

WVBS Newsletter

March 2021



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We are delighted to receive articles and photographs from members to brighten up our Newsletter. Where pictures of Birds are submitted, if possible, we may wish to include them in the Members Gallery on our website. Any photographs displayed would be credited to the individual who has submitted them and appropriately copyright protected. If you prefer not to have your photographs displayed on the website please let us know.

The deadline for articles for next month's newsletter is Monday 5th April

Your Committee

President	Alwyn Jackson
Chairman	Keith Walker
Recorder	David Gibbons
Treasurer	Martin Spriggs
Secretary	Lin Pateman
Membership Secretary	Richard Norris (co-opted)
Newsletter Editor	Alan Hughes
Publicity	Sue Gale
Committee Members	Mary Walker
	Nick Edwards
	Ray Gribble
	Emily Leonard
	David Laurie

Forthcoming Events

Please note that if you have your name down for any outdoor event and are unable to attend at the last moment for any reason, please advise the Event Leader at the earliest opportunity. This is especially important where there is a limit on numbers on particular walks, so that those on a waiting list can be included.

Due to the ongoing Covid 19 problem, all indoor meetings at the **Great Witchingham Village Hall** have been cancelled.

**Thursday 18th March
7.15 for 7.30 pm**

**Zoom presentation: Wild Landscapes of
Norfolk**

Speaker: Nick Acheson

We are delighted to welcome back Nick Acheson who is one of the NWT ambassadors. He will be in more reflective mood than his last visit, when he spoke about conservation. The presentation will be about our beloved Norfolk. Hopefully this will give us inspiration for exploring our fabulous county, when the shackles are loosened as we emerge from Covid. For those of you who have not heard Nick speak, he is a caring, passionate, articulate and widely travelled naturalist and his talks are not to be missed.

Here is the link to the Zoom presentation:-

Topic: Nick Acheson

Time: Mar 18, 2021 07:30 PM London

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82037373349?pwd=eXdWbmtvb1A4emovS213eW1MdGN5dz09>

Meeting ID: 820 3737 3349

Passcode: 467723

**Tuesday 30th March
7.30pm**

NarVOS Zoom presentation: Wicken Fen

Speaker: Ajay Tegala

Ajay Tegala, has previously worked at Lindisfarne, then as a Wildlife Ranger at Blakeney Point and is now working at Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire. He has made appearances with Chris Packham on Springwatch Unsprung and other TV programmes and has, on occasion been heard on BBC Radio 4 and Radio Norfolk.

Wicken Fen, one of Europe's most important wetlands, supports an abundance of wildlife. There are more than 9000 species, including a spectacular array of plants, birds and dragonflies. Ajay will present an overview of his work at this iconic reserve.

Once again, Ian Black, Chair of NarVOS has kindly invited all WVBS members to share this presentation. Please follow the Zoom link to access this meeting:

Topic: NarVOS Monthly Meeting - Ajay Tegala

Time: Mar 30, 2021 19:30 London

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88317560980?pwd=eGoxbms3OGlkWEsb0JkMVJDYVQzZz09>

Meeting ID: 883 1756 0980

Passcode: 929289

**Thursday 15th April 2021
7.15 for 7.30pm**

**Zoom Annual General Meeting followed by a
presentation from Allan Hale: "Chile from
Top to Bottom"**

Members are invited to join the 2021 virtual AGM which will be followed by a talk from our favourite presenter, Allan Hale.

He seems to have travelled more than Alan Wicker and this time will regale us with his Chilean birding adventures which start from Atacama Desert in the north to Tierra Del Fuego in the south, along with several sites in between and including a pelagic trip into the Pacific.

We need 25 members to participate to form a quorum so please support the event if you can.
The Agenda for the AGM will be as follows:-

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 18th April 2019 (attached to this email).
3. Matters Arising.
4. Chairman's Report (attached to this email).
5. Treasurer's Report & Accounts for year ending 31st Dec 2020 (attached to this email).
6. Election of Officers and Committee.
7. A.O.B.

