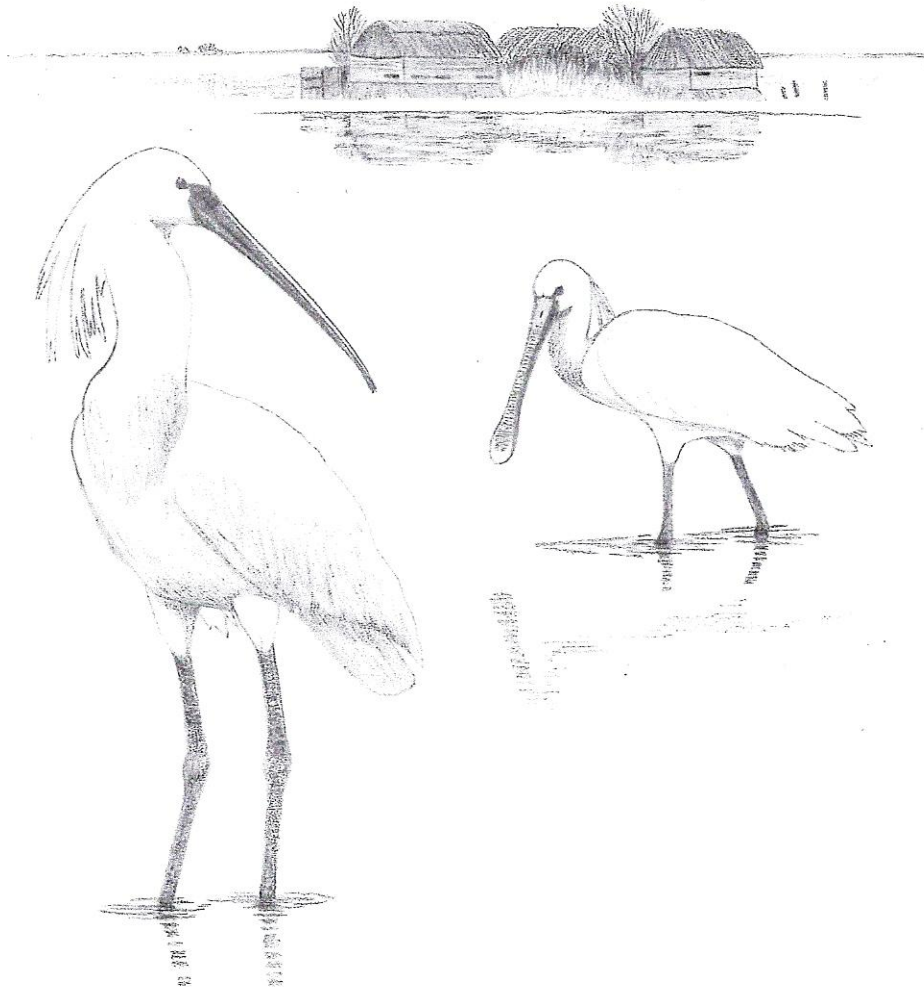


Cley Bird Club



Newsletter 92

March 2012

Cley Bird Club

Keeping birders countrywide in touch with Cley

Founded 1986

Membership 680

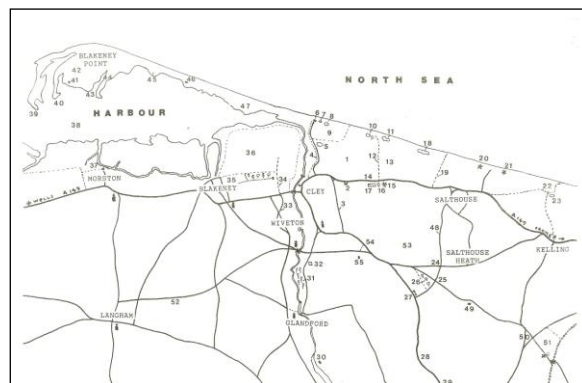
Membership Secretary

Anny Hare Flat One, The White Lion

8 White Lion St. Holt

Norfolk NR25 6BA

Email:anny.h@virgin.net



Dear Member

Welcome to our winter newsletter

Once again the Cley Square turned up trumps with a cracking winter bird, this time a Western Sandpiper a “first for Norfolk” see Dave’s report in the bird notes.

Pat and David’s annual review of the Cley Square makes compelling reading and leaves you feeling if only I had been to the reserve more often.

Annual Subscriptions

Many of you will be aware of the post office intent, if allowed, to greatly increase postage rates. Currently our subscriptions just about cover the cost of producing the newsletter. Going forward one of a number of options being considered to save cost is to make the newsletter available via e-mail. Notwithstanding the above we have decided to maintain the subscription at £4 for another year whilst we carry out a review of the best way forward. We will publish our findings along with a statement of all the clubs finances in the July newsletter.

Those not paying by standing order will have a subscription reminder enclosed at the back of their newsletter.

Thanks as ever to all of you who have contributed articles to this issue and to our artists 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

BIRD NEWS FROM THE "CLEY SQUARE"

November 2011 to February 2012

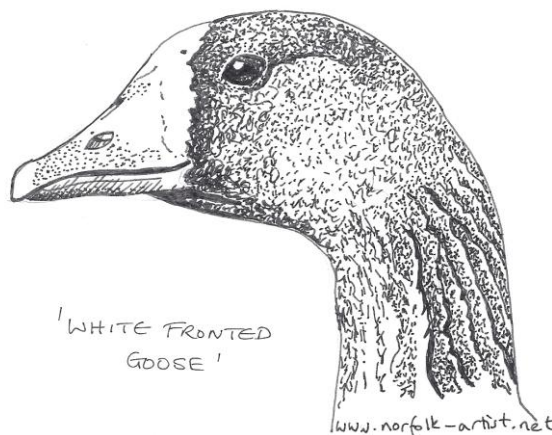
November

Weather

The month was mild with southerly winds predominating except for a good northerly gale on the 6th.

Winter wildfowl

Small groups of Bewick Swans (max 9) were seen on six dates and a family of six Whoopers graced the Cley Marshes WeBS count on the 28th. A few of the more unusual grey geese turned up with four Greenland White-fronts seen flying over Morston on the 8th and six sightings of Tundra Bean Geese (max 7 at Salthouse on the 13th). Mid-month there was a significant influx of White-fronted and Barnacle Geese on the east coast and there were flocks of 80 of the former and 74 of the latter on Blakeney Freshes on the 16th. One of the Barnacles was colour-ringed and Mark Golley managed to read the rings. These showed that it came from a large Dutch feral colony. Now why should a resident feral bird choose to fly across the North Sea in such mild conditions? The Dark-bellied Brents gradually built up to 2000 and it was nice to find that there were many family groups among those arriving early. There were a couple of Pale-bellieds in the flocks, last year's two leucistic juveniles now adults but no Black Brant. There were still over 60 Egyptian Geese roosting at Cley Marshes in the first days of month but the numbers then rapidly declined. A drake American Green-winged Teal took up residence at Cley NWT on the 14th and stayed to complete his moult.



Hérons and Cranes

A couple of immature Spoonbills were seen at Cley Marshes on three dates. There was a sighting of a Bittern at Cley NWT on the 20th. These three birds stayed for the winter but were seen only sporadically. Two Common Cranes flew east over Cley on the 18th and then two more or the same two were seen again on the 26th.

Raptors

Spectacular numbers of Short-eared Owls were reported flying in off the sea along the east coast during November. There were 39 sightings in the Square during the month with a maximum of six in a day, so quite nice but the Square didn't get its fair share. Long-eared Owls were also seen on five dates on Blakeney Point and three dates at Kelling. There were three sightings of Red Kite during the month.

Waders

The small flock of Avocets risking overwintering at Cley increased to 20 by the end of the month. The usual winter flock of neurotic Golden Plovers that commute between Blakeney Harbour and Cley NWT built up to an estimated 1000 and included a bird fitted with colour-rings, a yellow flag and a light sensor. This bird, an adult male, had been trapped at its nest site in Swedish Lapland. The researchers were delighted when we eventually read the rings as precise information on where it has wintered will be invaluable in interpreting the data and tracing the bird's movements if they succeed in re-trapping him next year. The Cley Ruff flock reached 63 with half of them juveniles and as usual 90% of them males. The Black-tailed Godwit flock was up to a respectable 256 birds but with just 8% juveniles. They had a poor breeding season in Iceland in 2011. 43 Woodcock were seen along the coast after flying in off the sea during the month.

Moving on to our less numerous waders, there were a couple of rather late individuals. A Red-necked Phalarope in stark black and white plumage was seen irregularly on Pat's Pool to the 8th and a Wood Sandpiper flew SW over Cley Marshes on the 1st (there are just five November records for this species listed in the Birds of Norfolk). Five Spotted Redshanks were seen at Cley Marshes on the 12th and three Greenshanks were in Blakeney Harbour on the 28th but otherwise all other records were of ones or twos for these two species for the rest of the winter. There was only one sighting of a Green Sandpiper, at Cley Marshes on the 24th, and only one Jack Snipe seen, at Kelling Water Meadow on the 2nd and 6th. There were three Little Stints present at Cley at the start of month with the last of these seen on the 12th and then a single brief late one on the 29th. A peculiar aberrant or hybrid Dunlin that defied identification added to the small wader excitement and confusion at Cley at the end of the month (see the rarities section later).

