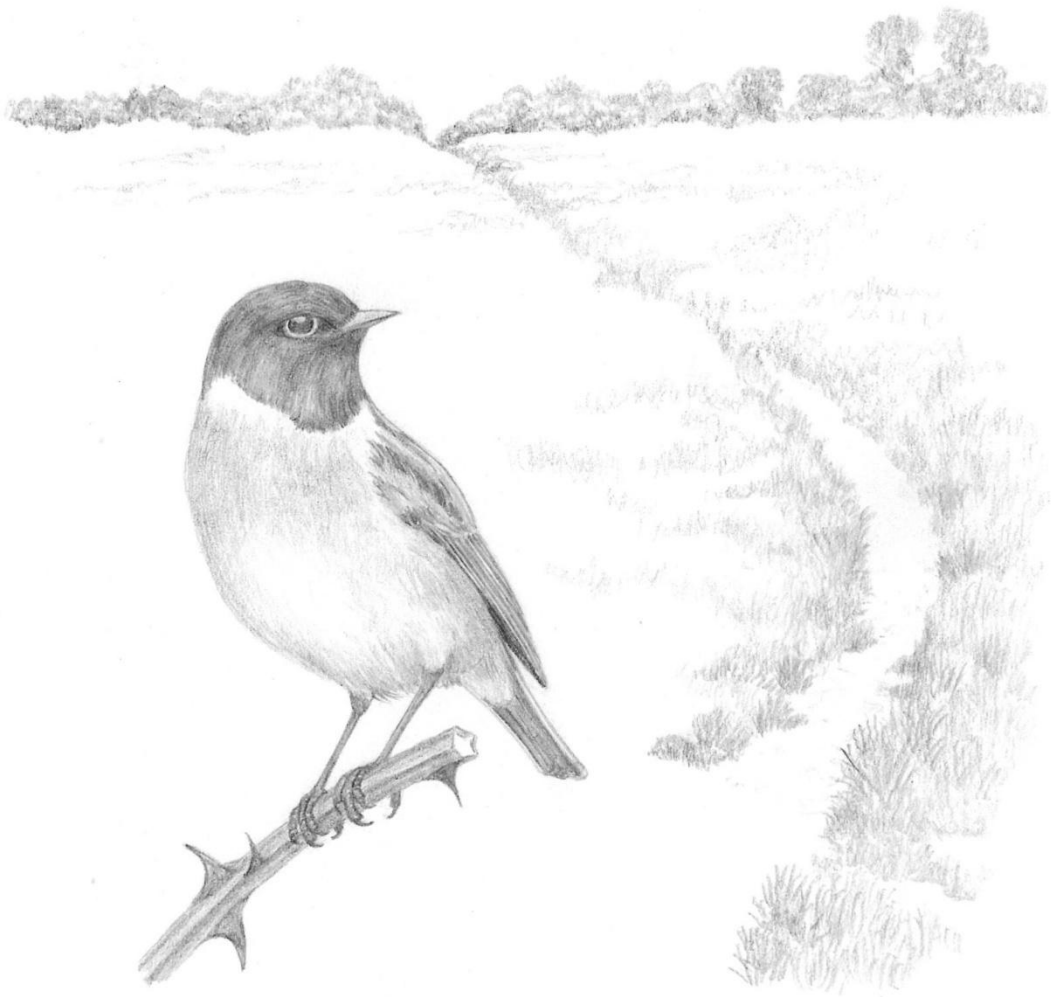


# Cley Bird Club



Newsletter 91

November 2011

## *Cley Bird Club*

*Keeping birders countrywide in touch with Cley*

*Founded 1986*

*Membership 680*

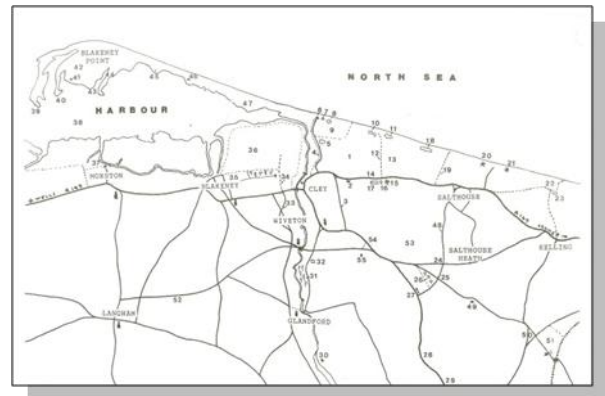
*Membership Secretary*

*Anny Hare Flat One, The White Lion*

*8 White Lion St. Holt*

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Dear Member

Welcome to our summer newsletter. Not the best summer for unusual birds, but still plenty to see. In this issue we cover the breeding birds at Cley, Kelling Heath, and Blakeney point. Whilst we don't claim the records to be complete they represent a benchmark for future birders and are the result of many hours work by a few dedicated members.

Of special interest is the two page report of migration written in 1951 by Archie Daukes and sent to CBC member Martin Woodcock.

Don't forget our winter meeting see page 13 for times and speakers

Once again thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter with special thanks to Pat Wileman for writing the bird notes, also thanks to our artist Pete Sewell, John Wagstaff and Andy Johnson.

### **Please note change of e-mail address for reporting sightings**

#### **Cley Bird Club Car Sticker**

Featuring the White Crowned Sparrow the new stickers are available only to members and cost £1 including postage. Available from membership secretary Anny Hare.

John Dicks

#### **Records of Sightings to:**

***David & Pat Wileman 21 Hollow Lane Langham Holt Norfolk NR25 7BY***

***E-mail cbcrecords@talktalk.net***

#### **Items for publication to editor:**

***JMJ Dicks Cherry Tree House Cherry Tree Rd. Plumstead Norfolk NR11 7LQ***

***01263 577354 E-mail j48a@hotmail.com***

#### **Winter Meetings Organiser:**

***Tony Aberdein 01263 741044***

As we could not find a volunteer to write this month's notes this is a quick list of what has been seen in the Square during the last four months.

## July Highlights

**Baltic Gull:** an apparent 1st summer Baltic Gull (form fuscus) was identified on Cley scrapes at dusk on the 29th

**Caspian Gull:** a 2nd summer was seen on N Scrape, Cley on the 16th and an adult on the 29th.

**Black Guillemot:** One was seen off Cley on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Redstart:** One was seen on Blakeney Point on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

## August Highlights

**Yelkouen Shearwater:** One was identified flying west past Cley Beach car-park at 7:44am on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Temminck's Stints:** 2 were seen on the 3rd and 3 on the 4th.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** An adult was first reported anonymously in the North Hide log on Thursday 4th and then was seen by many on N Scrape over the next 6 days. What may have been a different bird was seen on the 14th on Pat's Pool.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** A juvenile was on Pat's Pool from the 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Caspian Gull:** The adult seen in late July was seen again on several days between the 9<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Wrynecks:** One was found on Blakeney Point on the 18<sup>th</sup>, with 2 there on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. There were also 2 at Salthouse on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Greenish Warbler:** One was found on Blakeney Point, 500yds east of Halfway House on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Another was then found on Long Hills on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, it moved to The Hood and then Halfway House where it remained till the following day.

**Red-backed Shrike:** A juvenile and an adult male were found on Blakeney Point on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the male stayed in the Chapel Flats area until the 25<sup>th</sup>. Another juvenile was then found at Walsey Hills on the 27<sup>th</sup>, this stayed, feeding on wasps near the NOA steps and in the fields behind Snipes Marsh until the 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Hooded Crow:** This was reported at Salthouse on the 10<sup>th</sup>, and then seen regularly between Gramborough Hill and Kelling Quags from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>.

## September Highlights

**Fea's Petrel:** On the 19<sup>th</sup> a 'possible' was seen flying west past Cley Beach car-park at 10:50am but it was distant. Another 'possible' was reported flying west at 5:45pm on the 27<sup>th</sup> but we don't know who reported this.

**Cory's Shearwater:** Two were seen flying east past Cley Beach car-park at 6:20pm on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Balearic Shearwater:** at least 9 were reported during the month but some cannot be confirmed as we don't know who the observers were. There was singles on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 3 on 15<sup>th</sup>, 2 on 16<sup>th</sup>, and 1(or 2) on 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One was seen on Pat's Pool and then N Scrape on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Phalarope:** One was present most of the day on Pat's Pool on the 16<sup>th</sup>. There was an unconfirmed sighting at the back of Arnold's Marsh at noon on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-tailed Skua:** At least 6 birds were reported, 1 on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 4 on 13<sup>th</sup> and 1 juvenile on the 18<sup>th</sup>.



**Short-eared Owl:** 3 were reported, 1 at Blakeney Harbour on the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1 in off the sea at Kelling on the 16<sup>th</sup> and another in off the sea at Salthouse at the same time.

**Wryneck:** 3 were on Blakeney Point on the 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Red-rumped Swallow:** 1 was seen flying west over the north end of E Bank at 12:19 on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Citrine Wagtail:** a first winter bird was seen briefly in front of Dauke's Hide on the 6<sup>th</sup> before calling and flying off to farmland at 15:20. It was relocated on the 7<sup>th</sup> and then seen on and off until the 9<sup>th</sup> but proved elusive much of the time.

**Ring Ouzel:** One was on Blakeney Point on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Redstart:** There was an unconfirmed report of one near Dauke's Hide on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** There was one on Blakeney Point on the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> and another there on the 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>. Another one was at Kelling Water Meadow on the 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Firecrest:** One was found on Kelling Heath on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Tree Sparrow:** 3 flew over the reserve at Cley on September 11<sup>th</sup> then dropped into gardens on Hilltop. These were the first recorded in the Square this year.

## October Highlights

**Mandarin Duck:** At Kelling on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, a drake flew in over the shingle, circled the Quags and then landed in the main channel briefly before flying W

**Black-throated Diver:** One or two birds were reported on 9 days.

**Great Northern Diver:** One was reported off Cley on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 1 off Salthouse on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-necked Grebe:** There were unconfirmed reports on the sea off Cley on the 12<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>. On the 28<sup>th</sup> 1 was offshore with 2 there on the 30<sup>th</sup>. At the same time 1 or 2 were in the Glaven channel, viewable from Cley sluice at high water.

**Slavonian Grebe:** Reported off Cley on the 3<sup>rd</sup> (unconfirmed), 14<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Balearic Shearwater:** 1 or 2 reported on 8 days during the month.

**Shag:** One was first reported on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and then a juvenile was seen sitting on the sea most days from the 21<sup>st</sup> till the end of the month.

**Cattle Egret:** One took up residence with the cattle on Blakeney Freshmarsh on the 20<sup>th</sup>, where it stayed till the end of the month with a brief visit to Kelling WM on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Great White Egret:** One was reported north of the Dun Cow pub late morning on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Earlier it had been reported flying west over Weybourne car-park and was also reported at Cley.

**Glossy Ibis:** On the 22<sup>nd</sup> one was reported at Kelling WM at 11.05am. It then flew west. Later it was seen over Cley (Chris the car-park man had it pointed out to him!) and then over Titchwell at 2:20pm.

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** One was seen at Blakeney Point and Cley on the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> and another at Salthouse on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Jack Snipe:** One was seen on Blakeney Point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>. One or two were at Kelling WM from the 4<sup>th</sup> until the end of the month. Single birds were seen at Cley on the 18<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** A juvenile was on Pat's Pool at Cley on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Grey Phalarope:** Ones and twos were seen offshore between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, with 4 off Blakeney Point on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-tailed Skua:** There was only 1 (unconfirmed) report and this was on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Sabine's Gull:** A juvenile was seen flying past Cley on the 7<sup>th</sup>. There were also unconfirmed reports of 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup> & 3 on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Gull-billed Tern:** A possible 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird flew east along the tideline at c.8am on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Guillemot:** One was seen off Cley and Salthouse on the 20<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Auk:** The first confirmed sighting for the month was off Salthouse on the 15<sup>th</sup>. They were then reported in small numbers (max. 4) till the end of the month.

**Puffin:** One was seen on the sea off Cley and Salthouse on the 19<sup>th</sup> and off Salthouse on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-eared Owl:** One was seen off Salthouse on the 15<sup>th</sup>. It was attempting to come in off the sea in the late afternoon.

**Short-eared Owl:** Reported on 19 days along the coast during the month. It is difficult to determine how many birds were involved but there were at least 3 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 9 on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 4 on the 25<sup>th</sup> with ones and twos many other days.

**Pallid Swift:** On the 27<sup>th</sup> there was a Pallid Swift at Sheringham. Mid-morning another swift was found over Blakeney which was initially also thought to possibly be a Pallid but was later thought more likely to be a Common Swift. Mid-afternoon the Pallid left Sheringham and what was thought to be it was spotted over Cley Visitor Centre at 4pm, but it might alternatively have been the Blakeney bird. This bird stayed over Cley till dusk when it flew towards Blakeney. The Cley bird was photographed but in poor light. We await the deliberations of the rarity committee on this. Neither bird was found the next day.