The link is as follows:-

wvbs webmaster is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: AGM - Allan Hale
Time: Apr 15, 2021 07:30 PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82787787969?pwd=ZzRPNFhoSUt2ZFZHZzlwTGVMR1BFdz09>

Meeting ID: 827 8778 7969
Passcode: 289364

Sunday 25th April

Field Trip to Winterton

Leader/coordinator: Sue Gale

All being well we will meet at the beach Car park at 9.00 am. There is a parking charge but it is often possible to park in the village if preferred. There is a free car park on entry to the village but it was closed when I was last there. We will be restricted to groups of 6. with a maximum of 12 people, so it is essential to book if you wish to come along. I propose to walk along the southern dunes first, looking for migrants, Stonechats etc, and later the Northern dunes. At some point a seawatch might be worthwhile, for seals as well as birds. We might see Green Woodpeckers, Skylarks and even Dartford Warblers. With luck, some Little Terns will be back. The order may change if something of interest is reported. It is possible to walk quite a distance on the dunes, especially towards the North, and it is often further away that birds are seen - so be prepared to walk. Depending on progress and people's wishes we could relocate to Horsey or Waxham after lunch. Cranes are worth looking out for in both areas. When I have names I will be able to update people on parking and itinerary nearer the time. To book this, please email me at suegale98@gmail.com or text on 07881 923120.



Chirpings from the Chair

By Keith Walker

Outdoor Meetings

The anticipation is mounting after the introduction of the Covid Roadmap and if all goes to plan, we can start to participate in Outdoor Meetings, in small groups from 29th March. Our first scheduled walk is set for 25th April, which is being organised by Sue Gale, and further details are contained in this Newsletter.

Our thoughts are to stay relatively local and not to get too far ahead in terms of planning until there is confidence that we will not be faced with the need to reschedule things.

One of our greatest challenges is to find members who are prepared to organise an outdoor meeting, and we hope to persuade some of our more experienced birders to take us round their part of Norfolk, so don't be surprised if we tap you on the shoulder. We will gladly help with arrangements on the day and produce material for the Newsletter if assistance is required.

Chris Stone who has been delighting us with his postings about the Tiffey Valley on our WhatsApp group is the first to volunteer and we will accompany him round his patch on Saturday 29th May 2021. Full details will appear in our April Newsletter.

By all means let me or Ray Gribble know if you think you can help.

Lin Pateman

Huge thanks to Lin who has decided, after fourteen years, to stand down from the committee. She has undertaken the responsibilities of Club Secretary with tremendous enthusiasm and commitment and has always been the welcoming and friendly face to members. Additionally, she has played a very active role in organising trips, functions, and educational activities and she will be hugely missed.

AGM

Lin's departure does, of course, leave a vacancy for a Club Secretary, which Lin confirms is not onerous and is a much slimmed-down role. The prime responsibilities will be the taking

of minutes at our committee meetings and distributing them, and also maintaining an archive for club records.

We are hopeful that members will come forward to join the committee for 2021/22, it's not as daunting as it sounds and we try to make it light-hearted and sociable. If you are willing to help fill our vacancies then please either let Alan Hughes, who is organising the AGM, or me know.

Club Subscriptions 2021/22

I previously advised that because of the impact of Covid on our finances, that we would waive subscriptions for the year commencing 1st April 2021, providing you paid your subs last year. This is a gentle reminder for those who pay by Bankers Standing Order that they need to amend the next due date to 1st April 2022.

In the event of monies being received this year, we will happily refund any sums paid in error if you contact us. It may be that some members are content to leave the payment in place and in the absence of any contact, sums received will be treated as a donation to club funds.

WVBS Website

I am delighted to announce the much-vaunted revamp of the clubs website has now been launched – you can still find it on the same address – www.wvbs.co.uk .

There has been a huge amount of work from our member Emily Leonard who in my opinion has done a brilliant job in totally redesigning the site.

