
 - Provides surveys for commercial organisations, such as environmental waste companies etc.



Suffolk Ornithologists' Group

For birds & for birders

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