**Richard's Pipit:** Singles were reported on 8 days during the month

**Red-throated Pipit:** One flew east over Gramborough Hill at 10.50am on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** There was an unconfirmed report of one in a Blakeney garden mid-month.

**Black Redstart:** A male was at Cley on the 8<sup>th</sup> and a fem/immature bird was on the roof of the old Visitor Centre on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Elsewhere there were unconfirmed reports at Salthouse on the 28<sup>th</sup> and a farm in Blakeney on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Barred Warbler:** One was at Kelling WM on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Lesser Whitethroat:** One, possibly of eastern race *S.c.halimondendri*, was on Blakeney Point on the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>.

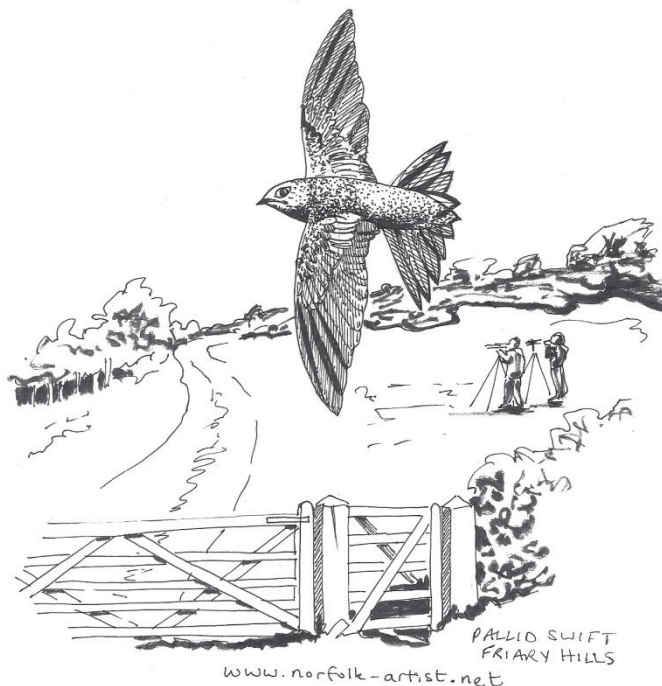
**Siberian Chiffchaff:** One was on Blakeney Point on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Firecrest:** There was an unconfirmed report from Gramborough Hill on the 20<sup>th</sup>. On the 24<sup>th</sup> one was in the shelter at Cley Beach car-park early morning. On the 25<sup>th</sup> there was one on Blakeney Point and one at Walsey Hills.

**Great Grey Shrike:** One flew in off the sea at Cley on the 13<sup>th</sup>; it then perched near the pillbox before flying off. There were unconfirmed reports of one on Blakeney Freshes on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Hooded Crow:** One was seen on Blakeney Point on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Raven:** One flew south behind Cley Visitor Centre at 4pm on the 14<sup>th</sup>.



## Departing Summer Visitors

**Spoonbill:** seen daily throughout July & August with a maximum of 17 seen together on July 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup>. At least 3 juveniles were seen often begging from adults, these were thought to be from the Holkham breeding colony. In September they were seen less frequently, often only in flight. There was only 1 report in October of 2 immature birds on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Hobby:** 1 or 2 birds were seen regularly throughout July, August and September. There were only two sightings in October with the last on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Nightjar:** Up to 5 males and 1 female were still being seen on Kelling Heath in July and August with the last sighting, with birds still churring, on August 22<sup>nd</sup>. No birds were reported from Salthouse Heath in this period though 2 had been present in June.

**Swallow:** The last report was on October 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Sand Martin:** The last confirmed report was on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**House Martin:** The last report was of 5 on October 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Swift:** There were no reports after September 18<sup>th</sup> until October 27<sup>th</sup> when what was thought to be a Common Swift was at Blakeney.

**Sedge Warbler:** The last report was on September 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Reed Warbler:** The last report was on October 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Grasshopper Warbler:** At least 2 birds were heard reeling in late July, 1 along the Skirts and 1 by West Bank. Reports in August & September were probably migrants.

**Willow Warbler:** Last reported on September 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Yellow Wagtail:** Small numbers were seen regularly throughout the period with a maximum of 12 at Cley on August 8<sup>th</sup>. A report of c.50, in off the sea, at 5.30pm on September 8<sup>th</sup> was the maximum count. Last reported on October 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Roseate Tern:** At least 5 sightings – 1 resting on Arnold's Marsh on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1 at Blakeney Point on August 1<sup>st</sup>, and singles offshore on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> August and 15<sup>th</sup> September.

**Arctic Tern:** The last confirmed report was on 19<sup>th</sup> October.

**Turtle Dove:** At least 1 was seen at Cley, 1 at Kelling Water Meadow, 1 at Langham and 3, including a juvenile, at Kelling Heath. The last reported was on August 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Migrants (July – October)**

**Osprey:** Seen on 5 days during the period with the last in off the sea on October 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Curlew Sandpiper:** seen almost daily from July till October 5<sup>th</sup> with a maximum of 41 on August 31<sup>st</sup> at Cley. The first juvenile was seen on August 12<sup>th</sup>.

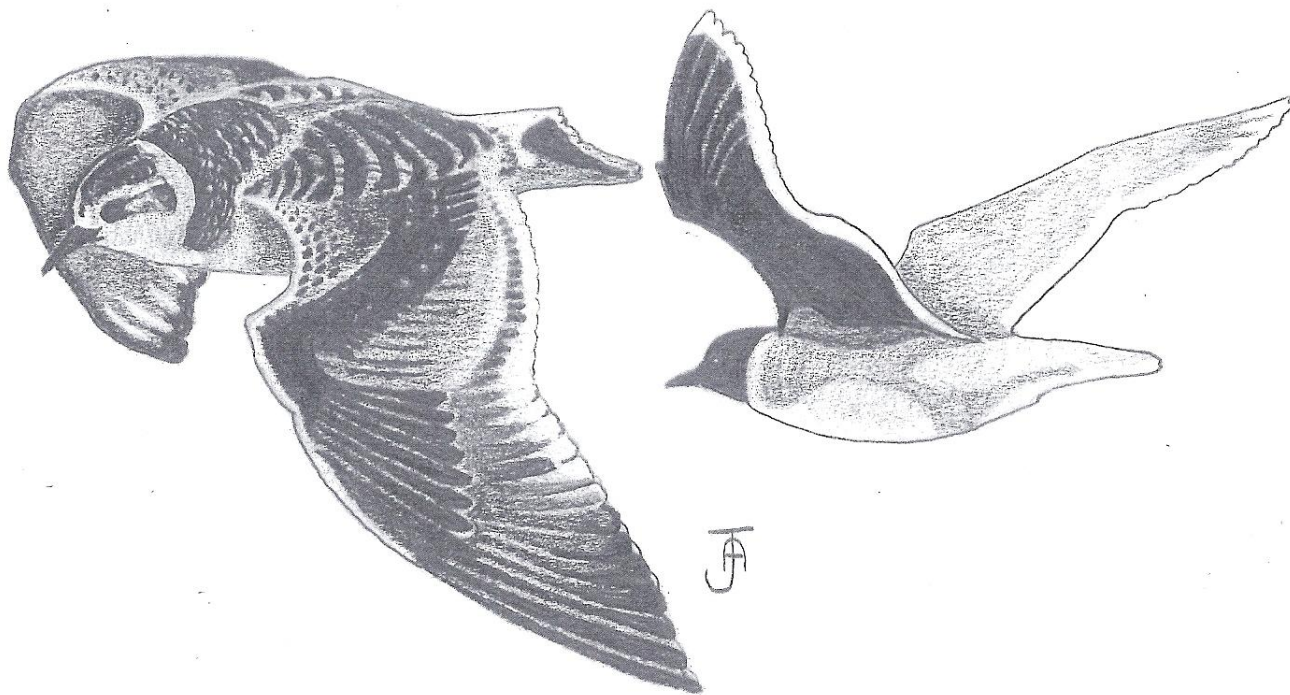
**Little Stint:** First autumn bird seen on July 19<sup>th</sup>, and then seen most days in August through October. The first juvenile was reported on July 26<sup>th</sup>. The maximum was c.19 on August 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Sandpiper:** 6 were seen at Cley on July 5<sup>th</sup> and 1 on the 8<sup>th</sup>. After that small numbers were seen most days until September 15<sup>th</sup> with a maximum of 8 on August 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Green Sandpiper:** Seen almost daily from July to October 5<sup>th</sup> with a maximum of 12 on July 20<sup>th</sup> & August 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Wood Sandpiper:** First reported on 8<sup>th</sup> July then seen on a further 8 days in July then most days till August 29<sup>th</sup>. There were no confirmed reports after that.

**Little Gull:** These were recorded most days in July, 16 days in August, 16 in September. In October they were mainly seen offshore being recorded on 16 days with around 500 present on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Nearly



all seen in the first half of July were 1<sup>st</sup> summer birds. The first juvenile was seen on July 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Tern:** Seen on 29 days during the period with a maximum of 42 off Cley on September 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Redstart:** The first report of the autumn was of 2 on Blakeney Point on August 4<sup>th</sup>. The maximum daily count was on September 16<sup>th</sup> with 16 on Blakeney Point and 1 at Kelling WM. Reported on a total of 22 days, with the last seen on October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Whinchat:** The first recorded was one in Eye Field, Cley on August 6<sup>th</sup>. The maximum daily count, 9, was on August 23<sup>rd</sup> with 7 on Blakeney Point, 1 at Salthouse and 1 at Kelling Heath. Reported on a total of 34 days, the last report was of a single on Kelling Heath on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** The first recorded was at Salthouse on September 4<sup>th</sup>. This was followed by singles at Kelling WM on the 5<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> and 2 on the Point on the 16<sup>th</sup> with 1 there on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Pied Flycatcher:** The first was recorded on Blakeney Point on August 12<sup>th</sup> with 6 there on the 13<sup>th</sup>. After that, 1-4 were seen there on 8 dates until September 17<sup>th</sup>. Elsewhere 1 was at Walsey Hills on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1 at Cley on September 29<sup>th</sup> and 1 at Kelling Heath on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

## Returning Wintering Birds

**Pink-footed Goose:** The first recorded in the Square were 4 that flew over Kelling Quags on September 12<sup>th</sup> and landed in a field. The first large flock was 2050 over Blakeney Point on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Brent Goose:** The first flock was of 8 over the sea on September 15<sup>th</sup> with 28 seen from Blakeney Point on the 16<sup>th</sup>. There had been a few sightings of smaller numbers before this but they could have been the few over-summering birds. By late October flocks of a few hundred birds were regularly being seen and these included a high proportion of juveniles indicating that they had had a good breeding season.

**Shore Lark:** The first 3 were reported on Blakeney Point on October 14<sup>th</sup>. After that small numbers were seen at the end of the month, but none had settled.

**Lapland Bunting:** The first for the autumn was seen on the Point on September 11<sup>th</sup> and then small numbers were seen or heard regularly along the coast.

**Snow Bunting:** The first seen were 3 on Blakeney Point on September 20<sup>th</sup>. By the end of October a flock of around 8 were being seen between Kelling and Cley.



## Ducks, Waders & Gulls (WeBS Counts)

Total counts for selected species from all coastal sites in the Square.