Our reason to change was to modernise our offering, which is mainly used by non-members and is a valuable aid to recruiting new people. We wanted a site which offered a digital recording system which our old host could not accommodate, and one which was more friendly for mobile phone users. We were also facing issues with problems updating the security features, which were in conflict with some of the historic custom-made content.

We still need to undertake further development over the next few months, but needed to migrate to our new host before we could add a new sub domain to facilitate the digital recording. Over the next few weeks we will create and transfer various data files of bird names and members details and will contact members when we are ready to launch the scheme.

There are two other pages where we will add further information :-

Our Club Clothing (access via “About Us” heading)

Birdwatching sites to visit in the Wensum Valley (access via “Sightings” heading).

Our work here has been thwarted by Covid as on the Clothing page we plan to add photos of

the items for sale and we have identified appropriate models to show off the items. However, we need to get together to take the photos.

I did previously write about the Wensum Valley feature which currently does not work, and one or two members have agreed to produce some content, which will be added in the next few weeks. You will then find details if you click on a photo or roundel. There are still other locations that we need some help with and I will appeal for help again when there are some examples to use as a template.

We would really welcome some constructive criticism about the new site and would also value any comments about any problems you experience. You could even leave a message on the Contact Us system!

Just click on the link in blue www.wvbs.co.uk

Hope you all approve.

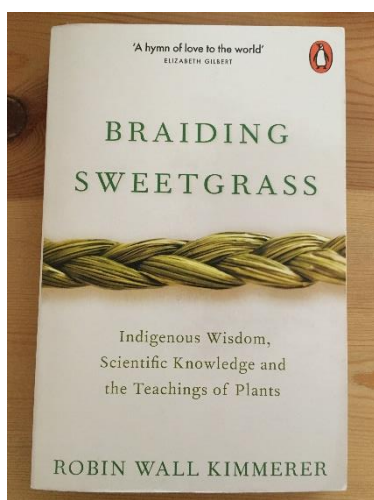
Ramblings from the Editor

By Alan Hughes

So, perhaps we can see that chink of light at the other end of the Covid lockdown tunnel now. But we are not quite there yet, and in the meantime, whilst we start planning some birding trips outside of our own local patches, here are some suggestions that I hope might help you through the next few weeks until we have some freedom back:-

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Published in 2020 by Penguin Books ISBN 978-0-141-99195-5



3 aspects of the author's life have a significant influence on this book:-

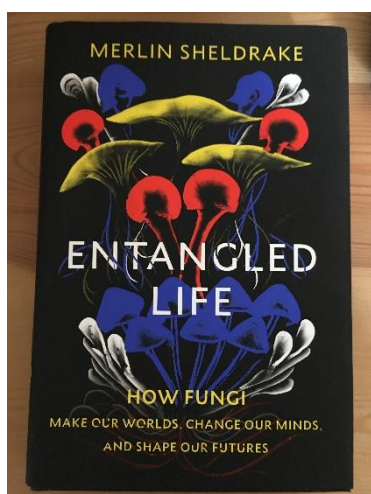
1. She is a mother, and cares deeply about her family – both her ancestral origins and the future for her offspring
2. She is an indigenous American of the Potawatomi people who, like other indigenous groups, suffered massively at the hands of white settlers, as their language, dress, ceremonies etc. were outlawed, and children were taken away from their families to be raised as white children.
3. She is an accomplished scientist – award winning botanist and professor of Environmental Biology

The subtitle of the book is Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants, and it aims to demonstrate how the objective approach of science can be hugely enriched by the ancient knowledge of indigenous people. So, it is not for everyone and, to be honest, I was sceptical at the outset. However, she completely won me over with the beauty of her writing, and her obvious deep love of the natural world. The spiritual philosophies of the indigenous Americans, and the way in which

all other natural elements of our world (plants, animals, rocks, seas, rivers etc.) are treated as non-human beings with as much right to exist and thrive as we have, are central to her arguments. Environmental degradation is the result of human exploitation of natural resources, and can only be reversed by developing a reciprocal relationship in which we express our gratitude for the “gifts” bestowed upon us and we offer compensation in terms of environmental recovery plans. Okay, so saying “sorry” and “thank you” to the plants and vegetables that are picked, I found difficult to swallow (forgive the pun).....