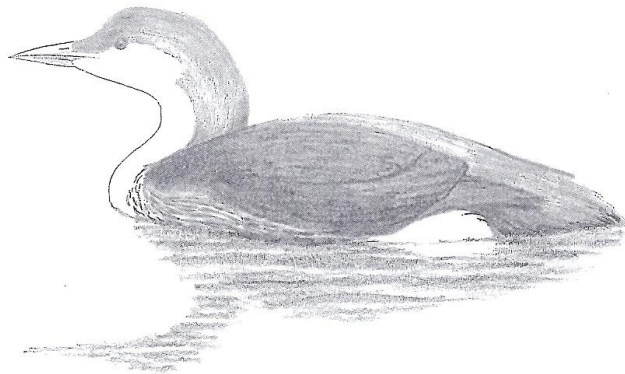
Seabirds

The last few Shearwaters of the year, three Sooties, two Balearics and a Manxie were logged during the month. Four of them came with the strong northerly winds on the 6th and 7th. Single Leach's Petrels were also seen passing offshore on each of those two blowy days. More remarkably on the 6th another was reported to have flown inland over the beach car park at Salthouse and possibly landed south of the A149. This bird was in serious trouble! Shags were seen almost daily in the first half of the month with a maximum count of four. What was presumably the same Black Guillemot was seen on the sea off Cley beach car park on three dates. Late Puffins were seen on the 6th and 16th. Little Auks were seen regularly being reported on 20 dates, mainly in single figures, but there was a flock of 33 on the 6th and there were 20 past in just under two hours on the 30th.

Arctic Skuas were recorded most days, there were 56 records of Pomarines with a maximum of 14 on the 6th when Bonxies also peaked at 45. Little Gulls were recorded passing or foraging offshore daily with the numbers involved sometimes very high e.g. 900 on the 6th and 1500 on the 27th.

There were 20 records of Great Northern Diver for the month. Black-throated Divers are much rarer off our coast but were recorded on no less than 14 dates.

Most sightings probably related to the same adult that appeared to linger off Cley beach car park but there appears to have been at least three, possibly four, different birds on one date. Red-necked Grebes were recorded on 13 dates (max 6), Slavonian Grebes on 11 dates (max 3). Small numbers of these grebes and also of our more unusual winter sea-ducks such as Scaup, Long-tails and Velvet Scoters were also logged during



the other winter months. A Grey Phalarope flew west past Cley on the 9th, there was a nice flotilla of four off Kelling Hard on the 16th and another single past there on the 23rd.

Passerines – the last autumn passage migrants

A late unidentifiable all-dark swift was reported in off the sea at Cley on the 2nd. The last sighting of a Willow Warbler was at Blakeney Point on the 7th, that of a Firecrest at Kelling Water Meadow the following day and the last Wheatear was seen at Blakeney Point on the 12th. A late Richard's Pipit was found on Blakeney Point on the 13th and Ring Ouzels were seen at Kelling Water Meadow on three dates. It was a very good month for Black Redstarts with sightings at Blakeney Point, Cley Marshes, Cley village and Glandford on a total of 16 dates. As many as 13 different individuals could have been involved.

Passerines - residents

A flock of 25 Crossbills was seen at Kelling Heath on the 3rd and another of 14 on the 10th.

Passerines – winter visitors

Shore Larks were unfortunately in short supply compared to last winter with none at Cley, four at Salthouse and five on Blakeney Point in the first half of month but after that only a single was seen at Salthouse on the last day of the month. Lapland Buntings were reported on 18 dates with a maximum count of 6 on the 18th along Blakeney Point. Flocks of Snow Buntings were seen daily with the maximum count being 81 on Blakeney Point. Water Pipits were elusive with singles at Cley on just four dates and at Kelling on two dates. A flock of up to 24 Twite took up their usual winter quarters on the saltmarsh by Blakeney Harbour.

There was a good fall of thrushes on Blakeney Point on the 7th after the previous day's northerly gale, with 300 Blackbirds, 200 Redwing, 185 Fieldfare and 15 Song Thrushes estimated. The only Mealy Redpoll of the month was also seen there that day. A Great Grey Shrike was found along the coastal footpath just west of Morston Quay on 8th. A Hawfinch flying in off sea at Salthouse on 11th must have come as a bit of a surprise to the observers, Nigel Rogers and John Wagstaff. There were six records of Waxwings during the month with the largest flock being 17 on the 16th at Kelling Heath. Few Brambling were reported, we received just 4 records with the largest flock nine at Kelling Heath on the 28th.

Rarities

One national rarity was identified – eventually. I briefly saw a small stint sized wader with the Dunlin while counting the duck on Pat's Pool on the 28th for the monthly WeBS count and passed it off as a Little Stint. It went over to Simmond's Scrape which was being counted by Pat. She thought it looked long billed and, unbeknown to me, took some photos of it. I found it again on Pat's at the end of my count, but asleep. Luckily we met Mark Golley starting off round the reserve as we were finishing and I mentioned that there was a Little Stint on Pat's to him. He said he would take a look at it. Mark phoned us back later to say that he was pretty certain it was a Semi-Palmated Sandpiper of the long-billed Eastern race – it had anchor marks on the retained juvenile scapulars and he was pretty certain he could make out the palmations between the toes. Mark felt confident enough to put the bird on the pager but only Richard Millington managed to also see it before it flew off west. Pat sent Mark her photos which were sufficient to confirm it was the same bird Mark had been looking at but weren't anywhere near good enough to identify it. Andy Stoddard meanwhile had re-found the bird in Blakeney Harbour off Half-Way House and got some much better photos that duly confirmed those anchor-marks and palmations. I snow-paked out the Little Stint entry on the WeBS form I had been filling in and inserted a Semi-P Sandpiper after the Green-winged Teal in the additional species boxes. The following day the bird showed on the scrapes at Cley and proved popular with local birders as it was the first Semi-P in Norfolk since 2003. As closer views and better quality photos were obtained people began to wonder if the bird might be a Western Sandpiper instead, first because of the bill's very long length and shape and secondly because of the amount of rufous on some of the scapulars (many of which were usually hidden or very hard to see). The bird became a Semi-P or Western on the pager and the best photos were e-mailed to experts in the States and Ireland. By December 1st a consensus had been reached that the bird was a Western, the first for Norfolk and only the eighth in Britain. The mega alerts went out and it became a must-see bird for many and generated valuable income for the NWT. I had to get out the WeBS form and that snow pake again! The moral of this tale is - if you want to find rarities then keep playing the Bill Oddie "possibles game" - no such thing as a Little Stint just possible Semi-P Sands. Mark had been determined to find



a Semi-P at Cley as there were a few in the country – he ended up with something even better! Three county rarities were seen. The Cattle Egret that arrived in October stayed with the cattle on Blakeney Freshes to the 24th and what was presumably the same individual was then seen at Salthouse Marshes on the 28th and 29th. Single Sabine's Gulls were seen flying offshore past Cley on the 6th and 7th. A Dusky Warbler was discovered by James MacCallum in suda at Long Hills on the 13th. It or another was then seen by Andy Stoddart at Far Point the next day and remained there the following day. In addition a late Lesser Whitethroat that was seen and photographed on Blakeney Point on the 7-8th was thought to possibly be of the central Asian race *halimondendri*.

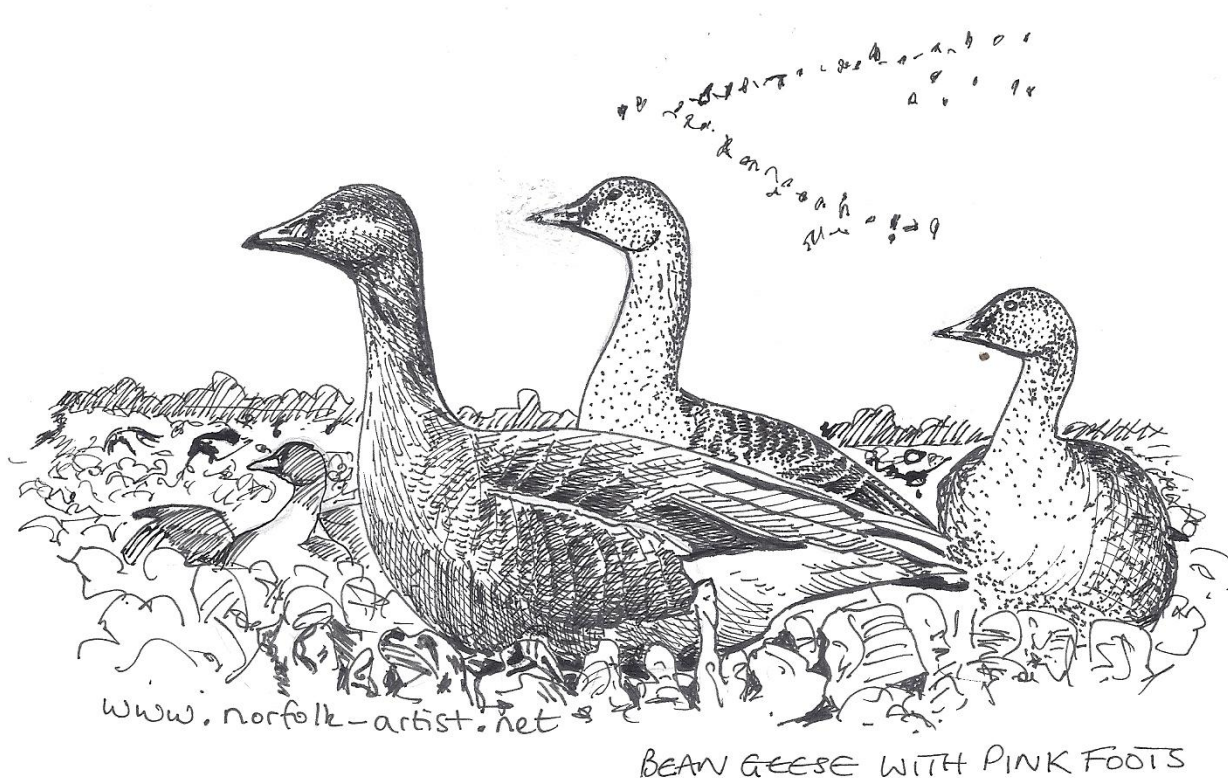
December

Weather

The month was again mild with strong westerly winds predominating except for two days when it was colder and the freshwater scrapes at Cley Marshes were partially iced over.