Species	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Species	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Mute Swan	16	42	46	36	Ringed Plover	44	373	166	16
Greylag Goose	324	468	480	454	Golden Plover	1	260	78	462
Canada Goose	12	25	89	199	Grey Plover	0	4	1	56
Dark Bellied Brent Goose	0	0	1	1050	Lapwing	245	239	194	914
Egyptian Goose	7	54	57	75	Dunlin	55	486	197	108
Shelduck	69	55	45	141	Ruff	26	50	42	37
Wigeon	4	0	122	1160	Black-tailed Godwit	299	485	253	193
Gadwall	27	18	52	59	Bar-tailed Godwit	1	3	67	18
Teal	79	350	290	2067	Curlew	223	649	494	426
Mallard	126	239	228	229	Redshank	213	165	238	280
Pintail	0	0	1	10	Turnstone	49	43	106	128
Shoveler	4	5	53	57	Black-headed Gull	611	1263	1058	645
Cormorant	18	50	26	17	Common Gull	6	11	4	8
Little Egret	36	50	57	60	Lesser Black-backed Gull	49	13	68	24
Grey Heron	5	5	6	16	Herring Gull	321	297	163	125
Moorhen	17	26	20	24	Great Black-backed Gull	84	135	15	121
Coot	42	15	22	11	Little Tern	110	24	0	0
Oystercatcher	685	691	307	363	Sandwich Tern	1083	72	33	0
Avocet	90	20	1	2	Common Tern	77	58	26	0

## Seabird numbers

Monthly figures for the more common sea birds

Species	Max daily count for a single site				N°. days reported			
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Eider	22	16	19	11	7	8	7	11
Common Scoter	290	134	130	110	24	13	16	21
Velvet Scoter	2	0	1	2	1	0	1	3
Goldeneye	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	4
Red-breasted Merganser	1	1	3	18	2	2	3	4
Red-throated Diver	2	2	37	36	6	3	20	27
Fulmar	6	2	2	0	19	9	5	0
Sooty Shearwater	0	1	5	3	0	2	3	4
Manx Shearwater	27	56	18	14	8	3	11	8
Gannet	141	71	1833	345	31	23	25	21
Pomarine Skua	1	0	2	10	1	0	6	15
Arctic Skua	31	28	18	15	26	18	27	15
Great Skua	2	2	24	60	4	5	11	11
Kittiwake	13	1	2	57	14	5	2	11
Guillemot	29	8	9	344	19	16	18	20
Razorbill	5	1	8	41	13	1	6	15

*NB. These figures include 'unconfirmed' sightings where we do not know who the observer was.*

Pat & David Wileman



## THE BEST OF THE REST IN NORFOLK JULY – OCTOBER 2011

This report could well be sub-titled ‘Frustration and Disappointment for Many.’ It is hard to believe that in a season with so few migrant birds passing through our county, that Norfolk has had two more ‘firsts’ (and ‘mega’ ones at that), that so few Norfolk birders actually managed to clap eyes on.

Considering JULY’s weather was so changeable and unsettled, very few scarce migrants touched down in Norfolk. Particularly noticeable by their absence were the rare waders. A nice positive record, however, was the first breeding of **Whooper Swans** in Norfolk since 1928. An injured bird failed to migrate back north from Welney WWT and its mate nobly stayed too and they fledged one young. Ahhh! Unless we are told to the contrary, regrettably, our Norfolk **Honey Buzzards** failed to breed this year, and only an occasional bird or two were reported in the usual area. A singing **Savi’s Warbler** was present at Hickling Broad from 20th to 30th. Seawatching rewarded the faithful with single **Cory’s Shearwaters** past Sheringham on 22nd and 24th and Hopton-on-Sea on 27th. Sheringham also scored a **Storm Petrel** on both 23rd and 24th.

AUGUST was very quiet until the last week. Snettisham did hold a **White-rumped Sandpiper** from 1st to 17th and Titchwell hosted an adult **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** from 18th to 23rd. The Bank Holiday weekend finally produced **Greenish Warblers** at Happisburgh, Warham Greens and Cromer. A few lucky birders managed to see the Cromer bird alongside a **Western Bonelli’s Warbler** in Warren Wood from 26th to 28th.

SEPTEMBER’s effort yielded just a few nice scarce migrants. The same or another **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was at Titchwell from 8th to 10th, joined there by a **Cattle Egret** from 9th to 11th, and amazingly a juvenile **Little Bittern** from 8th to 12th. (It’s all about coverage, clearly). An **Arctic Warbler** was well found in Burnham Overy Dunes on 24th, an **Icterine Warbler** at Caister-on-Sea on 27th, and a **Barred Warbler** at Holme NWT on 28th, which peeped out again for birders in early October.

OCTOBER is the month of the year when the really keen birders go forth and search and also hope to be in the right place at the right time. How galling for everyone to hear after the event that the mega **Sandhill Crane** that many twitched northern Scotland to see, actually touched down at Snettisham Coastal Park on 1st on its way south. Presumably it then sailed serenely all the way down our coastline, before coming to rest for several days in Suffolk? Aaaagh! Of scant consolation was a marked influx of **Great Grey Shrikes** along the north Norfolk coast from 13th to 16th. A stereo-typically skulking **Radde’s Warbler** was seen near Waxham church on 14th. The second of Norfolk’s firsts for the autumn was a real ‘crippler’ that was only possible to get to and see in the last hour of daylight on the 14th. A **Rufous-tailed Robin**, only ever seen alive previously in Britain for one day on Fair Isle on 23rd October 2004, was an incredible find by Rob Martin, after an exhaustive birding day on East Hills, on his way home to spend the rest of his birthday with his wife! Probably less than half of the searching 80 or so birders caught a glimpse of the bird as it occasionally moved from one potential roosting tree to another. Suffice to say that what followed was a crystal-clear starry Friday night and a disappointing Saturday morning for hundreds of birders. Saturday’s supporting cast did include a **Red-flanked Bluetail** trapped at Holme NOA, a **Bluethroat** at Stiffkey Fen, and a **Radde’s Warbler** trapped at Weybourne. Interesting that all the last four species are notorious skulkers! A fine juvenile **Pallid Harrier** briefly on 17th was confirmed only retrospectively from photographs taken over Brancaster and Thornham.. At least one **Glossy Ibis** was seen at Bintree Mill, Waxham and Titchwell between 19th and 22nd. We then had a mini arrival of **Pallas’s Warblers** from 23rd, with records from Waxham, Hemsby, Holme, Winterton and Burnham Overy Dunes. Also arriving on 23rd was a very showy first-winter **Daurian Shrike** at Horsey from 23rd to 28th. (This is what we used to call Isabelline Shrike, which has now been split into two recognisable forms. The other, Turkestan Shrike, has yet to get itself on the Norfolk list.) The strong southerlies late in the month brought at least one **Pallid Swift** for this report, seen over Cromer before moving west to West Runton 26th/27th. Hopefully, most birders will have caught up with a **Yellow-browed Warbler** or two. There was a good scattering of these from mid-September around the county. What’s the phrase? Something about ‘small mercies’?

Trevor Davies/Pauline Walton

## Cley Marshes Breeding Report 2011

Once more we have studied the birds, chicks and ducklings on Cley Marshes to try to determine the species breeding, together with the number of pairs and chicks fledged. Pat & David started to do this exercise at Cley Marshes in 2003 after discovering that only scant records were being kept. They were joined by Kath & Mick in 2009. This year the results have been enhanced by the assistance of Sue & Peter Morrison with their studies of some of the passerines and it is obvious that we could get much better results if we had more observers to concentrate on other individual species.

Each year has been different and each gives us surprises and more insight into breeding behaviour. We try to guess why things are different but there are so many factors involved that we have to admit that we really don't know.

The area covered is mainly the marshes north of the coast road between Beach Road, Cley and the Iron Road, but we also include Snipes Marsh and some species in North Foreland and the grounds of the Visitor Centre but these areas are not watched regularly.

The weather this year was again unusual. The cold spells during the winter reduced the numbers of some species, especially Bearded Tits and Cetti's Warblers. Then we had the hot dry weather in April and May which helped all the early breeders but reduced the water in some areas. However during this period the wardens managed to keep the water levels high on the reserve so that the dryness did not affect breeding. The high water levels on Cricket Marsh made this area extremely good for breeding ducks and waders, but the resulting high grass levels meant they were very difficult to see. Pope's meadows and the Serpentine were again very dry throughout causing any birds nesting there to have to take their young some distance to find water. The cold, wet weather in summer meant that some of the later breeders didn't do as well.

Mute Swans were a surprise again this year - we did not find any nests. There were a couple of attempts but these came to nothing. Suddenly, when we had given up on them, a pair was found with four small cygnets in the Catchwater Drain just east of Beach Rd. We don't know where the nest had been but it could have been west of Beach Rd outside the area monitored. Unfortunately three were lost after about ten days. The last chick survived another two months but never looked too healthy, then that disappeared too.

As always Greylag Geese were again present in big numbers and were the earliest breeders. Once more, our enthusiasm to count the young wore off when they started to form crèches so we do not have accurate numbers. Of interest was a neck-collared Greylag Y64. This male was ringed as an adult in Holland in 2009 and was first seen at Cley in March 2010; it has been with the geese in the area ever since. He had a mate last year but they failed to breed. However this year they appeared to successfully fledge eight young. Another neck-collared goose SXA (a female), which was ringed in the same place on the same day, was first seen in Norfolk (at Stiffkey Fen) in January 2010. We have no breeding record of this until it turned up at Cley this July with five fledged young. Two pairs of Canada Geese bred on the reserve raising eight young between them. Again this year, no Egyptian Geese bred.

There appeared to be many more ducklings around this year, possibly due to the good conditions on Cricket Marsh, but as always we failed to follow most of them to maturity. We will never know if they were just hidden from view in the many channels in the meadows and reedbeds or were predated. Although this may give an underestimate, our figures can only reflect those we did see. Two species that we were pleased to see breeding this year were Garganey and Teal. One or two pairs of Garganey were present on the reserve in late April and on 13<sup>th</sup> May a female was seen on Cricket Marsh with three small ducklings. Unfortunately they were not seen again so we don't know if any survived. This was our first breeding record since 2005. Three or four pairs of Teal usually remain to summer on the

reserve after all the wintering birds leave, and did again this year. On 7<sup>th</sup> June a female was spotted on Cricket Marsh with at least eight small ducklings. As with the Garganey they weren't seen again. This is the first time breeding for this species has been recorded since we started in 2003.

Little Egrets bred again in North Foreland Wood. There were three nests and at least four young fledged. A group of six juveniles together on the reserve on 21<sup>st</sup> June may have come from these nests but could have been from other colonies in the area. Herons also bred again in North Foreland, raising at least seven young. Bitterns failed again. Although there was one in the area seen occasionally during the spring, it was only heard to boom once. Despite some rumours, Spoonbills did not breed at Cley. Young seen begging on the scrapes in June and July are thought to have come from the Holkham colony.

Marsh Harriers are a species that we need to spend more time watching. It is possible to identify individual adults and see where they are nesting. However this year we didn't find enough time for this but we think there were three pairs nesting on the main reserve and two nests (one male with two females) in the Pope's reedbed. These raised eight and four young to fledging respectively.

Moorhens, Coots and Little Grebes all did poorly this year.

At least seventy pairs of Avocets attempted to breed in our area with nests seen from Eye Field to Sea Pool. The earliest nests were on the scrapes but, as has happened in the past few years, the nests were suddenly all abandoned. We don't know the cause of this but, despite the efforts of the wardens, we must assume it was predation of some sort. In previous years we have identified a main culprit (Hérons in 2008-9 and Stoats last year) but this year we are not sure what it was. As last year, many then decided to 'sit' on Eye Field but these all failed and some moved to the shingle behind North Hide. One pair started to sit there on 10<sup>th</sup> June. The wardens roped the area off and by the 22<sup>nd</sup>, nine birds were sitting, together with an Oystercatcher. They had all gone by 3<sup>rd</sup> July and we don't think they hatched any young. Three pairs did manage to raise nine chicks to fledging and these were all on North Scrape, although two of the broods were probably hatched from nests on the Brackish Pools east of North Hide with the chicks being moved soon after hatching.

Of the shingle nesting birds, the Oystercatchers again all failed despite, wherever possible, the wardens roping off nests as soon as they were found. One pair persisted in sitting on eggs on the shingle bank near the end of Iron Rd, within a foot or two of the path, for at least 18 days, but then gave up. Despite a few pairs displaying in late March, only one pair of Ringed Plovers were seen to nest. These were by Sea Pool where they had many attempts but failed to hatch any young. One pair of Little Ringed Plovers nested on Pat's Pool but after 20 days of incubation, Jackdaws raided the nest.

Lapwings breed early and this year benefitted from the warm weather in April and May. The number of pairs identified was actually less than last year but the seventeen young seen to fledge was the highest we have recorded.

As usual, Redshanks proved a difficult species to follow. The number of broods and small chicks seen appeared higher than in the last few years. We soon lost sight of most of the young so only had evidence of seven fledged chicks which was much lower than last year. We hope there were more.

There were a lot less Black-headed Gulls nesting this year. As usual they tried to nest on the stony island on Arnold's Marsh but the nests all failed. The only chicks seen were on some grassy tussocks in the Brackish Pools just west of the north end of East Bank. These all only survived a few days; we don't know if they were predated or fell off their tussocks and couldn't get back. Although a few Common Terns prospected nest sites on Arnold's none settled.

Swallows again nested around the hides and the shelter and pillbox at Beach car-park. What we presume was a young inexperienced pair was seen around and in (whenever a flap was open) the

central hides from late May. From 2<sup>nd</sup> June a flap was left open in Teal Hide as they looked determined to build there, but no nest was found, they just appeared to be roosting there. In September a poorly constructed nest was found on the floor with cold broken eggs in it. At the same time another nest was found in the rafters nearby with one live chick in it. This one was later seen to fledge.

Only one pair of Cetti's Warbler was thought to have bred this year in the Snipe's Marsh/Walsey Hills area. This species appeared to have suffered from the cold winter.