Entangled Life – How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures

By **Merlin Sheldrake**. Published in 2020 by The Bodley Head ISBN 9781847925206



For an equally radical look at the living world, but this time from a modern rather than an ancient perspective, I could not recommend this book highly enough. This extract from the sleeve notes describe this wonderful book more eloquently than I could:-

“...nearly all life relies in some way on fungi. These endlessly surprising organisms have no brain but can solve problems and manipulate animal behaviour with devastating precision. In giving us bread, alcohol and life-saving medicines, fungi have shaped human history, and their psychedelic properties have recently been shown to alleviate a number of mental illnesses. ...the discovery that they connect plants in

underground networks, the Wood Wide Web, is transforming the way we understand ecosystems. Yet over 90% of their species remain undocumented. Entangled Life is a mind-altering journey into a spectacular and neglected world, and shows that fungi provide a key to understanding both the planet on which we live, and life itself.”

The author is my kind of scientist – a brilliant academic, devoted field researcher, but also a kind of hippy with a passion for music (his brother, Cosmo*, is a full-time folk musician – the clue is in their names!) and an ability to think “outside the box” to give us a fascinating interpretation of his discoveries. Another good read.

***Folk on Foot – Cosmo Sheldrake**

www.folkonfoot.com

This is a regular podcast in which the presenter and founder, Matthew Bannister, visits a different British folk artist in each episode, usually in their home patch, interviews them and records a number of live performances as they walk around the area. So, what is the relevance to me as a birder? I hear you say: Well, apart from the fact that this episode features the brother of Merlin (see above), Cosmo uses recordings made in the field (or in this case, in the woods) to create instrumental pieces or to accompany his singing. His musical style is similar to that of his friend, Sam Lee (also in an episode of F on F), who sings

and plays sometimes whilst leading groups into some woodland in Kent frequented by Nightingales. Cosmo's piece created from birdsong is absolutely mesmerising, and I plan to explore some of his other work such as that created from underwater recordings made of whale song and of coral reefs. Eccentric but really worth a listen.

Attenborough in Colour

BBC i-Player

In common with many households, I suspect, David Attenborough is a bit of a legend in our family – one of the few celebrities to really earn the National Treasure moniker. And this 2-part series (Seeing in Colour and Hiding in Colour) illustrates the quality of his presentational skills and the supreme skills of the BBC Natural History Unit in the best possible way – this is wildlife pornography at its pinnacle! I am repeatedly amazed that the Beeb still manages to find fresh and surprising wildlife spectacles to amaze us with, and this time these are enhanced by special camera technology that purport to show us how animals see the world around them from their, sometimes unique viewpoint. It is fitting that during his term of office as controller of BBC2, Attenborough introduced colour television to this country, and this series (which was first mooted in the 1950's when we only had black & white TV) makes the most of it. Beautiful and fascinating.