Winter wildfowl

The only Bewick Swans reported were a flock of 28 flying west out over the sea past Cley Beach on the 10th. Two small flocks of Whoopers were seen in the first half of the month then just sightings of a lone bird and of a pair that chose to stay the rest of the winter feeding on Pope's Marsh, Salthouse and usually roosting on Pat's Pool, Cley Marshes. Significant flocks of Pinkfeet (up to 5000) moved into the Square to feed on cut sugar beet fields inland of Morston and Cley. The flocks contained quite a few Tundra Beans (max 38 at Morston on the 27th),



White-fronts (max 18 at Cley Marshes on the 12th) and the odd probably genuine wild Greylag and Barnacle Goose. Some of these birds chose to roost at Cley Marshes but had the frustrating habit of leaving before it got light enough to pick out the Tundra Beans with confidence. A flock of 40 Barnacles that roosted on North Scrape on the 3rd were presumably birds from last month's influx. Last winter's adult Ross's Goose returned to our area just before Xmas with his five Barnacle chums. They often roosted with Pinkfeet at Cley but didn't always feed with them sometimes preferring to join the Greylags by Bayfield Lake. We presume this bird and one of the Barnacles are responsible for the two or three hybrids that have been seen in the area over the last two years and that they are all escapees. The one puzzling and possible redeeming feature of this party of six birds

is that they travelled north to the Borders last spring with Pinkfeet (one of the hybrids was also still with them then). The drake American Green-winged Teal was last seen at Cley NWT on the 14th having stayed for exactly a month. There was a nice high count of 234 Pintail at Cley Marshes on the 27th.

Raptors

A Rough-legged Buzzard flew west just north of Langham on the 2nd and a Red Kite drifted west over Kelling Heath on the 12th. Otherwise there were just the usual regular appearances of Marsh Harriers, Peregrines, Kestrels, Merlins and Sparrowhawks to upset those neurotic Golden Plovers at Cley. There were just three records of Short-eared Owls received and one of these was of a poor unfortunate bird found dead along Beach Road, Cley.

Waders

The mild weather resulted in wader numbers remaining similar to November. Early morning counts of those roosting on Arnold's Marsh and Sea Pool were often good e.g. 308 Curlew on the 27th. A Jack Snipe was seen flying in over the sea at Cley on the 9th and a Purple Sandpiper was seen feeding on Sea Pool on the 27th.

Seabirds

That Black Guillemot was seen on the sea off Cley beach car park again on the 17th and there were four more late sightings of Puffins. Little Auks continued to be seen regularly in the first half of the month with a good count of 57 past Cley on the 9th in two hours. In the second half of the month there was only a report made to the visitor centre of an injured one being seen in the reeds by Arnold's Marsh on the 31st.

Bonxies continued to be seen regularly with a maximum count of four. There were just three Arctic Skuas logged with the last on the 30th and a single Pomarine on the 17th. A few Little Gulls continued to loiter offshore and remained into the New Year. At least one Sandwich Tern was also loath to leave for warmer winter quarters, being seen off Cley from the 3rd to the 6th and then it or another was seen again at the end of the month on the 26th and 29th. The final Grey Phalarope of the year flew west past Cley on the 5th.

Passerines – residents

Blackcaps attempting to overwinter were seen in gardens in Cley and Wiveton, another was in the hedgerows by Kelling Water Meadow along with a couple of Chiffchaffs. One lonely male Stonechat remained at Kelling Heath. One of the youngsters colour-ringed by Noel Elms on the Heath spent the winter at Cley Marshes with her new found boyfriend. He was unringed and therefore not a local. A Tree Sparrow visited the feeders in a Langham garden on the 27th. We received only seven records of Tree Sparrow in the Square for the whole of 2011.

Passerines – winter visitors

The largest flock of Snow Buntings was one of up to 70 birds that mainly fed either side of Cley Beach car park. There no reports of any at Salthouse after the 1st and there were no reports of Shore Larks at all. Lapland Buntings were reported on seven dates with a maximum count of 14 on the 12th on Blakeney Point. There were four sightings of Waxwings with the largest group being six in Cley village on the 17th. A flock of up to 30 Lesser Redpolls took up residence at Al Davies's nyger feeders in Kelling and were joined by a Mealy on the 29th.

Rarities

Two national rarities were recorded. The Western Sandpiper continued to be seen each day at Cley Marshes, initially attracting hordes of admirers and although the numbers tailed off towards the end of the month the hides were always busy. The bird mainly fed on Pat's Pool, Simmond's Scrape and Whitwell Scrape but did also occasionally visit North Scrape and Arnold's Marsh when all the waders got flushed. It didn't always associate with the Dunlin flock but could go off on its own or with just one or two other birds. It didn't like getting its feet wet but would prefer to run around Sanderling-like on the islands and the banks of the scrapes. To get a good close look required a good bit of patience, it could go missing for long periods and was often distant, but nearly everybody went away happy.

A Ross's Goose (that didn't have any Barnacle chums with it and so had some possibility of being a genuine vagrant) was seen flying west in a flock of Pinkfeet over Cley village by Mark Golley on the 19th and then it or another was seen by us flying south from Morston towards Langham with Pinkfeet on the 28th.

January

Weather

It continued to be extremely mild for most of the month with the westerly winds often very strong. There was, however, a cold three day period mid-month when the scrapes at Cley iced over and the winds changed to chilly easterlies at the month's end.

Winter wildfowl

The Pinkfeet remained in our area with up to 4000 roosting at Cley Marshes and livening up dawn visits. A flock of 85 White-fronted Geese flew NW over Cley village on 10th and the maximum count of Tundra Beans in the Pinkfeet flocks was 45 on Blakeney Freshes on the 23rd.

Gamebirds

There was a count of 34 Grey Partridges on Blakeney Point on the 11th. This is quite something when one considers that in Andy Stoddard and Steve Joyner's book *The Birds of Blakeney Point* written in 2005 it is said that "the only recent breeding occurred in 2002" and that "the species is today a rare and irregular visitor". Just five records were known for the period 1988-2005 with a maximum count of only five birds.

Raptors

Little Owls are now only reported very occasionally within the Cley Square. One was heard calling on the southwest side of Langham village on the 16th.

Waders

The number of Golden Plovers in the flock commuting between Cley Marshes and Blakeney Harbour was estimated to have grown to 3000. A Grey Phalarope visited North Scrape, Cley Marshes on the 3rd. A very nice, if not truly exceptional, record as the *Birds of Norfolk* states that there are records in all months and that typically there are about four seen each winter (December-March) in Norfolk.

Seabirds

There were two reports of Little Auks but only anonymous log entries with claimed sightings of a Black Guillemot and of a Puffin. The table at the end shows that there were some significant high counts of the common gull species and of Red-throated Divers. There were a further three sightings of Black-throated Divers.

A juvenile Glaucous Gull was seen on the sea between Salthouse and Kelling on the 2nd and an adult was at Blakeney Point on the 13th. There were up to five Yellow-legged Gulls in the late afternoon gull roosts on North Scrape at Cley Marshes and they were joined by two Caspian Gulls on the 8th. There were two subsequent reports of Caspian Gulls being seen on the reserve during the daytime.

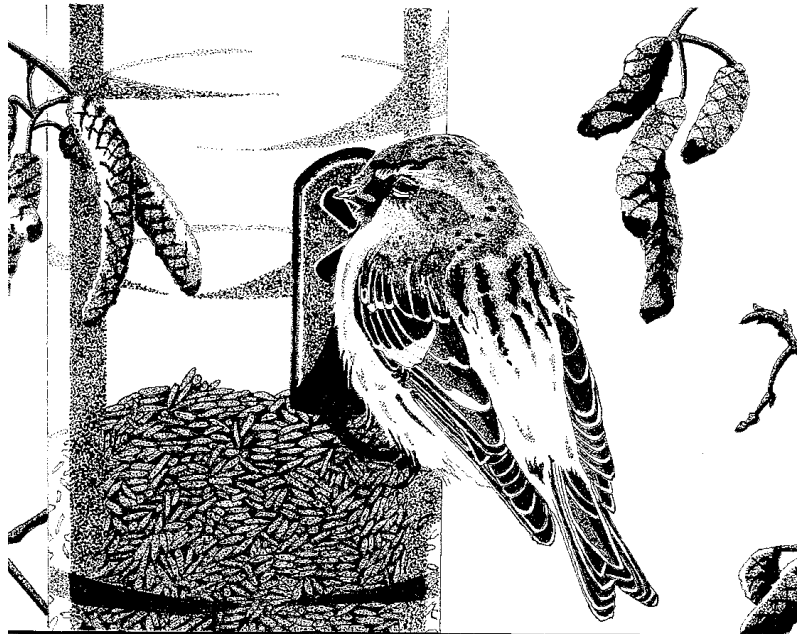
Passerines – winter visitors

A Shore Lark appeared by the shingle bank at Cley Marshes on the 1st but was just a one-day wonder. The largest flock of Snow Buntings reported was of 80 at the west end of Blakeney Point on the 11th. The seed put out by photographers eventually attracted up to 30 to Salthouse beach car-park. There was a potentially interesting report on BirdGuides of a flock of 25 Lapland Buntings by Cley beach car-park on the 22nd which we would like to hear more about. There were eight other reports for the Square with a maximum count of four at the Iron Road, Salthouse on the 17th.

There appeared to be very few Bramblings wintering in our area with the only records received relating to three in a mixed flock of finches feeding on a strip of sunflowers on the Bayfield estate. The real success story of the month was Al Davies's nyger feeders in his garden at Kelling where the flock of Lesser Redpolls had grown to 90 birds. Four Mealy Redpolls were found amongst them plus two more interesting individuals that were enjoyed by large numbers of birders thanks to Al's excellent arrangements with his neighbours. These two birds made it into the next section.