For the first time we attempted to get reasonable counts of some of the passerines that nest on the reserve. Singing male Sedge and Reed Warblers were counted between the first arrival dates and when they were beginning to breed and had dropped their level of song, and singing male Skylarks were recorded from late March. This gave much higher numbers than we had guessed at in the past. Reed Bunting and Meadow Pipit territories were mapped and Bearded Tit behaviour was watched. All these species were then watched through the season and evidence of breeding obtained. Bearded Tits were another species which seemed to have suffered from the cold winter with only three pairs breeding. Although we had never counted these before we had always thought there were many more. Still they had a good breeding season and by autumn there were flocks of up to forty birds being seen around the reserve though some of these may have come from elsewhere.

The following table shows numbers for the main species that bred with the 2010 figures in brackets

<b>Species</b>	<b><u>Minimum Pairs</u></b>	<b><u>Min. young fledged</u></b>	<b><u>Earliest chicks seen</u></b>
<b>Mute Swan</b>	1 (4)	0 (7)	2 <sup>nd</sup> June
<b>Greylag Goose</b>	44 (45)	? (100)	25 <sup>th</sup> April
<b>Canada Goose</b>	2 (1)	8 (5)	9 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Shelduck</b>	17 (10)	34 (35)	20 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Gadwall</b>	13 (17)	23 (23)	1 <sup>st</sup> June
<b>Teal</b>	1(0)	?	7 <sup>th</sup> June
<b>Mallard</b>	46 (33)	52 (48)	29 <sup>th</sup> April
<b>Garganey</b>	1(0)	?	13 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Shoveler</b>	7 (5)	4 (8)	26 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Pochard</b>	4 (4)	3 (1)	3 <sup>rd</sup> June
<b>Tufted Duck</b>	2 (4)	0 (6)	8 <sup>th</sup> July
<b>Little Grebe</b>	1 (5)	1 (3)	8 <sup>th</sup> June
<b>Little Egret</b>	3 (1)	4 (2)	7 <sup>th</sup> June
<b>Grey Heron</b>	4 (3)	7 (4)	11 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Marsh Harrier</b>	5 (6)	12 (15)	27 <sup>th</sup> June
<b>Moorhen</b>	14 (21)	7 (24)	27 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Coot</b>	8 (13)	8 (5)	10 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Oystercatcher</b>	10 (13)	0 (0)	
<b>Avocet</b>	70 (62)	9 (10)	6 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Ringed Plover</b>	1 (3)	0 (3)	
<b>Lapwing</b>	30 (40)	17 (7)	5 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Redshank</b>	20 (17)	7 (13)	13 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	31(57)	0 (0)	27 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Common Tern</b>	1 (0)	0 (0)	

In addition the following gives the passerine figures:

Species	Minimum Pairs	Species	Minimum Pairs
Skylark	12	Reed Warbler	48
Swallow	7	Bearded Tit	3
Meadow Pipit	16	Reed Bunting	12
Sedge Warbler	69		

This is only a brief summary of this year's breeding birds, if you would like to see the full report with details for each species and comparisons with previous years please contact us and we will send you a copy. It was not a scientific survey but just based on observations made during regular birding trips using the public footpaths and hides.

Once more we would like to thank the wardens, Bernard Bishop and Carl Brooker, and all local birders who told us of their sightings of nests and young birds around the reserve thus helping to complete the picture. As mentioned above, special thanks this year go to Sue & Peter Morrison for all their hours put into watching the passerines which have added another level of detail to the report. And finally, many thanks to Mike Harcup who took over while we were all away during the beginning of the season in April & May, without whom we would have had a lot of gaps in our records.

We aim to repeat this exercise again next year but we do need help from both those who got involved this year and anyone else who feels they can help. From this year's experience, we have seen that by concentrating on a few species (or even just one) it is possible to get much better results. So if you've found this article interesting and feel that you could help, please do contact us, we would love to hear from you. You don't need to be an expert, we aren't, you just have to be able to recognise the species you are monitoring. We have learnt a lot as we've gone along and you could too.

Pat & David Wileman  
 Kath & Mick Claydon  
 e-mail: [davidandpat@onetel.com](mailto:davidandpat@onetel.com)

### **Cley bird Club- Winter meetings 2011-12**

Wed. Nov.16<sup>th</sup> 2011-The work of the Hawk and Owl Trust                      Nigel Middleton

Wed Dec14th 2011-Birding in Namibia, Botswana and Zambia                      Moss Taylor

Wed Jan 18<sup>th</sup> 2012-A thousand years of birding in N W Norfolk                      Fred Cooke

Wed Feb 15<sup>th</sup> 2012-Conservation in the Glaven Valley-

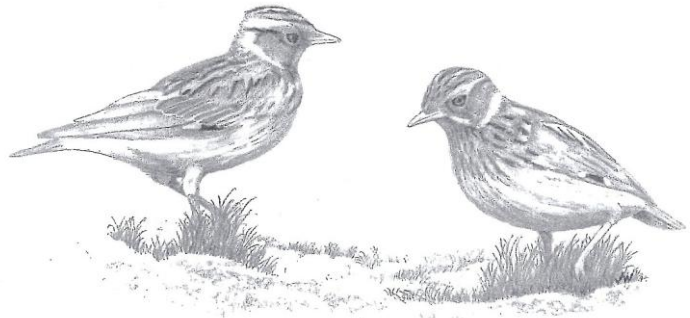
A farmer viewpoint    Ross Haddow

All meeting to be held in the White Horse at Blakeney at 8pm. Supper at 7pm. £8.50

Booking to Tony Aberdein 01263 741044 preferably with 48 hours notice.

## The breeding birds of Kelling Heath 2011

A reasonably successful breeding season this year bearing in mind the prolonged period of very dry spring weather which must have adversely affected plants and therefore the number of insects available as bird food. Parent birds will have been weakened by struggling to find enough food for themselves: and their young. The young will have suffered from erratic growth rates and possibly death from starvation.



Also let's not forget. the severity of the cold winter which must have affected the survival rates of birds of breeding age.

I am pleased to report that 2 pairs of Woodlarks, 2 pairs of Dartford Warblers and 1 pair of Stonechats' bred successfully this year. Not so pleased, though, that no more than 3 adult Turtle Doves were seen or heard during any 1 of my visits during spring and early summer. On 9th July I saw a pair of adults with a juvenile - my only evidence that breeding may have occurred on the heath.

On 1 evening visit for Nightjars in late June I watched a female and 2 males in flight whilst 3 other males were churring from other parts of the heath. This was my best total from 15 evening visits. As birds were seen, or churring was heard, from the same areas on each visit I assume there were up to 7 breeding territories involved. Maybe 7 pairs bred, hopefully with success, but of course I cannot be certain.

As with last year Linnets were the most numerous breeding birds with at least 24 nesting pairs and subsequently large numbers of successfully fledged young were seen. At least half a dozen pairs of Yellowhammers and Common Whitethroats were seen with juveniles. I saw



no Lesser Whitethroats this year and no Tree Pipits although 2 were seen by a fellow birder on 9th May.

Several species which I am certain did not do so well this year, compared to last year, were Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Greenfinch and Chaffinch. Maybe no more than 3 or 4 pairs of each from

my evidence. Although I heard 3 singing Garden Warblers, apparently holding territories, I have no proof that they bred. What I was able to prove, however, on 1st September was that a pair of Bullfinches had produced 3 juveniles.

Whilst I must confess I don't make a conscious effort to count them I am certain the numbers of Tit species, Goldcrests, Wrens and Dunnocks were somewhat reduced this year.

John Wagstaff

## **EFFECTS of HUMAN DISTURBANCE on BREEDING BIRDS**

It is fair comment to say that most bird species are intolerant of human disturbance in the early stages of the breeding cycle and that Dartford Warblers are particularly susceptible. A study by Murison *et al* 2007, carried out on Dartford Warblers breeding on lowland heath in Dorset concluded that as few as an average of 13 people passing through a territory in an hour was sufficient to cause birds to either abandon a breeding attempt or significantly delay it. The significance of delaying an attempt is that the eggs may hatch after the optimum period of food availability for the nestlings or leave no time for a further brood to be successful. While I have yet to prove or disprove the conclusion of Murison *et al*, it has long been my practice not to visit a Dartford Warbler nest until the clutch is complete and incubation under way.

Whatever the true effects of human disturbance may be, along with John Wagstaff who monitors the breeding birds with me, I was concerned to learn in early April 2011 that the locations of 2 Dartford Warbler nests on Kelling Heath were being widely circulated including in one case, a detailed sketch map. Our concern was justified as increasing numbers of people began to spend long periods wandering about the nest areas perhaps without realising that the bird's reaction to their close presence would be to become even more elusive and disappear for long periods. Further concern was raised by the yet to be explained disappearance of the complete clutch from one of the nests.

Kelling Heath has now become a victim of its own success, habitat management over the years has made the Heath attractive to a number of birds of conservation concern which in turn, attracts those seeking the pleasure of good views of highly desirable birds. A further attraction for visitors is that access to the Heath is not only free but virtually without restriction. The Trustees have agreed for seasonal notices to be placed requesting all users of the Heath to keep to the paths during the breeding season and most of the many visiting dog walkers, joggers, cyclists, horse riders, birders and other users are happy to oblige. However, a surprising number are equally happy to debate what is and what is not the path. Admittedly, the present habitat management practice of clearing heather and gorse right up to a path can confuse and even invite visitors to stray. While John and I both believe the Heath and its attractions are for all to enjoy, a simple change in the habitat management practice, by stopping the heather and gorse clearance well short of the paths, would be a most effective deterrent and hopefully reduce the level of disturbance evident in 2011.

Noel Elms.

September 2011.

# Blakeney Point Bird Report, 2011

## Edward Stubbings, National Trust Coastal Warden

### Breeding birds

- Table

Species	Common name	No. of breeding pairs	No. of young fledged	Comments
<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Common Shelduck	32-44		Not fully surveyed but thought to be usual numbers
<i>Anas strepera</i>	Gadwall	2		No nests or young found
<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Shoveler	3		No nests or young found
<i>Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard			
<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Red-legged Partridge			
<i>Perdix perdix</i>	Grey Partridge	3+		45+ birds seen in September
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Common Pheasant			
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher	110		Fledging success thought to be good
<i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>	Avocet	7		All nests failed
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover	17		Fledging success thought to be moderate
<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Lapwing	?		
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redshank	14+		Several nests found but only a few young seen
<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	1807+		Fledging success thought to be good
<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Mediterranean Gull	c.10	c.27	6+ nests found during Sandwich Tern nest count
<i>Larus canus</i>	Common Gull			



<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Little Tern	160	140	
<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Sandwich Tern	3562	1700-2000	Nest count conducted on the 29 <sup>th</sup> of May
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	92+	c.70	
<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Arctic Tern	7	5	
<i>Columba oenas</i>	Stock Dove	1		
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood pigeon	1+		2 nests failed
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark	32		Some young seen
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	7		
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow pipit	102		2+ broods many young seen
<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	Pied Wagtail	?		
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	15		Some broods seen
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock (Hedge Sparrow)	6+		
<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Sedge Warbler	?		2 territories (singing males for over 1 week)
<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Grasshopper Warbler	?		1-2 territories (singing males for over 1 week)
<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet	c.20?		Not fully surveyed but thought to have been a fairly good breeding season
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting	16+		Some young seen and heard

## Summary

Blakeney Point has long been recognised for its rare habitats and wildlife and is protected under several national and international designations, it is an internationally important breeding area for a number of seabirds; home to 30% of the UK's Sandwich Terns and 8% of the UK's Little Terns. This summer, 3,562 pairs of Sandwich Tern bred on the reserve and fledged up to 2000 young, while 160 pairs of Little Tern produced around 140 young, making the points colonies for both these species the largest in the UK. This should make us proud to live in such a beautiful and relatively undisturbed area. To make the story even more encouraging, it could be said that 2011 was a 'bumper breeding season', not only for the two species mentioned above but for the majority of nesting birds on Blakeney Point. Common and Arctic Terns also produced good numbers of young. The reasons for the high breeding success of the terns was thought to be down to extremely large numbers of clupeids and sandeels in the area, limited disturbance from people and possibly the warm dry spring giving

the birds a good start. Also, the beaches were ideal for breeding terns at the start of the season and the colonies did not suffer from the usual tidal inundations during the incubation period.

The breeding waders, including Oystercatcher, Redshank and Ringed Plover all held their own or did exceptionally well. Redshank were up from 10-13 pairs last year to 14+ pairs this year and an unprecedented number of nests were found in the fenced off dunes on far point. This is no time to be complacent however; as our seabirds still need all the help they can get in order to overcome the potential problems posed by increasing human activities and climate change. Ringed Plovers, although up by two pairs on 2010, are also a major cause for concern and have and will be receiving some concentrated and much needed conservation work.