News Items

Getting into Birdwatching - 50 years ago! Jan – March 1971

By Steph Plaster

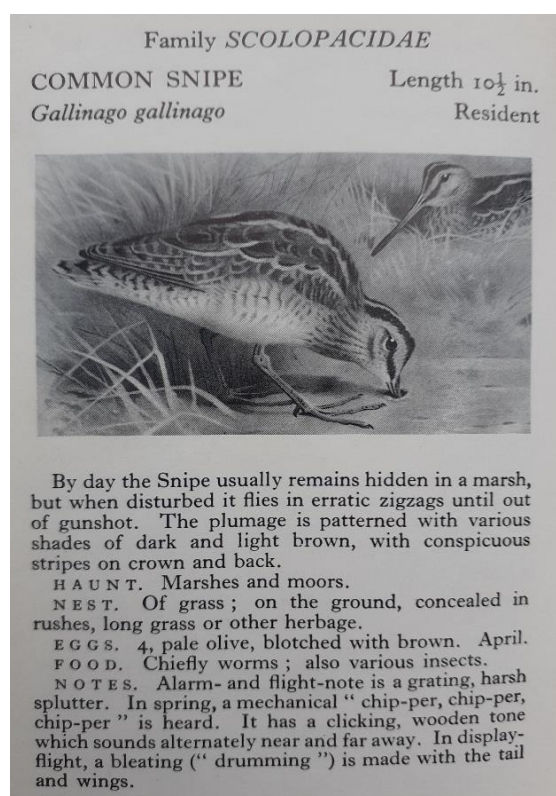
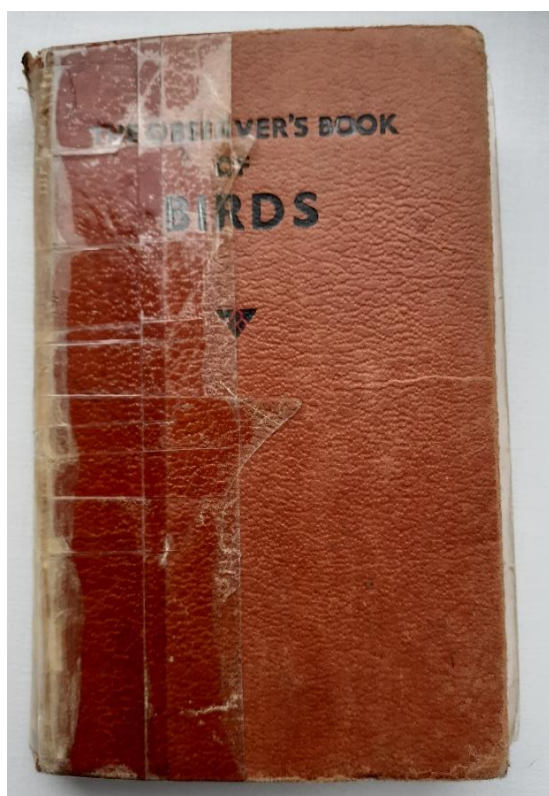
I'm sure many members have been birding for years and may remember, back in the day, what basic birdwatching was all about. Today, learning about birds can simply be a 'swipe' across a mobile phone or asking a 'weird' barrel on your desk, what's a Bittern? It's all at your fingertips if you want to compare Willow and Marsh tits or hear the plaintive call of the Curlew. Piece of cake really, and you don't even have to leave the house!

How different it was for us back in the 1970's when I started birdwatching at around 10 years old. Living in a small Norfolk hamlet (we knew everyone there) meant that options for kids were limited, so we were always outside over the fields, in ponds and woods or climbing haystacks on the farm. We were very lucky really and this environment made us appreciate the natural world all around us.

If you wanted to know about birds you had to get outside and immerse yourself in the countryside and we certainly did that. Luckily, we were given our late grandfather's old and battered, WWI brass field glasses and they were a revelation. It was with these knackered old bins, that I sussed out what was making a weird, humming / thrumming sound above the marshy cow pasture every spring. This noise or 'drumming' was utterly intriguing, so I had to work out what was on earth was making this