Rarities

The Western Sandpiper continued to be seen daily at Cley. It picked up a leg strain when the scrapes froze and hopped around on one leg for a few days but appeared to fully recover by the month's end. It was in fact last seen on the 31st with its departure no doubt due to the onset of another period of cold weather with frozen ground and scrapes. The bird clearly didn't fancy any more ice-skating. At least two and probably three County rarities were found. The first of Al's interesting Redpoll's turned up on the 8th when it was seen briefly by his partner Sally. It stayed to the 24th and was dubbed "Greypoll". This tricky individual was joined on the 15th by a much brighter, frosty bird that was dubbed "Whitepoll" and everyone was very happy that this second bird was a Coues's (Arctic) Redpoll (as opposed to a Mealy). "Greypoll" was eventually seen and photographed well and has been submitted to the county rarities committee by Al and his co-observers Marcus Nash and Andy Stoddard as a second Coues's Arctic Redpoll. It was suspected that the local Sparrowhawk might have been responsible for the bird's disappearance. It says in the modern literature that "some individuals are best left unidentified". To be predated then deemed by a committee to have been unidentifiable would be a cruel fate for "Greypoll". On the last day of the month a Black Brant finally came to join the Brent flocks feeding out at Cley and Salthouse Marshes being found there by Peter and Sue Morrison.



February

Weather

The first eleven days of the month were really cold. The freshwater scrapes and then also most of the brackish lagoons at Cley Marshes iced over. It started thawing on the 12th when westerly winds set in and temperatures were well above average towards the end of the month.

Winter wildfowl

A flock of 16 Bewick's Swans flew west over Cley NWT on the 6th, a further 5 flew past west offshore the following day and there were 14 east past Kelling on the 24th. The flock of Pinkfeet feeding in our area still numbered about 1000 during the cold snap and they based themselves at Blakeney Freshmarsh. There were still Tundra Beans with them with 26 counted in a flock feeding on cut sugar beet near Morston on the 9th. Small flocks of White-fronts were also seen feeding at Salthouse and Bayfield Hall. The highest count was of 45 flying over Cley NWT on the 8th. The number of Pale-bellied Brents in the flock feeding between Cley and Kelling increased to ten. The proportion of juveniles in our Dark-bellied Brent flocks worked out to be 17% for the winter making 2011 the best breeding year for them since the exceptional year of 2005 when 33% were youngsters. A lone Barnacle Goose was at Kelling Water Meadow and Salthouse at the start of the month but appears to have soon found friends as the number of the Ross's Goose's Barnacle chums at Bayfield had increased from five to six a week later.

The first table at the end of these notes gives the monthly total Wetland Bird Survey counts for our area and compares the means with those for the previous five winters. It can be seen that the counts of the dabbling ducks were a bit down this winter (c15% lower than the five year means).

The arctic cold snap gave a nice little influx of red-headed Smew to Cley Marshes with seven seen on the 7th, four on the borrow pit by Beach Road sluice and three on Sea Pool. Two of them

remained on the borrow pit (which has the deepest water on the reserve) until the 21st. There were up to 44 Goldeneyes, 35 Red-breasted Mergansers and six Goosanders in Blakeney Harbour. As usual Bayfield Lake was the only bit of freshwater with a sizeable flock of diving ducks – 50 Tufteds.

Gamebirds

The cold weather forced Red-legged Partridges into some people's gardens. Nic and Sue Page had a covey of 17 in theirs at Langham.

Hérons and Cranes

Two Common Cranes flew east over Salthouse Heath on the 5th. The Bittern was seen at Blakeney Freshes on three dates and at Cley NWT on a further three dates towards the end of the month. The two Spoonbills also survived the winter and were being seen more or less daily at the end of the month commuting between Salthouse and Blakeney Harbour.

Waders

The cold weather produced many Woodcock sightings in the first half of the month. The highest count was of 17 leaving woods behind Blakeney Freshes at dusk on the 10th. Several birds were flushed up from the shingle banks after flying in off the sea, one was flushed from a garden in Wiveton, one was seen flying over a garden in Blakeney village, others were seen at Bayfield Hall and there were up to three at Kelling Heath. The Black-tailed Godwits at Cley Marshes stuck out the icy conditions roosting and feeding in a little bit of ice-free water on Arnold's Marsh. The flock of Ruffs appeared to manage to find some form of sustenance on the frozen meadows and fields. There was a considerable influx of Dunlin with a maximum count of 1490 at Cley on the 7th and also 93 Knots that day. The first Green Sandpiper reported this year was seen flying off from Cley Marshes on the 23rd. Our breeding waders started returning with the warmer weather at the end of the month. The Avocet flock at Cley Marshes grew to 118 and there were 88 Ringed Plovers at Blakeney Point with three males practising their display flights to prospective mates.

Raptors

An adult male Marsh Harrier stayed at Cley NWT for the second winter running (they usually migrate south). He and a first winter male were seen displaying to females and carrying nest material at the end of the month.

Seabirds

Two adult and three redheaded Smew were seen flying west off shore past Cley on the 3rd. There was a final Black-throated Diver sighting on the 10th. A third-winter Iceland Gull was found dead on Blakeney Point on the 18th and a subadult flew past Cley beach then Blakeney Point on the 22nd.

Passerines – winter visitors

The five Water Pipits seen near Beach Road sluice at Cley NWT on the 9th was the highest count for the winter. The flock of 75 Snow Buntings at Salthouse contained five colour-ringed individuals that came from two different races, *insulae* (breeding in Iceland) and *nivalis* (Norway/Greenland). They are said to mix freely on the wintering grounds. There were five records of "flyover" Lapland Buntings at Kelling Water Meadow. We didn't receive many reports of Siskin flocks during the winter but there were 70 by Glandford ford on the 4th and when the warmer weather came a series of small flocks totalling about 60 birds were seen flying west over Cley NWT on the 22nd. There had also been few records of Grey Wagtails this winter, just a couple of birds in the Glaven valley, but there were four records of birds flying westwards along the coast once the warmer weather came.

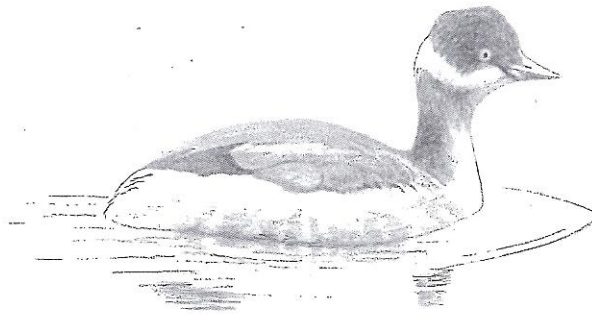
Passerines - residents

The number of Tree Sparrows visiting feeders in Langham increased to five and a Blackcap in Cley village managed to survive the bitter cold weather. The mild weather that followed marked the start of breeding activity at Kelling Heath with up to five Wood Larks present and the males song-fighting. The colour-ringed male Stonechat that bred with his sister last year has an unringed female with him this year. As virtually all youngsters are now ringed on the heath she can't be a relative which bodes well for the local gene pool.

Rarities

Three county rarities were seen. The Black Brant was present in the Cley-Salthouse Brent flocks for a further two days and then turned up again in a flock feeding further east at Kelling on the 16th and

17th. A Black-necked Grebe was seen drifting east on the sea past Kelling Hard by Marcus Nash and Chris Mason on the 10th. “Whitepoll” visited Al Davies’s feeders at Kelling sporadically throughout the month.



Special thanks again to all who have sent in records and to Mark and Al for commenting on drafts. David and Pat Wileman.

Monthly Wildfowl and Wader WeBS Counts

Total coordinated count from all coastal sites in the Square.

<i>Species</i>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<i>Species</i>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Dark-b Brent	1335	1631	1645	1519	1533(1911)	Avocet	20	18	13	25	19(33)
Shelduck	392	214	483	402	373(394)	Ringed Plover	39	5	82	19	36(68)
Wigeon	961	1439	1767	2689	1704(1981)	Golden Plover	614	1025	1301	156	774(989)
Gadwall	15	28	33	49	31(50)	Lapwing	849	891	1434	514	922(1020)
Teal	1219	740	1010	643	903(1059)	Dunlin	258	234	354	1352	550(478)
Mallard	203	191	306	303	251(305)	Ruff	63	35	36	32	42(32)
Pintail	130	64	177	162	133(164)	Black-tailed Godwit	242	269	204	212	232(191)
Moorhen	43	23	42	54	41(69)	Curlew	221	151	485	94	238(191)
Oystercatcher	334	383	81	270	267(371)	Redshank	288	178	204	141	203(217)

Figures in brackets are the means for the preceding 5 winters.

Monthly Maximum Day Counts of Seabirds

<i>Species</i>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<i>Species</i>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>
Common Scoter	539	600	100	30	Black-headed Gull	176	655	1760	637
Red-throated Diver	81	126	352	298	Common Gull	453	280	476	267
Gannet	411	65	12	13	Herring Gull	261	560	660	408
Kittiwake	414	4	104	10	Great Black-backed Gull	69	82	82	42

BEST OF THE REST IN NORFOLK
NOVEMBER 2011 – FEBRUARY 2012

After the last two deep-freeze winters, we should all be grateful to have not had a third. Our milder winter's birds have been a little on the plain side, but there have been some nice highlights to keep Norfolk birders happy.

NOVEMBER kicked off nicely with an **American Golden Plover** at Breydon Water on 1st. The double act of female **Ferruginous** and female **Ring-necked Ducks** re-surfaced frequently at Cockshoot and Ranworth Broads throughout the winter. A very rare for Norfolk **Melodious Warbler** was available to all at Happisburgh from 8th to 10th. Also sadly rare these days, two **Pallas's Warblers** together with a **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** were in the clifftop woods at Trimmingham on 9th-10th. A really showy male **Desert Wheatear** guarded his mealworms on the beach at Holme Dunes from 10th-12th then adjourned to Titchwell for the next three days. Holme also hosted a tricky **Hoopoe** on 12th/13th. A **Dusky Warbler** skulked and ticked around Horsey Gap from 13th to 17th. Two more **Hume's Yellow-browed Warblers** were at Caistor-on-Sea on 15th and Holme NOA 23rd to 28th but the latter was not seen often. A nice modest arrival of **Waxwings** came this month, 26 in Holt and 56 at Strumpshaw Fen being amongst the best flocks.