Birds that haven't fared so well are the Lapwings, Avocets and Ringed Plovers that attempt to breed on the site of the old Blakeney chapel, north of the new Glaven. This may be due to the habitat change and foxes finding the new source of food. This is often the case for birds that colonise, and do very well on, newly created habitat (either naturally or unnaturally) then find there breeding success dropping off as the habitat changes and predators move in.

Most passerines did well and there were even Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers holding territory for prolonged periods during the spring and summer, however, breeding was not proven for either species.

- **Systematic list**

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A 'lek' count in May revealed 64-88 birds in 3-4 different areas. Several crèches of goslings were seen

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

There were three breeding pairs calling in spring and there were some large coveys seen from late summer onwards. There were as many as 47 birds present on the reserve during the autumn.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Good numbers nested, although 8 pairs down on the previous year (110 and 118 respectively). Common gull predation was at a minimal level and many young fledged. A family that bred between the Lifeboat House and the landing ridge raised at least 3 young to fledging. A chick was thought to have been stunned by lightning during a thunderstorm on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June and died the next day.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta*

Seven pairs attempted to nest on the Chapel site but all nests failed before hatching.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

The number of breeding pairs was up by two pairs on 2010 but many nests failed at the egg stage and a disappointing number of young were seen.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

There may have been a pair or two on the chapel site but these were not confirmed. There is an interaction between this site and Blakeney and Cley fresh marshes involving birds that either move nest sites after being predated or bring recently fledged chicks that hatched elsewhere.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

There were 6 nests on far point at one point during the summer and some were found at The Long Hills and Yankee ridge. Several of these were known to hatch but, as Redshanks like to take their newly born young straight into inaccessible saltmarsh creeks, eventual breeding success is hard to judge.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

The colony was first occupied on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, a fairly typical date. Roughly 1800 nested and fledging success was good. There are often a few other much smaller colonies on higher areas of marsh along the point but this year only 7 nests were situated away from the main colony.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

As with Black-headed Gull, counting nests amongst the suaeda bushes is more or less impossible and any estimate of breeding pairs is bound to be out by a couple of pairs either way. It was estimated that 10+ pairs bred in the main colony and 6+ nests were found during the Sandwich Tern nest count on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May. A maximum of 27 fledglings were counted at the end July, so breeding success was thought to be good.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

The first birds were seen on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, but numbers built very slowly. The first displaying birds were seen in the first week of May and the first eggs were laid around the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. The late start that was experienced this year seems to be characteristic of the species so we shouldn't have been too surprised when things did start to pick up and larger numbers of birds arrived and started breeding. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June over 100 incubating birds were counted in one colony alone and it became clear that things were going to be much better than the previous year, when only 81 pairs bred on the whole reserve and only 15 young were raised. The odd rogue pair started laying eggs in outlying areas and at one point there were eight areas fenced off for little terns. Most of the smaller colonies were unsuccessful but a few pairs were successful indicating that predation levels were low. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 120 incubating adults were counted in the main 'beach colony' and there were three or four broods of chicks. The Watch House colonies were not targeted significantly by kestrels and managed to fledge a good number of chicks.

Three visits were made by boat during the breeding season, one on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May to check for birds and fence the nesting area, one on the 21<sup>st</sup>, when 10 pairs were counted and one in late June. The late June visit saw the colony abandoned and dog prints inside the fenced area.

Stiffkey Meals: 10 pairs

Far point: 15+ pairs

Beach colony: 120 pairs

Watch House area: 15 pairs

Total: 160+ pairs

Breeding success: 0.875 per pair (0.93 recurring for Blakeney Point)

An adult little tern was found dead on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July which had been colour ringed as a nestling on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2003 at Winterton.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

The first birds arrived back to the breeding grounds on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, slightly earlier than previous years. Sandwich Terns can actually be seen in most months of the year off shore including the winter months. Mating was observed in mid April and the first eggs were laid by the end of the month. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May a nest count was conducted. There were three distinct patches of bare ground/short vegetation available for Sandwich Terns to breed on and these were counted separately. The total number of nests was 3562 and there were many nests with two eggs and some even with three. There were also quite a few just hatched chicks still in nest scrapes during the nest count. Chicks started fledging in late June and by July counting them was becoming problematic as some were already moving away from the colony. Therefore, our best count was 1800 but it is thought that at least 2000 fledged as food supply was good and very few dead chicks were found in the colony once the birds had left.

#### Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

The first birds were seen on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, a rather late date (most early arriving birds are seen in the broads before they hit the coast). In line with the other terns, Common Terns had a much better breeding season than previous years. Good supplies of clupeids were delivered to chicks in June and there were no Common Gulls breeding in the beach colony this year. 92+ pairs produced c.70 young.

#### Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

The first birds were seen on the reserve on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, the last tern sp t arrive. No young had been raised on The Point since 2008, so the five produced this year was a welcome boost to The Points small breeding population. Arctic terns on the point specialise in foraging around saltmarsh creeks, catching crabs to feed their young.

#### Stock Dove *Columba oenus*

A male was heard singing in the roof of the Lifeboat House (right next to my head as I lay in bed) very early in the morning throughout the season but no young were seen.

#### Wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*

A pair laid two clutches of eggs in the main pine in the plantation but both failed. There was probably the odd pair in random places elsewhere on The Point that went undetected.

#### Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

The Points Skylark population is unfortunately still flagging. Breeding bird surveys were conducted in late April and early May but very few birds were detected on the shingle ridge. This may have been a real decline in birds breeding in this area or birds may just have been missed. Some young were seen but not enough.

#### Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seven pairs bred, mostly around the Lifeboat House, with one pair rearing two broods in the old Tern Hide. A pair started nest building in the 'loo with a view' at the Watch House but despite putting a sign on the door, they were shut out during the building stage and did not return.

#### Meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis*

102 pairs, or birds displaying breeding behaviour, were detected during the breeding bird surveys in late April and early May. Breeding success was thought to be good.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

A pair was seen around the LBH on a few occasions but surprisingly did not nest this year, so no return of the female White Wagtail that has bred with a male Pied Wagtail for the previous two summers. So, unless nests were missed, there were no nesting Pied wagtails on The Point in 2011.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

The Points population stays level at 15 pairs. This is incredible considering the severity of the weather in December 2010.

Dunnock (Hedge Sparrow) *Prunella modularis*

The number of breeding Hedge Sparrows dropped this year from 10 to 6+.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

There were singing males at the wrecked blue boat in the Marrams and near the Watch House but breeding was not proven. This is at least the second year when singing males have spent prolonged periods singing along the shingle ridge.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

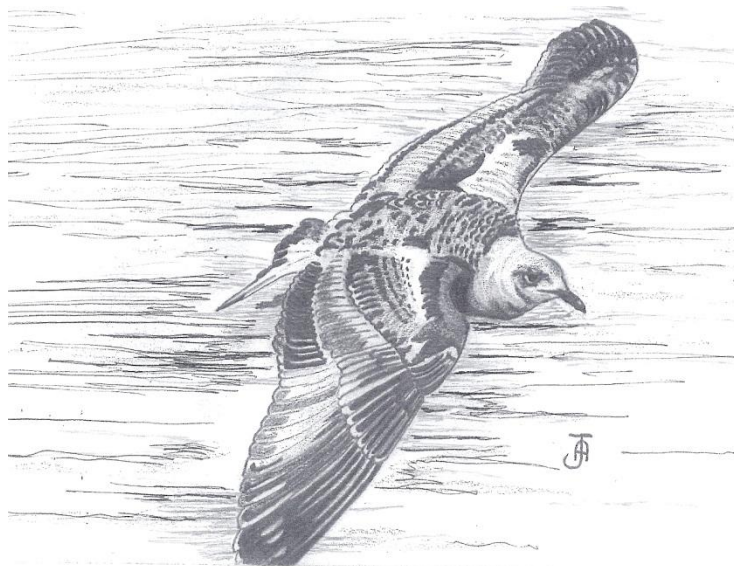
There were singing males in three areas during spring and one stayed at The Hoods for over two weeks. As with the above species, breeding was not proven but it seems a likely coloniser.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Linnets were not counted on this years breeding bird surveys due to their breeding in small discreet colonies and moving around in flocks during the breeding season. Having said this, many nests and young were seen. One nest with eggs in a Lupin was abandoned when an infestation of aphids hit the bush. It is thought that there were over 20 pairs that bred on the point but this is just a rough estimate.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

16+ pairs bred on the point in 2011 and quite a few young were consequently seen. The young have a distinctive high pitched call which is like a weak imitation of the call of their parents and this was heard in several places. The strongholds remain the suaeda along the shingle ridge and both edges of Yankee Ridge.



## Looking after Little Terns A Multiple-Choice Activity

*In the summer of 2011 the National Trust, facilitated through Eddie Stubbings, the Coastal Warden of Blakeney Point, decided to use a volunteer to warden the Watch House Little Tern colony.*

So, here's the colony; what to do?

Heck, where should I position myself?

I'll wander around selecting the most favourable vantage point. How about here, at the mid-point of the colony. Looks good. Wait a minute though; I can see somebody approaching from the west and I'm too far away. I hope they are not going to limbo underneath the fence. No, they are moving around following the blue twine line.

I think I'll stand at the western end, close to the action. My goodness I'm a long way from the eastern approach and I can see a lot more people approaching from there. They look a bit shifty to me; probably spent the night planning a raid and consulting Little Tern egg recipes. No, they too are following the boundary line.

Ok, so let's move stealthily to the eastern edge and monitor the action. Wait though, who is that emerging from the mid-point of the colony and what's that in his hand; a Little Tern nest and egg detector, I suspect. No worries it's one of the wardens carrying a telescope with tripod. I am now of the opinion that I might be watching the terns but they are doubtless watching me.

So, should I talk to anyone. No, the visitors have surely come here to experience calm; a place away from the pace. Yes, but if I don't talk to them they will feel ignored, neglected and cast adrift from the mainstream.

Anyway, I don't remember taking a vow of silence.

I decide to talk.

All goes well.

In the distance I can see a dog walker. Should I:

- a. Pretend to clean my binoculars and telescope thereby ignoring the dog walker.
- b. Have lunch under cover of the suaeda.
- c. Boldly approach the dog walker and explain the reasons why dogs are not allowed in the vicinity of the colony.

As I have no lunch or telescope then I am impelled towards option C.

All goes well.

So, first day over and tomorrow.....

*2011 was a very successful year for both Sandwich and Little Terns. 160 pairs of Little Terns nested on Blakeney NNR, 150 of which were on the point. A small colony of 10 pairs at Stiffkey Meals failed to raise young. 140 young fledged from the 4 loose colonies situated on Blakeney Point.*

If you would like to help then:

Contact Eddie Stubbings on 07786690062 or even me on 07767090493.

*Malcolm Davies*

Great piece of local Cley bird news sent to me by Martin Woodcock

Combing through my archives recently, I came across an account of a big fall of migrants at Cley on 1951. This was sent to me on two typewritten pages by Archie Daukes soon after I had first met him as I missed this event by only a few weeks.

I'm sure Archie would be very pleased if this could see the light of day 60 years on!!

In the course of the first three days of October 1951 a very large movement of birds was observed at Cley.

The last few days of September consisted mostly of fair weather with Easterly winds, due to the existence of an anticyclone over Norway.

During the night of September 30th/October 1st a steady Easterly wind prevailed, accompanied however by considerable low cloud, which conditions continued during the day of October 1st but, with the exception of a few Chaffinches and Redstarts, nothing of particular interest occurred during the morning of October 1st. About 1 p.m. however, the ruins of the Camp at the end of the Beach Road at Cley and the bushes and buildings between the Road and the Observatory were suddenly swarming with Robins; it was estimated that there were at least 200 in the Camp buildings alone, in addition to vastly larger numbers in the grass, the bushes and buildings in the neighbourhood of the Observatory. By evening 102 Robins had been ringed by the Warden and his Assistants.

In the course of the afternoon many Robins were observed coming in from the sea in a very exhausted condition and could have been picked up by hand; one bird, in particular, was seen to come in very low over the water and, being unable to gain elevation, to collide with a low ridge of shingle just above the tide mark.

Between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. on the same day the bushes suddenly became alive with Goldcrests and Song Thrushes, although these were not actually seen to come in from the sea.

On October 2nd, after a night of continued medium to strong Easterly winds and cloud, I went along the Beach towards Blakeney Point. In the bushes from the Hood to the Long Hills were masses of birds consisting of very large numbers of Robins, Song Thrushes, Goldcrests (among which one Firecrest was observed), a fair number of Redwings, Fieldfares, Bramblings, Chaffinches, Redstarts, Willow Wrens and/or Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps (male and

(contd).

female), one Ring Ousel (cock), some Snowbuntings, two Lapland Buntings (identified by call only) and five Bluethroats, one of which was in practically full Spring plumage with blue breast and red spot.