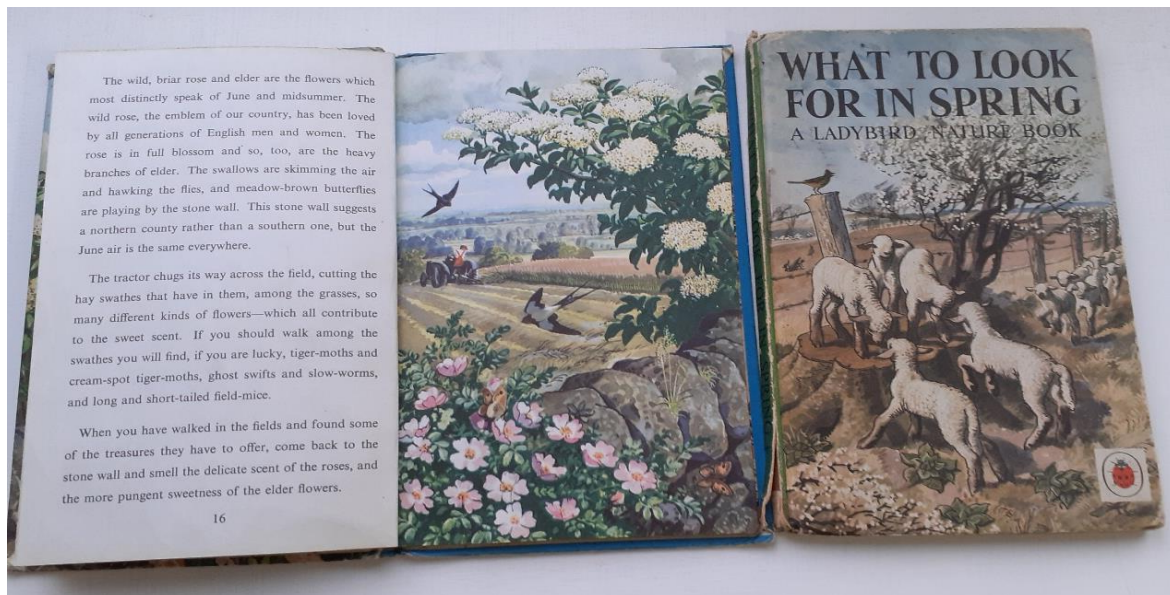
strange sound. So with the bins and reading my treasured 'Observers's Book of Birds', 1968 edition, which, as you can see below has been well used, I worked out it was a Snipe, and what a brilliant bird it is. It's still one of my favourites and if you see it up close, or hear it drumming you'll know why.

How many kids today have heard Snipe drumming in spring? Relatively few I'd guess which is a real shame as learning about nature should be an experience, a journey of discovery and not simply a 'swipe, a 'like' or 'tweet', we need to encourage kids to 'get out there' and get back to basics again.

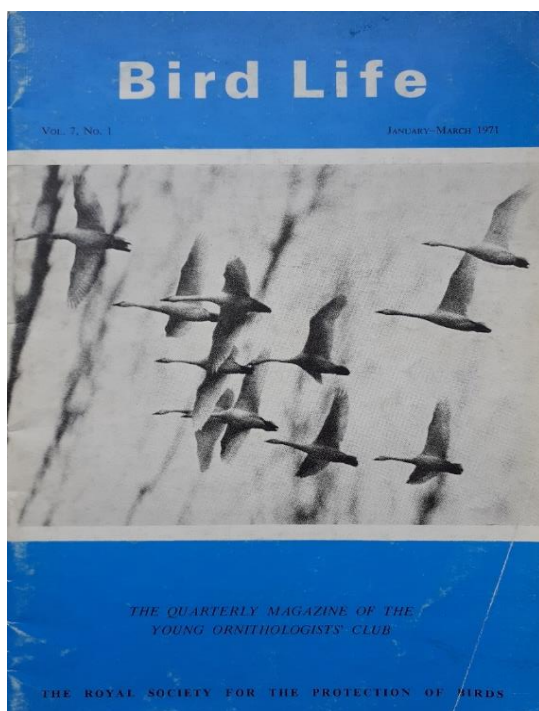


Around this time I joined the YOC, with parental help of course, as our parents encouraged us to discover and question things, especially the natural and historical worlds, we avidly read 'Look and Learn' annuals and spent our pocket money on iconic Ladybird books, they cost 2/6d in 'old' money!