DECEMBER was pretty quiet for new birds. Of most interest was a first-winter **Coues's Arctic Redpoll** around the picnic area at Titchwell RSPB, in with a few other Redpolls, but often elusive. It has however stayed right through this winter period. An old friend returned this winter to Buckenham/Cantley Marshes – the adult **Lesser White-fronted Goose** in with its Taiga Bean cousins again. Winter in Norfolk, you know it makes sense!

JANUARY was the ideal time to tick everything again for the New Year's list, as all the birds stayed. The **Great Grey Shrike** was well visited at Fakenham and four **Shorelarks** stayed on in Holkham Bay. Up to three **Ross's Geese** have been seen occasionally with the Pinkfeet in Norfolk, but the flocks have been very mobile this year, interchanging over the whole county from Snettisham down to the Broads. A first-winter drake **Ferruginous Duck** was found at Whitlingham CP from 19th to 22nd. The **Rough-legged Buzzards** have been quite a feature in our county again this winter. Probably up to a dozen have been logged, including up to seven within a few miles of Wells/Holkham. From close observation an adult female may well have returned to Holkham this year, bringing again one new offspring. The best place to see **Short-eared Owls** has been Holme/Thornham where at least three have managed to find enough prey to see them through.

FEBRUARY did finally bring a really cold spell with ice and snow for a couple of weeks. The main feature of this was a big influx of **Smews**, presumably from a more frozen Holland. A few drakes were seen well inland, the coast mainly holding 'redheads' with the best being five on Wells boating lake. Inland up to 22 were on the Great Ouse between Saddlebow and Stowbridge, including five drakes. Another returning bird was the **Great White Egret**, settling in to the river valley near Marlingford by the end of the month. Our biggest bird, literally, was an immature **White-tailed Eagle** in the Broads on 21st/22nd, but sadly, it moved on from Ormesby St. Margaret early on its second day and has not yet been re-found. There has been another winter influx nationally of **Glossy Ibises**, with up to five reaching Norfolk on their travels. They seem to have found a liking for the Berney/Halvergate Marshes late in the month. Wouldn't that be a nice new breeding bird for Norfolk?

Trevor Davies and Pauline Walton

Cley Square Review 2011

During 2011, 256 species have been recorded in the Cley Square. This number excludes any species where the observer was not identified or the record was reported as only 'possible' or 'probable'. Of these, 24 are pending acceptance by the County or National Rarities Committees. We have been recording now since 2006 and the list for that period now stands at 313 species with 12 pending acceptance. New species added this year were American Wigeon, Yelkouen Shearwater, White-tailed Eagle, Western Sandpiper, Bonaparte's Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Pallid Swift and Red-throated Pipit. These are not necessarily new to the Square but new since 2006.

Ducks and Geese

Flocks of c.3,000 Pink-footed Geese were seen regularly on lifted beet fields in the Square in January. They seemed to stay later this year and a flock of 2,300 was seen leaving the marshes on 27th February. By mid-March only small flocks (<50) remained. They started to return in September with a flock of 2,050 on Blakeney Freshmarsh on the 18th. But as usual the numbers in the fields didn't build up until the beet was lifted in December and the highest count was 5000 at Morston just before Christmas.

Small numbers of Tundra Beans and Eurasian White-fronted Geese were with the Pink-footed in both periods but an influx of these species plus Barnacle Geese in December was unusual. (For details of these see the Bird Notes in this newsletter).

Flocks of Brent Geese remained around the 1,300 mark during 1st 3 months of the year but built up in the 2nd winter period with a maximum count of 2000 on Cley Marshes on 21st November. The flocks carried a few Pale-bellied birds in each period with a maximum of 16 (incl. two families with broods of 3 & 5) at Cley on 10th February. One Black Brant was seen regularly in January and early February but in the 2nd winter period there was only a single unconfirmed report of one in the Square.

Of the resident geese, the maximum counts this year were 594 Greylags, 67 Egyptians and 203 Canadas. These numbers were slightly lower than last year for Greylags and Egyptians but higher for Canadas.

There were no rare geese in the Square during the year (except escapes) but a drake American Wigeon took up residence for a month in early January and a Green-winged Teal showed on and off for a month from mid-November. Redheaded Smews were seen at Cley and Blakeney Freshes during January.

Maximum daily duck counts within the Square.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Shelduck	330	180	167	74	108	68	58	26	31	65	373	206
Wigeon	658	442	172	17	6	13	6	18	242	888	612	600
Gadwall	87	49	57	33	68	112	25	14	66	50	29	22
Teal	506	382	81	55	19	68	79	348	1005	1828	874	567
Mallard	109	88	84	32	33	55	78	219	124	69	87	116
Pintail	100	51	10	3	2		7	3	16	76	142	234
Garganey				4	2	3		1	2			
Shoveler	24	28	34	20	14	8	4	4	52	57	43	26
Pochard	1	1	17	14	9	1	2	4	2	3	8	5
Tufted Duck	70	56	12	15	19	19	14	4	4	3	15	

Waders

There were three rare waders this year. The displaying Great Snipe which was present for around a week in May, this was seen by many but could be elusive and was dipped by many more. A Lesser Yellowlegs, present at the same time, was easier to see. Then the Western Sandpiper at the end of the year which was much more obliging, but no more on this as you can read about that in the 'Bird News' earlier in this newsletter.

Amongst the scarcer waders up to 5 Temminck's Stints were seen between the 4th and 19th May with another 2 or 3 in early August. Single Jack Snipe were reported during October from Blakeney Point (2 days), Cley (2 days) and Kelling Heath (1 day) and 1-2 were seen on and off at Kelling between 30th September and 6th November. Additionally a single bird was seen coming in off the sea at Cley on 9th December. A Pectoral Sandpiper was at Cley from the 4th to the 14th August with another on 18th September. There was only one confirmed sighting of Dotterel this year, on the shingle at Cley on 10th September, but there was an anonymous report on 3rd October. Single Red-necked Phalaropes were on the scrapes at Cley on 26-28th August, and on-and-off from 31st October till 8th November. The only confirmed sighting of a Grey Phalarope on the scrapes at Cley was on 16th September. Sightings over the sea were reported on 10 days between 7th October and 5th December with 4 off Blakeney on the 20th October and Kelling on 16th November.

The following table shows the monthly maxima counts recorded for a species (at a single site within the Square)..

Maximum counts for waders

Days Recorded	Species	Maxima counts (single site)											
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
325	Oystercatcher	248	316	297	280	265	215	377	645	223	257	266	212
331	Avocet	23	62	196	250	115	189	161	52	6	10	20	20
148	Little Ringed Plover			5	9	8	5	14	13	6			
290	Ringed Plover	119	50	27	22	269	62	37	400	175	60	40	13
235	Golden Plover	2000	1000	400	45	28	1	16	400	200	900	1150	3000
238	Grey Plover	55	27	26	4	12	35	37	29	80	50	34	104
219	Lapwing	1079	856	194	64	49	88	138	127	221	701	866	1300
191	Knot	26	43	50	24	220	76	52	42	520	144	25	5
156	Sanderling	30	37	25	100	60	10	48	155	55	8	85	11
115	Little Stint					4	2	3	19	14	3	3	
89	Curlew Sandpiper				1	1	2	2	41	27	9		
327	Dunlin	386	280	245	28	139	21	252	510	181	310	238	187
286	Ruff	47	41	21	25	23	10	31	45	64	60	63	65
178	Snipe	8	1	8	7	7	2	3	18	21	21	15	10
39	Woodcock	20	1	1	1	1					2	12	2
341	Black-tailed Godwit	301	220	161	153	161	150	385	530	590	314	256	266
250	Bar-tailed Godwit	207	116	285	25	500	208	137	75	98	45	88	25
145	Whimbrel				23	31	5	83	66	50	4	1	1
334	Curlew	136	135	80	47	100	121	132	487	194	315	110	302
100	Common Sandpiper				3	6	1	6	8	3			
129	Green Sandpiper				2	2	7	12	12	9	4	1	
183	Spotted Redshank	2	2	2	2	4	10	8	15	6	2	5	1
168	Greenshank	1	1	1	19	19	3	8	11	8	6	3	1
66	Wood Sandpiper				1	10	1	3	3		1	1	
331	Redshank	166	58	111	72	37	94	140	117	102	173	134	57
273	Turnstone	107	42	23	69	32	21	68	47	72	106	88	39

Seabirds

This year's top sighting was of a Yelkouen Shearwater which flew west past beach car park, Cley at 7.44am on 29th August. Although quite close in, it was only seen by a few observers. As this species is not yet accepted onto the British List it may prove impossible to get this record accepted.

Other rare seabirds seen this year included 2 Cory's Shearwaters on 13th September, single Leaches Petrels on 6th & 7th November and a single redhead Smew which flew W past Cley on 18th December. A single Black Guillemot was seen on 25th July and then on 6 days between 20th October and 17th December – were these sightings all of the same bird?

The following table shows the distribution of sightings of the more common seabirds over the year.