The following day, October 3rd, was fine and cloudless, with a steady East wind, after a night of similar conditions. The Hood, the Long Hills and the Britannia Point produced a great many Robins and Goldcrests (but less than on the previous day) and very much larger numbers than previously of Song Thrushes, Redwings, Fieldfares, with a fair number of Blackbirds, twenty to thirty Ring Ousels, some Bramblings, Chaffinches, Blackcaps, Redstarts, a few Willow Wrens and/or Chiffchaffs, one pied Flycatcher, one spotted Flycatcher, one Merlin, and two Bluethroats (immature). The small plantation on the Point, near the Laboratory, was beaten and produced (simultaneously) twenty to twenty-five Goldcrests, eight Ring Ousels, a few Willow Wrens and/or Chiffchaffs and one Short-eared Owl.

By the following day, October 4th, with similar weather conditions, most of the birds appeared to have passed on.

There are of course on record many cases of migration on as large or larger a scale and productive of more and much greater rarities, but two points of interest emerge in the present instance, i.e.-

(1) that during the spell of Easterly winds, it was only when these winds were accompanied by low cloud and mist that very large numbers of many species of birds were observed.

(2) that Robins were seen actually coming in from the sea during the middle of the day, while, judging from the time at which they appeared, everything pointed to the Song Thrushes and Goldcrests having done so as well, although this was not actually observed.

A. H. DAUKES.



## BLAKENEY FRESHMARSH –THE FUTURE

The Environment Agency (EA) published their draft Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) in July 2000, which contained a proposal to create an intertidal habitat on Blakeney Freshmarsh, as part of the local flood defence managed re-alignment. These works were scheduled to be undertaken in Epoch 2 of the S.M.P. (2026-2055). It was also assumed that the intertidal flow, via Blakeney Freshmarsh, would help to reduce the silting in the navigation channels leading to Blakeney Harbour.

Public consultation on the S.M.P. produced a considerable amount of local support for these proposals, particularly from Blakeney Parish Council. Subsequently the proposal to allow intertidal flow via Blakeney Freshmarsh was confirmed in the S.M.P. for Epoch 2 (2026-2055) and provision was made for a study into the potential effects of the proposed works to be undertaken prior to that date. C.B.C. responded to the public consultation of the draft S.M.P. and requested that if it was eventually necessary to allow intertidal flow into Blakeney Freshmarsh, due to predicted sea level rises, the transition from freshmarsh to saltmarsh should be gradual, in order to allow adaptation and transmigration of the flora and fauna. It was also suggested that compensatory habitat should be provided for in the Glaven Valley.

Recent concerns of CBC members, over the potential future loss of the Blakeney Freshmarsh, culminated in the production of a case for the retention of the freshmarsh for as long as possible, subject to eventual change to saltmarsh by future sea level rise. This proposal was sent to the EA, the National Trust, (major land owner) and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, requesting their comments.

The response from the EA. stated that the Blakeney Bank, which protects the freshmarsh from the tidal flow, has been assessed to have a useful life, as a tidal defence, for 60 years. It also confirmed that the action plan for the S.M.P. includes studies to investigate the full effects of the proposed works and to explore compensatory locations for the loss of freshmarsh habitat.

Other individuals and local groups have expressed their concerns regarding the negative effects of the proposed works. An assurance was also given that the EA. will carry out a full consultation with interested local parties in order to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed works. The studies to assess the full effects of the proposed work have yet to be carried out and currently no funding is available for this work.

With respect to the National Trust and the NWT, the matter has been discussed with them and several reminders have been made in order to obtain a response. Despite this no response has been obtained at all, which is most disappointing. Nevertheless it is believed that both trusts would wish to see the freshmarsh remain in its current state until predicted sea level rises render the situation untenable.

Tony Aberdeen

A New Garden Bird for Rosemary

A Mediterranean Gull was a "first" for my garden in Weybourne this June. It was 6:30am weather fine, when all of a sudden, the gull alighted on my lawn. In its bill was a partly eaten Starling. The bird was within 4 metres of me as it scoffed the remainder of its meal, feather and all. Then it paused briefly before flying away, having been on my lawn for about three minutes. Resplendent in its summer plumage, it made my day.

Rosemary Clarke

Bitterns boomed at RSPB Titchwell Marsh reserve twice as loudly this year where the number of breeding pairs doubled from one to two – a reward for the reserve team’s hard work in improving Titchwell freshwater reed beds where areas were cleared to allow more water movement. The bittern’s main food, rudd, is found in such areas, which are being extended eastwards to create even more suitable habitat. Some lucky birders actually saw 2 young bitterns swimming. Earlier in the year The Royal Institute of British Architects announced that it was awarding one of it’s top awards to Titchwell’s new Parrinder hide. And at NWT Hickling Broad reserve, where a £500,000 restoration project saw the creation of a new network of dykes and open water on the once-dry Hundred Acre reed bed, there were 3 booming males and, in the summer, birds flying back to nests were seen. A £250,000 grant is being used to raise the water level over a further 100 acre section of the reserve and a bank will be built around the entire site to keep in water channelled from the broad.

Norman Sills has just turned 65 and retired, after 40 years with the RSPB. He created the RSPB’s Titchwell nature reserve from 1973, where he was the first warden, and spent 24 years there before taking on the role of site manager, and laying the first sod at RSPB Lakenheath on October 31 1995. Some 300,000 reeds were planted and 24 sluices developed on waterways. There are now more than 60 hectares of reeds and 25 hectares of water and, of course, a visitor centre. Lakenheath already has bittern, marsh harrier, common crane and kingfisher amongst it’s many residents. We wish Norman a long and happy retirement – he has certainly earned it.

Otters are, surprisingly for such a reclusive animal, encroaching into cities. There have been reports of sightings in smaller cities but conservationists have captured footage of a new breed of ‘urban otter, which is shunning the countryside in favour of city centres. Hidden cameras captured an urban otter making its home by a floating dock in the heart of Bristol’s city centre, only yards from a shopping mall. The first evidence came from droppings found in the area. And in August it was reported that otters had built holts on the rivers Medway and Eden in Kent, which means that otters, once threatened with extinction, are now found in every county in England. Having never been an angler I am delighted!

The National Trust say that butterfly spotting has become almost as popular as bird watching and held a “Love Butterflies” weekend in the summer. Last year Patrick Barkham, an enthusiast, ticked all of Britain’s 59 butterflies in one year – he had help of course and a good information service. It was not easy and, I guess, was fairly expensive

A team of experts, headed by staff at the WWT Slimbridge and Birds Russia, embarked on an emergency scheme to save the spoon-billed sandpiper, one of the world’s rarest birds, from extinction, -its numbers had fallen to just 120-200 pairs by 2009. The team headed to the Russian Far East and located and collected clutches of eggs and later 17 chicks hatched successfully. After quarantine in Moscow the chicks will be brought to WWT HQ at Slimbridge, where they will be reared to establish a captive population. The migratory bird’s numbers are thought to be declining by some 25% annually due mainly to hunting in wintering grounds in Burma and damage to habitat along the migratory route along the Korean, Chinese and Japanese coasts. Spoon-billed sandpipers have not previously been reared in captivity and, if successful, the captive population will be the source for reintroduction into the wild, once threats have been tackled, and provide a safety net in case of extinction in the wild.

The Galapagos regional government plans to build 1,000 homes in Puerto Ayora, which will double the size of the island's largest town. This is in response to the huge increase in the islands' resident population which, since 1959, has grown from 2,000 to 30,000, and to the increase of tourism. The Galapagos Conservation Trust fears that the giant tortoise would suffer if roads or houses were built in its annual migration route from the mountains down to breed and has other concerns. Now the Prince of Wales' Foundation for the Built Environment is opening an office in the Galapagos islands and is teaming up with the regional government and conservation bodies and will teach local people how to build sustainable housing, with more efficient ventilation and rain-water collection, using local building materials and without increasing the threat to the islands' endangered species. The partnership has first to help the local community decide how Puerto Ayora, in particular, could develop in a sustainable way and, long term, to find how to manage further growth on the inhabited islands as a whole.

Stone Curlews had a good year at RSPB Weeting Heath nature reserve this year. The first chick hatched in early May and fledged successfully whilst the eggs of the second pair hatched 2 chicks, one of which disappeared after fledging. A third pair arrived in early June and also laid eggs.

Police raided the Skibob Estate in Sutherland after the discovery of 3 dead golden eagles and found enough poison to kill all the country's golden eagles, red kites and other raptors several times over. Dean Barr, a shooting manager, was arrested, found guilty and fined £3,300 by Inverness Sheriffs Court. No doubt his employers will pay the fine. The, news which will put the wind up the kilts of owners of Scottish shooting estates. part of Scotland's Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, passed earlier this year, espouses the idea of vicarious liability, that is to say the owner of an estate can now be prosecuted if his gamekeeper or shoots manager kills birds of prey. But will magistrates enforce this? Let's hope so and that England and Wales follow suit.

A young Sowerby's beaked whale beached at Thornham on the North Norfolk coast mid-August, only the third recorded in the county. Sadly when NWT staff found her she was quite helpless and badly injured and an RSPCA vet put the creature out of it's suffering. Sowerby's live in deep water in the Atlantic and feed on squid which supply all their food and water. And in September a rare 33ft Sel whale was washed up on marshland on the north bank of the Humber during the highest tides of the year She was found 875 yards from the shore when the water retreated and was still alive but injured and she died some hours later. Sel whales, a protected species, are usually seen only on the west coast and only 11 have been stranded in the past 100 years.

The migratory flight of bar-headed geese from Siberia to winter in the Indian sub-continent has been tracked as never before using GPS satellite tags. New research, by Bangor University, revealed that bar-headed geese climb to altitudes of 6,000 metres in just 8 hours as they pass over the world's highest mountain range – in the process taking no rest. They ascend so fast that the forces acting on the birds might be strong enough to kill a human being. The satellite tags also showed that rather than flying with a strong tail-wind at their backs the geese wait for calm conditions to make the journey under their own steam – most likely to avoid weather which might prove dangerous, with calmer winds at night offering an extra degree of safety and helping to avoid storms.

A healthy population of snow leopards, one of the world's rarest big cats, has been found thriving in a remote corner of Afghanistan. The Wildlife Conservation Society used cameras triggered by the animals' appearance, day and night, in the Wakhan Corridor, a sliver of mountain range in the north-east that is largely cut off from the rest of the country.

Rare white-faced darter dragonflies are found in only ten sites in England and were reintroduced to pools in Cumbria Wildlife Trust's Foulshaw Moss reserve on 2010 and 2011, larvae having been collected from a donor site. This year, for the first time in years, larvae have hatched at the reserve following 13 years of work restoring the moss habitat which suits the darter. The currently small population will be increased with more batches of larvae over the next few years and it is hoped the colony being established by the British Dragonfly Society and Cumbria Wildlife Trust, funded by Natural England, will become self sustaining.

A pair of pintails raised 3 chicks at RSPB Titchwell Marsh reserve – the first time in a Norfolk nature reserve. There are fewer than 30 breeding pairs of pintails across the UK..

Sixteen more white-tailed eagle chicks from Norway arrived in June and are the latest addition to the East Scotland re-introduction programme The young birds took to the sky in August having been released from a secret location in Fife. Eighty sea eagles have been released since 2007. However the Provost of Perth Cathedral, who breeds Toulouse geese at his cottage at Abernethy, by the River Tay, returned to his home mid-August to find one of his geese dead on the ground and the rest of the flock traumatised, while the sea eagle responsible looked on. He went indoors to phone the RSPB but heard “a terrible noise” and went back out to find the sea eagle attacking his prize gander. The bird of prey then turned on him, leaving him with a 4-inch gash. The Provost called for a halt to the Programme to reintroduce the sea eagle. Not surprisingly an RSPB spokesperson said the incident was ‘regrettable’ and “in our experience sea eagles only attack humans if they feel cornered or threatened”. That’s alright then! Had it been a child threatening the bird it might have been more than ‘regrettable’. The RSPB insisted that the scheme would continue, at any cost?

Scientists of the International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO) have suggested that a deadly trio of factors-climate change, pollution and over fishing-are acting together to cause deterioration, far more rapidly than expected, and predict that marine life could be on the brink of mass extinction. The report warned that entire ecosystems, such as coral reefs, could be lost and recommended to government delegated at UN HQ in New York, that there should be a reduction of over fishing; that unsustainable fisheries should be closed ;that protected areas be created in the seas and that there should be a major reduction of pollutants including plastic bags, agricultural fertilisers and human waste. 63% of the assessed fish stocks world-wide were over exploited or depleted and their recovery is vital. Not a happy picture!