	Days Recorded												Max count	
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Date
Scaup	1									2	5		17	16-Nov
Eider	11	8	9	15	5	2	7	8	7	11	15	3	105	24-Feb
Long-tailed Duck	1		1							4	5	2	2	08-Oct
Common Scoter	20	8	16	18	14	14	24	13	16	21	26	15	c.600	23-Dec
Velvet Scoter	7	1					1		1	3	18	5	7	12-Nov
Goldeneye	3				1		1			4	8	4	16	31-Dec
Red-breasted Merganser	8	1	3	7	2	1	2	2	3	4	14	2	22	06-Nov
Goosander	2	2	1							1	5	5	10	12-Nov
Red-throated Diver	21	20	18	12	6	4	6	3	20	27	29	21	644	09-Feb
Black-throated Diver	1						1	1		6	13	3	c.4	28-Nov
Great Northern Diver	1	1								2	13	8	6	17-Feb
Great Crested Grebe	17	14	12	2	4		3	1	4	16	17	14	22	09-Feb
Red-necked Grebe	5	2						1		2	13	5	6	26-Nov
Slavonian Grebe	4									2	9	5	3	08-Nov
Fulmar	10	7	4	16	15	9	19	9	5				22	21-Apr
Cory's Shearwater									1				1	13-Sep
Sooty Shearwater								1	2	3	3		5	16-Sep
Manx Shearwater				1	3	2	8	3	11	8	1		550	04-Jun
Balearic Shearwater									4	7	2		3	15-Sep
Gannet	8	8	13	22	25	23	31	23	25	21	25	12	1833	15-Sep
Pomarine Skua							1		4	14	20	1	14	16-Nov
Arctic Skua					1	5	26	18	27	15	24	2	31	18-Jul
Long-tailed Skua									3				3	13-Sep
Great Skua	1						4	5	11	11	13	6	60	08-Oct
Guillemot	15	16	2	3	7	2	19	16	18	20	21	15	43	24-Oct
Razorbill	1					4	13	1	6	15	18	7	41	24-Oct
Little Auk										2	21	10	57	09-Dec
Puffin										1	2	4	1	

Gulls & Terns

Rare birds this year included 5 sightings of Sabine's Gulls between 7th October & 7th November, an apparent Baltic Gull on 29th July and a Gull-billed Tern over Kelling Quags on 18th May with another 'possible' off Cley on 24th October. A Bonaparte's Gull was seen flying W over Cley on 22nd May; during the next two days there were various reports of one at Cley & Salthouse but one of these was later identified as a 'runt' Black-headed Gull. We will await the findings of the Rarities Committees on all these birds.

Scarce birds included 5 Caspian Gulls (one, seen on 6 days, may not have been 'pure' Caspian) and at least 3 different Glaucous Gulls.

Maxima counts for common Gulls & Terns

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Kittiwake	156	9	2	90	55	40	13	1	2	344	414	4
Black-headed Gull	611	138	651	3400	1400	2000	415	613	697	600	1200	655
Little Gull				15	8	31	14	5	9	500	1500	20
Mediterranean Gull	1	1	13	11	20	12	13	2	5	2	1	
Common Gull	223	132	62	154	35	8	49	7	34	54	453	280
Lesser Black-backed Gull	4	5	9	26	9	5	22	37	86	148	8	2
Herring Gull	837	686	253	396	168	640	247	260	144	159	261	560
Yellow-legged Gull	4	1	1			1	10	10	7	5	1	1
Great Black-backed Gull	106	76	81	112	54	57	67	131	113	88	71	82
Little Tern				28	101	60	169	27	4			
Black Tern				5	2	1	6	3	42	2	1	
Sandwich Tern			200	1750	2530	4500	1467	244	252	38	7	2
Common Tern				20	22	54	240	219	539	5	1	
Roseate Tern							1	1	1			
Arctic Tern				3	4	6	46	3	3	3		

Other Birds

Other rarities reported this year by month:

- March: Hooded Crow – seen on and off until October, were all sightings the same bird?
- April: Great Egret at Cley/Blakeney GM; Eastern Subalpine Warbler on the Point; Raven at Cley; Little Bunting on the Point.
- May: Red-footed Falcon on the Point; Red-rumped Swallow at Salthouse; Citrine Wagtail near Cley windmill; Common Rosefinch at Walsey Hills.
- August: Two Greenish Warblers on the Point
- September: Cattle Egret west of Cley; 2 Great Egrets over Cley which then landed on the Freshes; Red-rumped Swallow at Cley; Citrine Wagtail at Cley.
- October: Cattle Egret at Blakeney Freshes and other coastal sites which stayed until late November; Pallid (or Common?) Swift at Cley & Blakeney; Red-throated Pipit at Salthouse; Siberian Chiffchaff on the Point; Raven at Cley.
- November: 2 Dusky Warblers on the Point.

As with all other rarities mentioned in this report, these are subject to acceptance by the relevant Rarities Committees.

Not on the rarities list but worthy of mention was the White-tailed Eagle which was first seen over Kelling Heath on 4th April then gave many the run-around along the ridge on the following day.

Spoonbills became more frequent visitors in 2011 with them being reported in the Square on 210 days.

Less positive was the situation with Cuckoos and Nightingales. Cuckoos were reported from nine sites between 16th April and 29th June. Most were only heard or seen on one day, but Cley had reports on 9 days, Kelling WM 3 days and Kelling Heath 4. Only 12 reports of Nightingales were received; a single on Blakeney Point (1 day) then from The Hangs, Lawn Farm, Salthouse Heath crossroads and Lowes Farm at the E end of the Heath. Please report all sightings (or hearings) of these birds to us this summer so we can see if they are declining or are just under-reported.

Other Matters

Apart from the birds a few changes happened in the Square during the year to improve the habitat for the birds and us humans.

On Cley and Salthouse Marshes the NWT carried out some major works. Early in the year more fences were replaced and new cattle pens were built to improve the grazing on the reserve. In July, after the main breeding season, any of you visiting the reserve will not have failed to notice Pat's Pool being dried out and then the excavation squad coming in. This all looked drastic but the silted up pool was soon dug out and by the end of the month it was being filled with water again and within a few days some ducks and then waders returned. This scrape has since proved very popular with the autumn and winter birds. After that new bridges and culverts were built over the drains at both Cley and Salthouse to enable livestock to move freely (when gates are opened) across the marshes allowing ease of evacuation next time the sea overtops the shingle. This together with fencing will mean cattle can be put onto previously ungrazed areas improving the habitat for birds. The last work of the season was to build a hard path along the southern side of the reserve parallel to the Coast road. This now means there is a good path from the village right along to East Bank, so people no longer have to walk on the road because of the mud.

Away from the coast, on the heathlands, intensive management was carried out at both Kelling Heath SSI and Salthouse Heath in the winter periods and is expected to have immediate and longer term benefits for wildlife, especially birds and insects. Both groups of trustees here are lucky to have, in Kevin Jones, a very keen and conscientious person to carry out the work.

Summary

This has been a brief summary of what has been happening in the Square this year. More details of specific sightings can be found in the Bird Notes in this and previous issues of this newsletter. Similarly detailed reports of breeding birds for were given in Newsletter 91. If you would like further details of birds seen at any one site or across the Square, please contact us and we will be happy to provide them.

Once more, many thanks go to all of you who sent in records or who wrote in the logs in the hides at Cley or the NWT Visitor Centre. We received over 28,000 separate sightings in 2011 which have made this report possible, so please keep up the good work and continue to send us records in 2012. As mentioned above records without names cannot be accepted though they will be recorded. If writing in the logs please give your name (not initials unless we know you) and if the sighting is unusual, contact details would be helpful. As well as significant records being passed to the Norfolk County Recorders in future all records will be loaded into the BTO's Birdtrack database enabling them to be used in future surveys. This means all your reports are important and will be made good use of.

Pat & David Wileman

Address at front of newsletter

Cley Bird Club welcomes the following new members

BT and PS Pottle, Mrs P J Gillings, Mr and Mrs W Sadler, Mr and Mrs A Parker, Ms D Skingle

Mr and Mrs G W Dyson

Newsletter March 2012

SNIPPETS

Peter Gooden

Brendan Joyce, leader of Norfolk Wildlife Trust, has been awarded the prestigious Christopher Cadbury medal for an outstanding contribution to nature conservation. He is the first Norfolk naturalist to receive the silver medallion, presented every 3 years by the wildlife trusts. Under his guidance membership of NWT has grown from 12,500 in 1995 to 35,000 members today and Brendan agrees that the development of Cley Marshes nature reserve and its award winning visitor centre is one of his most important successes. Our warmest congratulations to him and the staff who support him.

The 13 surviving spoon-billed sandpiper chicks from northeast Russia, reported in the last newsletter, eventually reached WWT Slimbridge in November. They travelled by road, sea and air and spent time in quarantine. Let's hope the WWT's breeding programme is successful.

The first known species of orchid, *Bulbophyllum nocturnam*, which has flowers that open at night and close at first light has been discovered on New Britain Island, near Papua, New Guinea, reported experts from Kew Gardens in November. Flowers that open at night are seen in very few plants and none has been previously recorded in the 25,000 species of orchid.

At RSPB's Strumpshaw Fen otters are seen almost daily and improvements to water quality, general habitat, maintaining waterways and ensuring a good fish population has resulted in a regular breeding female and others, which ignore visitors and swim past hides. RSPB's mid-Yare reserves, including Strumpshaw, are thought to be home to 3 territorial males, 4 or 5 breeding females and a number of young males – as well as an increasing number of rare birds.

British butterflies are heading north as global temperatures rise, according to a study by academics at the universities of Bristol and Sheffield. Climate change is causing some species, such as the brown argus to adapt to new habitats and food for its caterpillars. On the wider picture a 10 year assessment of butterfly species distribution and population, by Butterfly Conservation, shows that almost three quarters of British butterfly species have decreased in population in the last decade – 72% of species declined in abundance and the distribution, or geographical range, of 54% of butterflies fell. The deterioration of suitable habitat is believed to be the main reason.

The BTO reported, at the end of last year, that all 5 tagged cuckoos arrived in the Congo, all within a few miles of each other, and Chris Hurson, research ecologist at BTO, expressed surprise at how close to the equator they remained. The birds may well have begun their return migration to the UK, fingers crossed that all 5 make it.

A dwarf sperm whale, the first ever seen in British waters, was sighted, photographed and confirmed off Penzance last year. This is the 29th species of cetacean recorded off Britain. Quite small, the maximum length it reaches is 9ft and the dwarf sperm whale, warm water

and deep water species, are seldom seen anywhere and little is known about their social and reproductive behaviour.

Robert Gilmour has designed a host of stamps for Royal Mail over the past 2 years at his studio in Cley and his brilliant lino prints of birds have been immensely popular, especially with philatelists. Now his final sets – sheep breeds (February); Pigs (April) and cattle breeds in September will complete his work.

A majority of conservationists contacted in a poll said the notion that some threatened species should be allowed to become extinct is worthy of consideration. Of 584 questioned 60% agreed that criteria should be established for deciding which species to abandon to allow focus on saving others. A spokesman for the International Union of Conservation in Geneva said we will inevitably lose species but there will be disagreements on priorities. There are 17,000 species under threat, so choices must be made depending on many parameters. Murray Rudd, of the University of York, ran the survey and said most large conservation organisations have check lists for prioritising their efforts and also that making a choice would not be straightforward.

RSPB Scotland has stated that the number of white-tailed eagles in the UK has risen to around the same number as before they became extinct 100+ years ago. A successful breeding season in the west of Scotland, with 57 territorial pairs producing 43 young, plus 16 chicks, a gift from Norway, being released in the east of the country, have helped the total whilst extending the range.

During the winter Japan again dispatched its controversial whaling fleet to the Antarctic and Michihiko Kano, Japanese Fisheries Minister, said that increased protection would be given to the fleet against action by the Shepherd conservation Society. Mr Kano said Japan intended pursuing the resumption of commercial whaling, banned since 1986, and that they needed to continue scientific whaling, which governments dismiss a cynical pretext. The Japanese Government makes no secret of the fact that the flesh of the hundreds of animals killed ends up in the commercial market.

In January, near Droitwich, Worcestershire kingfishers were photographed diving through a hole in the frozen surface of a lake and successfully catching fish, described by the photographer, Mark Hancox, as “incredible ingenuity”.

In Hlangwe National Park, Zimbabwe at least 77 elephants, including 18 calves, died in the latter months of last year – due to a heatwave drying up the waterholes. The Parks and Wildlife Authority said that from September it was as hot as 40c, far higher than usual..

The RSPB has warned, yet again that the hen harrier could disappear from England, for the second time, because of continued illegal trapping and shooting. An RSPB survey, with Natural England, found that only 4 nesting pairs, all in a single estate, in the Forest of Bowland, Lancashire raised young. This is believed to be the lowest population in England since the hen harrier was reintroduced in the 960s after dying out in the late 19th century,

Zoologists at Deep Sea World in North Queensferry, Fife were thrilled when an endangered angel shark, called Anne, gave birth, over 3 weeks, of 19 pups. Talk about hard labour!

Britain has drawn up plans for a 1 million square kilometre marine protection zone around the island of South Georgia – a rich habitat for penguins, killer whales and Patagonian toothfish. It will cause a furious reaction from Argentina – at least a diplomatic confrontation. Argentina, like the UK is a signatory of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Living Resources but that might be overlooked. The plan, co-ordinated with Britain will be formally announced by South Georgia and will allow local authorities to place strict bans on the slaughter of whales and other wildlife and fishing will be permitted only in designated areas.

Handlers in an animal park in Kuming, China were surprised to find that a ram, named Changmao had mated with 7 deer- no report as yet of any offspring but the deer think very highly of him! And at a farm in Desborough, Northamptonshire an 11-month old texel ram, unsurprisingly called Randy, jumped over a 5ft fence into a field where West Lodge Rural Centre's 109 ewes were being held and managed to father 33 lambs in just 24 hours before he was caught. 13 of his offspring had already been born in January and 20 ewes were expecting. One of the farmers said when ewes come into season they produce a perfume that drives rams mad. If they could bottle it they'd make a fortune!!

Blakeney Point's grey seal population had its best breeding season in 2011 and with some 770 new pups spotted, has grown to its greatest ever size.

The effect of the ever-increasing number of windfarms in and around the UK have not been properly assessed and little account is taken, by developers and planning authorities, of flyways. RSPB Scotland research on upland windfarms found breeding population densities of such as curlew and hen harrier reduced by 50% when nests were located within 500m of a turbine. In Morecambe Bay a development of two 125m tall wind turbines was given the go-ahead by a judge, despite local opposition and the fact that the turbines will be only 5km from an important feeding ground for geese. The judge admitted the turbines could lead to the death of some 50 geese each year. US government estimates suggest wind turbines kill about 1 bird every minute, 440,000 every year! At Altamont Pass, California some 2,700 birds are killed annually including 1,100 raptors – 70 golden eagles part of them. Ten white-eagles were killed on Smola, a Norwegian island and a griffon vulture was filmed in collision with a rotor blade on Crete. Surely there should be far more consultation on the siting of wind turbines with Natural England and other conservation bodies before planning permission, seemingly on the nod, is given.

The critically endangered Javan rhinoceros has been wiped out in Vietnam, when poachers killed the country's last one for its horn. The only remaining Java rhinos are now believed to be a group of less than 50 in Indonesia. There are none in captivity. Meanwhile the International Union for Conservation of Nature said, November, that Africa's black rhino is extinct and 2 other subspecies are close to the same fate. The ICUN also said the northern white rhino of Central Africa was now "possibly extinct" in the wild. The group cited commercial poaching as the main threat, but said that conservation programmes had brought the Southern white rhino back from the brink.

A 9-year search for a dormouse in Dorset finally came to fruition for conservationists, who put out nesting tubes beside the A351 near Corfe Castle, in which a dormouse was found, in a hedgerow. The conservationists became convinced that a few lived on the Isle of Purbeck after half-chewed hazelnuts were found. If at first

Three decades of on-the-ground monitoring of peregrine nests; wildlife crime records and remotely sensed data was used to explore the impact of grouse moor management on peregrine falcon populations. The research showed peregrines breeding or attempting to breed on grouse moors have had only half the success they have had on equally suitable habitat – open country, other moorland and forested areas. Only one of the nests on grouse moors produced chicks, but the fledged young did well enough to show there is no shortage of food. The logical explanation for the differences is that persecution is rife on many driven grouse moors,

Icelandic whalers, since 2006, have killed 280 fin whales, the second largest animal on the planet, despite the international ban on commercial whaling. Iceland has exported almost 400 tonnes of fin whale meat and blubber to Japan, worth some 18 million US dollars, since it began killing fin whales and last June alone exported 133 tonnes of whale products to Japan. The Icelanders temporarily ceased the killing in the latter part of 2011 but planned to resume the killing this year.

New cameras have been installed on Norfolk Cathedral's spire to give close-up views of the pair of peregrines who are now resident there. The Hawk and Owl Trust's staff and volunteers, with help from firefighters and the cathedral's foreman fixed the cameras to overlook the nesting platform installed last year.

Matthew Gonshaw, from Bow, East London, was jailed for 6 months after he admitted stealing hundreds of birds' eggs, The RSPB told Thames Magistrates almost 700 eggs were found in his home – including 5 golden eagles from nests in Scotland and 12 avocets from Two Tree Island in Essex. This is the fourth time he has been jailed for similar offences. Described by the RSPB as “a serial menace” Gonshaw was banned last month by Stratford Magistrates from visiting Scotland during the breeding season, February 1 to August 31, and from all RSPB land and any owned by the Wildlife Trust until 2022.

A pioneering survey by researchers at the University of East Anglia's School of Environmental Sciences has found that the Broads is a haven for an incredible 25% of the nation's rarest species. It has long been known that such as the swallowtail butterfly and Norfolk hawker dragonfly are restricted to the region and an exhaustive examination recognised of 1.5 million records has disclosed that many more previously species are known solely in the Broads. They range from the Broads dolly fly and slender amber snail to the scarce and rare moth – marsh neb. The survey is expected to be a great boost for tourism.

Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve, near Fakenham, has deservedly received the national Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge recognising its education programme, which promotes outdoor learning. The award aims at making it easier for teachers to take groups out of the classroom to learn more about the environment and open evenings are held at Sculthorpe for group leaders and teachers to find out the educational facilities available.

At Donna Nook, near North Somercotes, Lincolnshire, in December up to 75 seal pups were thought to have died after a series of high tides hit the colony. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust closed the reserve to give seals a chance to find each other without being frightened by sightseers.

The Island Mere hide at RSPB Minsmere has been replaced by a modern, spacious facility – giving improved viewing across the reedbed and mere.

Nineteen black rhino were drugged and airlifted, using helicopters, from South Africa's Eastern Cape to new breeding grounds in northern Limpopo province. The operation, orchestrated by the WWF, resulted from rising poaching driven by increasing demand for rhino horn from booming Asian middle classes. A single horn can fetch as much as £50,000. Robert Cottingham was duck hunting, with his dog Pipper, in Box Elder County, Utah, USA and was in a skiff in a shallow marsh area. Mr C. got out of the boat to retrieve a wounded mallard, laying his 12-bore shotgun across the bow of the boat; Pippa jumped up, trod on the gun and fired pellets into his master's behind from only 10 feet. Assistance was summoned and 27 pellets were removed from Mr C's bottom. The biter well and truly bit – I like that!!

British Antarctic Survey scientists are surveying the Pine Island Glacier in Western Antarctica, known as the “weak underbelly” of the Antarctic to discover how rapidly the ice is melting. Scientists believe the glacier is one of the fastest melting regions of the continent. Dr Andy Smith, leader of the 3 month mission, which will work in temperatures of –33c, 800 miles from the nearest fixed research base, said that when Antarctic ice sheets melt away, they take away some of the resistance holding back the glacier and that the loss of the glacier would be a major contribution to rising sea levels.

Reed Warbler numbers on canals and waterways managed by British Waterways have increased by 48%, due to better water quality and reedbed habitat.