From The Times, August 20 ‘The Cool Weekend Guide’ pull-out – “Burnham Market, Norfolk. Why go? This hub of well-heeled Norfolk boasts art galleries, boutiques and delis. The nearby RSPB Titchwell reserve is an oasis of peace and is home to 600 species of birds. Think of all the petrol Steve, Lee and other leading twitchers have wasted!

In China a team of 70 trackers collected panda poo hoping to discover how many of the animals are still living in the wild, this is part of the 4<sup>th</sup> decadal census of panda numbers. The last count recorded 1596 wild pandas.

The last reported sighting of an osprey in the Dyfi Valley in Wales was some 400 years ago – until a male, Monty, appeared in the valley 2 years ago and this year attracted a mate, Nora. After a hasty 16 day courtship she laid her eggs in a nest on top of a 50ft telegraph pole. A trio of youngsters, Einon, Leri and Dulas, fledged and are probably on course to winter in Africa. Tiny solar powered transmitters have been fitted to each of them to track progress (no self-respecting migrant leaves this country without a transmitter nowadays!) The Dyfi Osprey Project are hopeful that the birds will return safely next year – although only one in three tends to do so. There is another breeding

pair in Glaslyn, Gwynned, N. Wales and it is suspected that Monty was born there, returning to Wales to breed

Spoonbills returned to Holkham National Nature reserve this year. In 2010 they established the first breeding colony in the UK for 300 years and Natural England staff, who manage the reserve, and who maintained ideal habitat for the birds, eagerly awaited their return. Eight breeding pairs duly arrived, successfully fledging 14 young and colour rings on 6 different birds allowed staff to establish that they had come from European sites and that they were new to Holkham this year. There is a group of some 40 adult and immature spoonbills spending the summer on the North Norfolk coast and moving between feeding stations on other reserves and Michael Rooney, Senior Reserve Manager at Holkham is hopeful that some of them will join and extend Holkham's breeding colony.

Some 6,000 young Manx shearwaters set off, in early September, from Skomer and Skokholm islands off the Pembrokeshire coast, to fly the 6,000 miles to Argentina. They flew into 80 mph winds and, instead of heading out to sea, were blown up to 20 miles inland. Exhausted many crash-landed on beaches and cliffs and the RSPCA did their best to rescue them – the biggest rescue mission the charity has had since the 1996 disaster when the oil tanker, Sea Empress, ran aground of Milford Haven. Some birds were so weak that they had to be put down but the RSPCA hoped to save 70%. The two islands are home to c175,000 Manx shearwaters.

In need of a Satnav? A young male Antarctic Emperor penguin' which took to the water in the late spring to search for squid and krill, lost its way and finished up stranded on Peka Peka beach on New Zealand's North Island. It is 44 years since a wild Emperor penguin was last sighted in New Zealand and only the second ever. Emperors typically spend their entire lives in Antarctica. The penguin was pumped free of beach sand and twigs it had eaten, apparently mistaking it for snow, and recovered on a diet of fish. Returned to good health it left for home mid-summer, and was 4 days at sea in an insulated crate on the scientific research vessel Tangara before being released into the Southern Ocean about 1240 miles from Antarctica where he would find other penguins Unfortunately the tag fitted to it has gone quiet which may mean that it has been eaten!

Booming bitterns in the UK this year numbered 104 – the best figure since records began. There were 33 in Suffolk and 23 in Norfolk. Minsmere hosted 11 boomers and 6 nests; RSPB Strumpshaw Fen had 2 successful nests and RSPB Lakenheath had 7 nests – a record for the site.

Four goshawks and a buzzard were found' deliberately poisoned', say the RSPB, in woodland to the west of Exeter, Devon in September. There are only 20 breeding pairs of goshawks in the county.

BTO researchers have attached tiny satellite trackers to 5 cuckoos to try and discover why their numbers are declining so rapidly. The UK population has declined, it is thought, by some 65% over the past 25 years and with fewer migrating to this country in the summer the BTO hope tracking the 5 male birds, particularly outside Britain, will help the researchers to understand why so few make it back. They want to know where they go once they leave the UK; where they stop off en route to refuel and where they winter and the trackers will work for ten hours daily, going into "sleep mode" while a solar panel recharges the battery which should last for at least a year. They did not have to wait long for the first information. Four birds started migrating in June, the first in the first week, a week earlier than expected, giving information on the length of stay in the UK and of the breeding season. The signal on one bird which flew to the Netherlands failed briefly but, on July 4 the tracker started working again and the bird had reached an area 40 km from Strasbourg. Each of the birds has followed one of two routes with all appearing to be heading for a stopover south of the

Alps. By mid-August all 5 had reached Africa one in Senegal, one in Chad, and two in Nigeria' the fifth had only reached Morocco where it stayed to do some sight seeing.

Blakeney Point National Nature reserve had an excellent year. It is of course home to 30% of the UK's sandwich terns and 8% of little terns, and this year 3,562 pairs of sandwich terns fledged up to 2,000 young and 160 pairs of little terns about 140.

RSPB conservationists are en route to Henderson Island, part of the UK's Pitcairn Overseas Territory, in a bid to eradicate the invasive rats and save the endangered Henderson petrel, which nests only on the island. Rats are eating 25,000 newly hatched Henderson petrel chicks on the world heritage listed island, driving the species towards extinction. Four petrel species nest on the island but the Henderson petrel is most threatened as it is found nowhere else in the world.

A new species of bird-like dinosaur, found in the Ashdown Brickyard, near Bexhill, E. Sussex, is believed to be the world's smallest, between 13 and 16 inches. The new species, which was carnivorous or omnivorous, came from the Mesozoic era, which began some 250 million years ago and was part of a group that included all two-legged meat eating dinosaurs called theropods. Meanwhile another bird-like dinosaur, which lived about 85 million years ago, was, according to analysis of a fossil jaw bone found in Kazakhstan, at least 2m tall with a skull twice as large as an ostrich. It's wing span would have easily matched that of an albatross but it is not known if it could fly. Scientists at University College, Dublin said the discovery was one of the largest birds known of any age. Little and large!!

The American student who, as reported earlier, stole 299 rare bird skins from the Natural History Museum at Tring in June 2009 to fund his studies was ordered to pay £125,150 by St. Albans crown court under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

Thousands of African elephants are being poached to meet China's lust for ivory, the worst illegal slaughter for decades – even the Samburu National Park in northern Kenya, one of the continent's best-protected reserves, has lost more elephants in the past 2.5 years than in the previous 11. Bulls and matriarchs are targeted for their large tusks – leaving leaderless herds of orphans. Conservationists blame the UN's Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species relaxing the 20-year ban on ivory trade. In 2010 more than half the elephants that died in South Africa were killed illegally. So sad and surely the UN could do something to reverse the trend. Trouble is big money is involved.

A maribou stork has been hatched at Paignton Zoo, only the second time the species has bred in the UK. It is progressing well!

RSPB Minsmere is to undergo one of the biggest developments in its 64 year history – aimed at making its natural wonders even more accessible and inspiring to people of all ages – especially children. The declared aims are to 'create an inspirational visitor experience' 'to broaden the reserve's appeal' 'to make Minsmere easier to discover and get to' and 'to increase Minsmere's sustainability.

CleySpy at Glandford – on the Letheringsett, Wiveton, Blakeney road, is moving into new premises at the top of the yard, allowing BIRDscapes to expand into a second gallery space and with much more storage to increase their stock of pictures. The barn vacated by CleySpy is to become Art Café, something of an arts hub for the area.

50-year project to clear invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* England's last colonies of red squirrels, from Bardsey Island, in Poole Harbour, to save one of has been declared successful. The *ponticum* had taken over the woodland on the 500-acre island, reducing numbers of squirrels by cutting the available food supply. Over the last decade, however, numbers have risen by 25% to c250, which is considered capacity for the island.

Staff at Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset keep foxes away from the swans by playing *The Archers* and other BBC Radio 4 programmes at high volume all night. The swanherd, David Wheeler, said 'foxes hear voices and think people must be around, so they go away',

Some 455 critically endangered northern white-crested gibbons have been discovered by conservationists in Pu Mat national park in central Vietnam. They are the last known viable population of the species still existing.

A crocodile farmer in Huntingdon became the first person in Britain to hatch Nile crocodiles, the culmination of a 6-year breeding programme. They can grow up to 10 feet long and weigh up to 1 tonne each and the farmer intends to use them for breeding and to sell crocodile meat in his farm shop. Not sure I would fancy it.

The Hawk and Owl Trust's Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature reserve saw the return, for the 7<sup>th</sup> year running, of a female marsh harrier which raised 6 chicks, the same number as successfully fledged last year

An osprey took up residence at NWT's Ranworth Broad in May and two were spotted together in June. Ospreys are site faithful and NWT staff are looking at providing nesting platforms in the hope that they might return and breed. The NWT Broads nature reserve manager said it was believed that the resident osprey might be the bird which visited Ranworth last summer.

The Isles of Scilly have produced another rarity-not seen since the 1960s. A team from the University of Exeter and members of the Wiltshire Bat Group found a brown long-eared bat – a pregnant female – to their "surprise and delight" which surely indicates a breeding population.

Random attacks by bottlenose dolphins on porpoises are probably due to sexual frustration. Worldwide research has shown young males are responsible – probably because they are kept from female dolphins by older males

A female whooper swan, which had injured its wing – possibly by flying into overhead power cables – managed to reach WWT Welney reserve and, being clearly unable to fly back to Iceland to breed, her mate decided to stay with her and the pair produced 2 cygnets, the first whooper swans to do so at Welney. Will the youngsters migrate to Iceland next year I wonder? They will have been pleased to welcome the first migrant whoopers which began arriving at Welney in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September. The first group of 9 were adults and appeared to be non-breeding birds. None were ringed and were unknown at the reserve.

The Brazilian environment protection agency has given approval to the massive Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in the heart of the Amazon rain forest. The dam will flood 200 square miles of rainforest and critics say it will harm fish stocks vital to the 14 tribes that inhabit Xingu National Park downriver; turn up to 90 miles of the river into stagnant puddles and displace as many as 40,000 people. Environmentalists fear that the dam, which would be the world's third largest, will lead to more dams in the Amazon creating development resulting in even faster deforestation of the rainforest – a massive absorber of carbon dioxide. The Brazilian government says the project is

essential to help Brazil's torrid economy growth that can help millions out of poverty and, assuming the consortium building the dam obtain an operating licence before producing energy, the billion dollar project is designed to produce 11,000 megawatts of electricity, more than 6% of Brazil's energy needs.

The Grade II-listed lighthouse at Long Sutton, beside the Wash in Lincolnshire, where Sir Peter Scott lived during the 1930s and discovered his passion for wildfowl and their migrations, has been given planning permission for a visitor centre, café and other improvements and the owners hope to start work next year in converting garages at the property into a museum dedicated to the work of Sir Peter.

Over the past decade scientists have discovered 615 new species in Madagascar – that extraordinary island. They found 385 new plants, 22 invertebrates, 17 fish, 69 amphibians, 61 reptiles and an amazing 41 species of mammal. Of the species found on Madagascar 70% are found nowhere else in the world.

The BTO's 2010 breeding bird survey showed further decline in numbers of migratory birds reaching the UK with 8 out of 10 of the species with the highest declines in numbers over the last 15 years being birds which migrate to sub-Saharan Africa for the winter. The loss of turtle dove, cuckoo, wood warbler, nightingale, yellow wagtail, pied flycatcher and spotted flycatcher has been evident for some time and the RSPB warn that similar declines are seen across Europe and that "species were at risk of disappearing off the map! At the same time the pan-European bird monitoring scheme, which studied population figures for 145 of the most common species in 25 European countries between 1980 and 2009, showed that farmland birds are the most threatened group with half of the 10 most at risk relying on farmland for feeding, roosting or breeding. It showed that bird populations are at an all-time recorded low.

Apparently as the sea turns more acid – due to CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere – it may make fish deaf. Clown fish raised in the sea as acidic as it is today fled when played the sound of predators, but fish raised in water as acidic as predicted by the UN in 2050 did not react and that could be potentially devastating.

In Sri Lanka mid-summer thousands of wildlife officials and volunteers took to treetop huts near reservoirs and watering holes for Sri Lanka's first national count of its dwindling elephant population. The Wildlife Department said the 3-day census was aimed at gathering information to help the government make plans to protect elephants. Conservation groups refused to take part in the census alleging it was a smokescreen for capturing and domesticating the remaining wild elephants.