Poachers killed a park ranger and 2 gorillas, in September, near Lobeke National Park, Camaroon. The gorillas, shot for bushmeat, would have fetched a maximum of \$200. Jail sentences are minimal – if caught poachers get only 2 to 3 months in jail.

At Fulbourn, Cambridge, a soundtrack of birdcalls has helped to protect one of the country's last colonies – and East Anglia's largest population, of swifts. They were identified in pre-fabricated properties being replaced with modern homes and special bird boxes were built into cavity walls - the while a CD playing nesting calls was used to attract birds to their new homes. Rob Mungovan, South Cambridgeshire District Council's ecology officer was given the Tony Bradshaw award by the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management for the novel approach.

A new law passed by the Brazilian Senate could reverse international progress to halt deforestation. The bill relaxes rules on the amount of land farmers must preserve as forest and provides an amnesty on fines for illegal logging carried out by farmers before 2008. Green groups say it will undermine protection for the forest - and make it hard for Brazil to meet its pledges to reduce deforestation - which accounts for nearly a fifth of the world's total greenhouse gas output. The director of Greenpeace Brazil said the law would be “a disaster for the Amazon and all Brazilian forests:

Chris Skinner, a keen conservationist, who farms in Norfolk was advised to let a 150m stretch of hedge be allowed to grow very tall. He did so and by 2011 it had reached some 25 feet high and attracted a pair of late-arriving turtle doves – the first seen on the farm for 15 years. Happily the pair raised 2 young, which fledged in August.

Petty bureaucrats in North Devon Council decided the great spectacle of starlings coming to roost, watched locally and nationally by millions on TV, is a threat to health in Barnstaple because their droppings are potentially dangerous and could cause salmonella, usually associated with food poisoning. Their remedy? They had all the trees and shrubs around St Peter's Church, where about 1,000 starlings nested. This action was rightly branded 'ludicrous'.

Two sunken islands, each as big as Tasmania, have been found in the Indian Ocean. They may once have formed a land link between Australia and India and when the two landmasses broke apart the link was left stranded and eventually sank. Meanwhile volcanologists say that an undersea volcano erupting off the smallest of the 7 Canary Islands, may be the first stirrings of a new island. From some 850ft below the surface the volcano, 3 miles off the south coast of El Hierro, has been spewing gases and lava – some coming spectacularly to the surface

In Beebe, Arkansas, USA on New Year's Eve 2010 some 5000 blackbirds plummeted down from the sky and died on impact – cause unknown at the time. Incredibly on New Year's Eve 2011 blackbirds again rained down on the same town and died – causes then unknown. However, research has shown that the blackbirds, which are a flocking species like the starling, were probably scared out of their roosts by celebratory fireworks, became disorientated in the dark and crash-landed having flown into each other.

Harvest mice bred successfully in captivity for several months last year at Natural Surroundings nature reserve on the Bayfield Estate, Glandford, Holt (off the Letheringsett – Wiveton road). In the spring some will be released into the wild but visitors will still be able to find some in captivity.

Novelist Sir Terry Pratchett is backing an appeal to raise £4.4 million to build a 'state of the ark' wildlife hospital, The proposed site is at a World Animal Centre in East Huntspill, Somerset, where there has been an animal sanctuary for a decade.

Naturalists report a growing phenomenon of pet parrots that have been taught to repeat phrases before escaping are passing on the technique to wild bird flocks Don't be surprised if a bird on your feeder calls you "Pretty Polly".

Killer whales, including a mother and calf, were seen 100 yards off the Cornish coast in December – a very rare occurrence, they are usually found around Iceland, Norway and northern Scotland. Surfers were warned to stay clear. Even more surprising former, long-serving Norfolk Bird Recorder Giles Dunmore and another birder, Phil Viner spotted a killer whale off Sheringham last month. Giles has seen killer whales before in other locations and, being sure of his identification, contacted Dave Leech, County Mammal Recorder, who said it was the first ever sighting of a killer whale off Norfolk and that, bearing in mind Giles' experience this was regarded as a reputable record. Once Giles submitted a detailed written report and a sketch of the sighting it could be officially recorded.

Years ago The Portobello Inn, near Worcester, has been forced to hand back to Hereford Museum a 37lb stuffed pike. The 46" fish, in a glass case, had pride of place in the inn and had been stolen from the museum 50. Records show it was caught as far back as 1910 on the River Wye. Another that got away!

Eclectus parrots live in Australia and on neighbouring islands. Females make nests in the hollow of trees, which can be flooded in heavy rain, and when this happens mothers sometimes kill their male young – allowing the females to live. Robert Heinsohn, of the Australian National University in Canberra, who made an 8 year survey of 42 nest hollows, suggests that because female offspring fledge a week earlier they have a better chance of surviving during floods and, from the mother's point of view it makes sense to kill the males, which are differently coloured, to save the energy required to care for it. Carried to an extreme this behaviour could cause an excess of female birds who would struggle to find mates.

The illegal trade in ivory reached record levels in 2011 as poachers slaughtered elephants to meet the growing demand from the far east. In 23 years of compiling ivory seizures data 2011 was the worst ever – there were 13 major seizures in the year, totalling about 23 tonnes, representing the killing of some 2,500 elephants. Add the ivory not impounded and the total of elephants killed is utterly appalling.

Between 2005 and 2010 nearly 3,500 whales and other cetaceans were stranded on the British coastline, almost 1,000 being in Scotland. The Zoological Society of London is trying to record all strandings and said there had been a rise in the number of hump backed whales but a drop in the number of porpoises, about half of which had died of starvation or disease.

The RSPB's 200 nature reserves generate £66m from the 2 million visits they receive every year. They also support 1872 jobs.

As the seas warm the Antarctic abyss is being invaded by huge crabs more than a metre across. Over a million king crabs, from further north have colonised Palmer deep, a basin on the Antarctic peninsular continental shelf and are laying waste to the landscape and have wiped out the local wildlife – they eat literally anything. The crabs threaten to ruin ecosystems that have evolved over 14 million years.

Singing pairs of plain-tailed wrens perform intimate duets in which they alternate syllables so quickly it sounds like a single bird singing. Researchers discovered that the brains of both birds process the entire duet, not just their individual part. The research involved recording duets sung by the wrens in the bamboo forests of Ecuador's Antisana volcano, and suggested that the male birds paid more attention to the female's contribution to the melody than their own. It figures!

The Indonesian Government is still failing to enforce laws protecting orang - utans and does not prosecute perpetrators and some 1,000 Bornean orang-utans living on the Indonesian side of Borneo are being killed each year – 54% being killed for bushmeat and 10% while raiding crops. The continuing loss of habitat has decreased numbers to 69,000 only left in the wild as their habitat is being lost to palm oil plantations.

Travel in the Arctic, notoriously difficult, is becoming even harder as climate changes and rising winter temperatures causes vital ice roads to melt earlier. So a Canadian firm, Discovery Air has signed a contract with the UK's Hybrid Air Vehicles to buy some 45 lighter-than-air vehicles to be used across Canada's Northwest Territories. HAVs are not strictly airships – they use inert gas helium to lift and lift also comes from their design. They can carry 50 tonnes if they take off like an aeroplane and around 30 tonnes if they take off vertically.

Fossils of a bizarre sabre-toothed squirrel have been unearthed from 95-million-year-old rocks in Argentina, rich in the remains of giant sauropod and theropod dinosaurs.

Authorities in Thailand rescued nearly 100 endangered pangolins, worth c£20,000, which were destined for food in either Vietnam or China, where the anteaters are considered an aphrodisiac.

The future for Blakeney Freshmarsh – an update

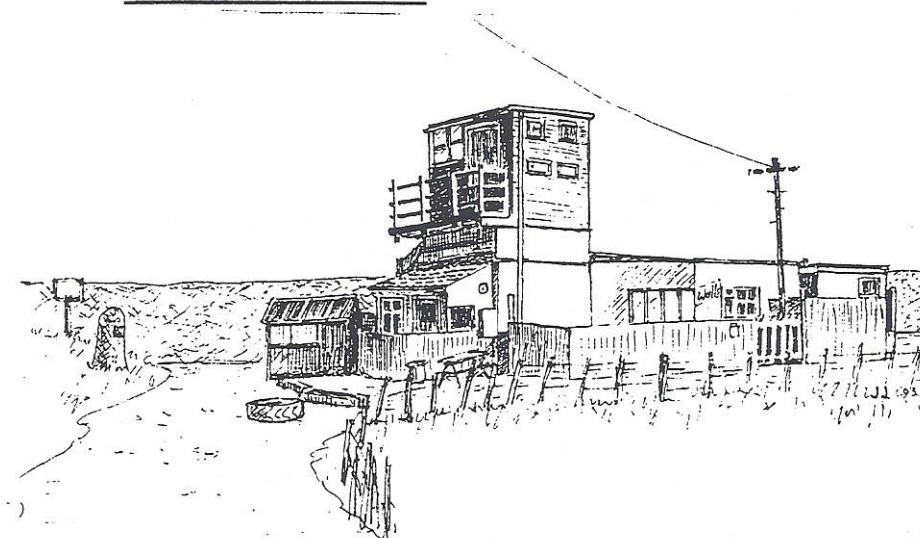
In the November 2011 Newsletter a report was made on the response of the Env. Agency to a proposal by the C.B.C. for the retention of Blakeney Freshmarsh. The E.A. stated that, subject to a full investigation of possible works affecting the freshmarsh, they would carry out consultations with all affected parties, prior to forming any detailed proposals.

At that time a response from the N.W.T. and the National Trust had not been received, however their comments have now been obtained. Both trusts have confirmed that they have concerns about the possible use of the freshmarsh to receive intertidal flows. They, along with C.B.C. and other consultants will no doubt, express their views when the E.A. come forward with their detailed proposals. We look forward to hearing from the E.A., in the due course, and will report, via a future newsletter.

Tony Aberdein

To bring back happy memories from Newsletter 39 March

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