Indonesia has been losing about a million hectares of forest each year and deforestation has turned the country into the third largest greenhouse gas emitter – after the USA and China. Research has disclosed that packaging from Asia Pulp and Paper, Indonesia's leading paper supplier, banned by several retailers because of its role in deforestation is used by Mattel in popular children's toys including Barbie dolls and Disney models. A.P.P. plans to continue using wood from natural forests until at least 2015. Tesco last year announced they would follow Sainsbury and Marks and Spencer and stop using A.P.P. materials in its own-brand products. On the other hand research carried out by the University of Helsinki and New York's Rockefeller University shows the density of forests and woodlands has increased in 45 countries out of a group of 68 that account for 72% of the world's forests. In Britain density increased by 10.8% compared with 6.6% across Europe. In South America and Africa rises of 0.8% and 1.1% were recorded.



Many of you who have visited North Norfolk, or are lucky enough to live here, will be aware of the black dome on what was a wartime airfield at Langham – near Bernard Matthews' poultry farm. It was built in 1942-43 to train anti-aircraft gunners and is one of only 6 of the 40 built remaining. Now a £500,000 scheme aims to restore the dome to its original condition and function.

John Buxton, who kept or tried to keep news of cranes – which arrived back in Norfolk some 30 years ago – from birders has now written a book, with the assistance of Chris Durdin, former RSPB press officer, entitled “The Norfolk Crane Story”, £30 from Wren Publishing. Don't all rush.

It seems female Southern elephant seals often scurry out to sea for a rough and tumble with the boys – a finding which, perhaps, casts doubt on the long-held belief that they are submissive partners in a highly chauvinistic mating game where they come ashore to breed with dominant “beach masters” in harems up to 200+ in size. Research by scientists at the New South Wales Office of the Environment and Heritage showed that some females were far from land in the breeding season. It is unclear why elephant seals mate at sea; it could be random or part of a strategy that gives females control over who they mate with away from the single choice in a harem. It may, of course, be just more comfortable – males can weigh up to 10 times more than females!

A study by a team of British led scientists has uncovered the trend of plants and animals fleeing from the effects of climate change far faster than suspected. The team estimates that species are moving away from Earth's warm equatorial belt at a rate equivalent to 20 centimetres per hour. Migration towards the poles since the early 1970s was 3 times more rapid than earlier studies suggested – the researchers calculated an average species moved 17.6km in the direction of the poles every 10 years, whilst shifts to the cooler altitudes of hills and mountains were at the rate of 12.2m per decade. Could this have any bearing on the missing migrants?

The County Preservation Trust has been granted planning permission to build 2 red squirrel breeding enclosures on its smallholding at Mayfields, Kelmerthorpe. When operative they will work in close contact with Pensthorpe nature reserve.

The chalk reef which runs along the North Norfolk coast from Cley to Mundesley could be included in a scheme to protect underwater gems around England's shoreline. The reef has been earmarked as a marine conservation zone and is one of 7 special spots in Norfolk's coast which may be proposed to ministers as reference areas to receive greater protection

Troops guarding an Austrian airport against storks were to frighten the birds away by staring at them in an aggressive manner – an environmentalist had informed the authorities that being stared at intimidated the storks more than the sound of a gun. I had a CSM who did just that!

Chimps in the Ngogo forest, in Uganda's Kibale national park are skilled hunters working together to catch monkey prey, typically the red colobus, with such success that the local population has fallen by 90% between 1975 and 2007. An estimate of chimp numbers in the same period shows a 53% increase suggesting they were prospering at the increasing expense of their prey.

Thousands of badgers will be shot under the Government's plans to allow widespread culling to protect cattle from tuberculosis. A review for DEFRA showed there would be a significant decrease in the number of cattle destroyed, currently 25,000 pa. Licensing to cull will be strictly supervised, with marksmanship tests and specifying the use of powerful rifles, to maximise chances of a clean kill. There is opposition from animal welfare and wildlife groups and, surprise, surprise from political opponents.

The first atlas of ladybirds in the UK shows that some of the most widely spread of all 47 different ladybirds in Britain and Northern Ireland have suffered a significant decline with 10 species in the UK having been decreasing for the past 20 years. Since the arrival in the UK of the invasive Asian Harlequin ladybird, which competes for food and preys on the larva of other smaller species, such as the two spot, and whose population has exploded since its arrival, racking up 25,676 records – second only to the seven-spot ladybird, the most common with 27,000 records in Britain and Ireland, there has been a noticeable decline in numbers and the invasion of Harlequins is one cause of this. Since the survey the 13-spot ladybird, declared extinct 60 years ago, has been found alive and well. Experts confirmed that a breeding colony was found in the Axe Estuary Wetlands in Devon, by Richard Comont, a PhD student at Oxford University who identified the larva.

Global warming temporarily ground to a halt over the last 10 years because of increased pollution from countries like China coupled with trends in the El Nino. Southern Oscillation – a cyclical change in the behaviour of the Pacific Ocean – which has seen the Pacific take heat from the atmosphere for a decade but which will swing back to warming the air again, with China, a heavy consumer of coal planning to cut pollution from its coal-burning power plant contributing.

# Simon Aspinall 1958-2011

Simon was born in North London in 1958 but grew up in Surrey. Educated at Whitgift School in Croydon and Purley High School in Old Coulsdon he then went to the University of East Anglia to read Environmental Science, partly to be near to Cley and the North Norfolk Coast where he spent as much time as possible, promising one day to live there. After University he worked for the RSPB, the NCC and later SNH, surveying and monitoring Corncrakes, breeding birds on bog and moorland habitats, raptors, and seabirds both in nesting colonies and at sea across Scotland and the south of England. In 1987 Simon was Assistant Warden on Fair Isle and his Fair Isle Wren mapping guidelines are still used on the Island today. In 1993 he moved to the United Arab Emirates to work for the newly established National Avian Research Centre promoting conservation studies and assisting in the establishment of a national network of protected areas within the UAE. Later Simon became a freelance environmental consultant in the Emirates. His love of Cley and North Norfolk continued during his time abroad and eventually he did make his home in Cley, returning several times every year to birdwatch on the marshes and The Point.

When I first started working for the National Trust on Blakeney Point in 2006 Simon was one of a group of dedicated ornithologists and friends who regularly ventured up the shingle in their spare time (and some during their professional lives) looking for birds and inspiration. Some were lifelong friends and collaborators of Simons. For me this group of birdwatchers was an excellent source of breeding bird observations and counts, contacts in the world of conservation, tips offs of rare birds on The Point and, of course, inspiration and friendship.

Sadly, Simon was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease shortly after I met him. For the first few years Simon was still able to walk up the shingle, later with the aid of a walking stick and then sticks. I would sometimes bump into him on Cley Beach Road struggling along on his push bike with his walking sticks along the frame and his bins around his neck. I was normally in a rush to catch a bus, or something similar, but would stop to say hello and rush out a few words and I always went off with a feeling of admiration that he could still cycle around Cley, keep cheerful and enjoy birdwatching under such circumstances. During the last few years of his illness, when walking up the point was no longer possible, we would arrange visits to The Point in the

National Trust land rover where he could be taken around the reserve as I went about my winter rounds. There were a few winter/spring days that were particularly memorable: cold, clear blue, distilled winter days with Hen Harriers, Snow buntings, Shore larks and of course the seal pups for company. Regular phone calls and, towards the end, emails kept Simon up to date on how the terns were doing and what migrants were about, and his genuine interest right to the last really touched me. His tenacity, cheerfulness under conditions that most of us would find overwhelming, and enthusiasm for The Point made a real impression on me.

Ornithologically speaking Simon was as sharp as a razor and took routes around the local countryside that most people rarely did and therefore found birds that others missed. He was amazing with flyovers and attempted to teach me the difference between the calls of the redpoll species (I still haven't quite got it). He had knowledge of birds from the Middle East that not many others had and helped us age and sex Norfolk's first Trumpeter Finch. I felt that Simon possibly saw a part of himself in me and some of the other wardens who have worked on The Point and thus took a particular interest and was encouraged by the fact that there were others of his kind trying to make a difference in a troubled world. He tried, I think, to inspire us to make the best of our lives and, if we felt so inclined, to put our best efforts into conservation and the study of birds.

In 2008 Simon met my girlfriend Birgitta (Bee) and we became good friends. Simon would always ask about Bee when she was off doing some adventurous ornithological work around the world and probably saw some of himself in her too. He always said, jokingly, that 'she's too good for you' and was probably right. In the autumn of 2010 Simon, knowing that I was having housing problems, offered to let me stay with him in his cottage 'Paston' in Cley. His lovely cottage close to the allotments in Cley therefore became home for me between October 2010 and April 2011 and, although Simon was away for most of the time; either in the Middle East (which sadly would have been his last trip out to the area that he loved so well) or staying with his parents Jack and Sylvia, in Holt, we spent the odd evening together and had long discussions on various subjects, but mostly birds.

I now hold these evenings dear to my heart. His presence was definitely always alive in his books, other household objects (including stuffed birds etc!) and in the garden, unfortunately my garden bird list was rather poor by Simon's standards.

There are a few stories definitely worth relating which illustrate Simon's personality. In December 2010 he flew out to Tunisia with a friend only to be caught up in the middle of a revolution that turned out to be the catalyst for many other such revolutions around the Arab world. This, as anyone who knew Simon, or indeed his good friend Richard Porter, is typical. Another story relates to Simon bringing the tail feathers of a RUFUS BUSH ROBIN! up The Point, which he had brought back from a trip to the UAE. He encouraged Paul Nichols (another point warden) and myself to tell James McCallum that we had found them in front of the plantation and to ask him if he knew what they were from. A fine trick and one that I'm sure James would have appreciated. Unfortunately when James was next up The Point, so were Giles Dunmore (the county bird recorder at the time) and Andy Stoddart (ex rarities committee etc). To say that they both nearly had a heart attack would be an understatement and after thinking that we were going to have to call out the air ambulance Paul and I had to confess. However we did put most of the blame on Simon for having brought the feathers on to The Point in the first place.

Having only known Simon personally since 2006 this memorial naturally concentrates on the last six years of his life and it will be up others to give a full account of his life and career, which will hopefully be published in British Birds in due course. I can say that he led an exciting, purposeful life dedicated to conservation and to what he called 'our feathered friends'. I felt that he loved the depth of wisdom and intrigue that birds can offer us. He spent most of his life working in the field, ringing, advocating nature protection or writing various books, papers, articles and reports. He seemed to be tireless in his work and did it all for creatures that could not thank him for all his hard work. He was talented, interesting, kind and caring and wasn't afraid to say what he was thinking.

I will remember Simon fondly. Simon was loved by many and will be missed.

Eddie Stubbings

### **Prairie Dreams**

By Andrew Stoddart

Privately published, 2011

Pbk, 262pp. Price **£17.99\***

This book, subtitled 'A Human and Natural History of North America's Great Plains', is a fascinating account of a much abused wilderness. It is not a detailed natural history of the Prairies, (there are other publications which tackle this subject), but is described by the Author as "a history of the interaction between European culture and the North American grasslands". The book is well researched with nearly 100 references (quoted in the Bibliography) and the text is divided into 26 sections plus a prologue and an epilogue which cover the various aspects of the subject matter. One little niggle, I would have liked a simple map showing the area that the book covers together with its topographical features as that would have saved me the task of frequent referrals to my atlas.

It is the destructive influence of man that forms the main theme of the book with accounts of the early explorers in the Great Plains, the political drive to 'settle the wilderness' by the establishment of unsustainable agriculture, and the problems of grasshoppers, droughts and consequential dust bowls. These catastrophes, together with the mass slaughter of the buffalo and the extinction of the Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis*, occurring about the same time as the demise of the Carolina Parakeet *Conuropsis carolineensis* and the Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*, make harrowing reading. More encouragingly there is hope for the future and the Author discusses the plans to improve the conservation of the remaining grassland and to extend the existing reserves.

I have however a difficulty with the Author's views on Judeo-Christian beliefs. He suggests for instance that they gave man full permission to exploit nature without hindrance; I would have thought that it was man's basic common human failings of ignorance, greed, politics and brutality that led (and to some extent still lead) him into this approach to nature. (There is an error - It was not the 'church' but Bishop Ussher's discredited publication of 1658 that decreed that Creation occurred in 4004 BC).

The real beauty in the book is in the style of the writing. There are no illustrations but this is more than adequately made up for by the descriptive prose that so well captures the atmosphere of the landscape. One example that I like demonstrates this, "For many pioneer settlers the incessant wind, the constancy of landscape, its awful perfection of symmetry, its hatred of the vertical and its terrifying emptiness all imparted strange feelings of helplessness".

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to those who love wild places and have an interest in their history, and also to lovers of English prose.

*Chris Wheeler*

The above review was originally published in the September 2011 issue of *British Birds*

\*Copies of the book can be obtained direct from the author for £10.99 +£2 pp see Andy's advert in *Sales and Wants* at the back of the newsletter.

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