I've still got all my Ladybird Books from childhood and read them time and time again, 'What to look for in Spring', Summer, Autumn and Winter' were my favourites as they were beautifully illustrated and there were always plenty of birds in them. 'Battered' books below well read and well loved!



The **YOC** was of course the 'Young Ornithologist's Club', the junior section of the **RSPB** and it cost 15/0d for a family to join – that's 75p in today's money! There was a quarterly magazine, articles competitions, and plenty of information for aspiring birdwatchers. There may be some WVBS members who were also in the YOC, would be interesting to see how many and if they remember the magazine? It had a blue cover and incorporated a bird photo or drawing on the front, a copy of the one issued exactly 50 years ago is below. **Jan-March 1971.**




Bird Life	
The Magazine of the Young Ornithologists' Club of The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire "To observe and conserve"	
Edited by JOHN TAUNTON and PETER HOLDEN Vol. 7, No. 1	
PRINCIPAL CONTENTS	
Rare Birds: Red-necked Phalaropes by Alan McGregor	2
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Cover photograph of Bewick's swans by D. and K. Urry	
Editorial	
<p>Another New Year lies ahead and, in this issue, we list a full and exciting programme of courses. We are also pleased to announce that Y.O.C. members can now visit R.S.P.B. reserves free of charge. And, for those who wish to study birds nearer home, there will be plenty of outings and projects.</p> <p>But are there any other activities which you feel the Y.O.C. should cover? If so, read page 16 and send us your suggestion. Many members' suggestions for improving the Y.O.C. have been adopted. Yours could be, too.</p> <p>We apologise for having to raise the subscription rates. But it is the first time for five years and, as you know, costs have risen a lot since then. Postage on an individual member's <i>Bird Life</i> and newsletters for a year has increased by 1/9d., and the cost of paper, printing, etc. have all gone up. In fact, it is only because of the greatly increased number of Y.O.C. members (now over 30,000) that we need not raise subscriptions even more. So we welcome your continued support; can you also enrol some more members for 1971?</p>	

I still have a

dozen or so YOC mags from 1970 to 1973 in my bookcase as they are great to re-read and see what we learnt fifty years ago. A wide range of articles encouraged children to actively go out and look for material relating to birds and the environment. Some of the articles concerned collecting birds feet, feathers and wings or skulls.

One favourite item was on how to dissect an owl pellet, copy of article below. We'd search around the base of large trees in the local parkland to find owl pellets and I can remember how they always looked grey and fibrous. Not only did we search for and dissect owl pellets, we avidly collected feathers and eggshells (after hatching), as blackbird's eggshells could always be found in the garden or church walk. It taught you to keep your 'eyes peeled' as you never knew what you'd find whilst out in the countryside, an Egyptian Goose nest in an oak tree and newly-hatched lapwing chicks were highlights!

Typical articles in **YOC** magazines are featured below:-



Collecting and analysing bird pellets

By DAVID GLUE, Research Officer, The British Trust for Ornithology

BIRD PELLETS (or castings) consist of the undigested parts of food which are ejected through the mouth in compact masses. Most pellets are composed of hard, less easily digested materials of little food value to the bird: the bones of birds, mammals and fishes; teeth, claws and beaks; insect head parts and wing cases; seed husks, etc. These hard parts are usually enclosed by softer substances like mammal fur, bird feathers and vegetable fibre.

Which birds produce pellets ?

More species eject pellets than many bird-watchers realise. Over 60 families and 330 species are mentioned in bird books and papers. Birds producing pellets in this country include: common garden species like the robin, dunnock and starling;

water-side feeders like the heron, kingfisher and herring gull; farmland birds such as the rook, carrion crow and yellowhammer; and predators like the shrikes, owls, falcons and hawks.

Which pellets are worth collecting ?

Any bird pellet can give valuable clues about the foods eaten. The identification of the food traces is often difficult, but certain species eject pellets that are both easier to collect and to analyse. Those larger birds which roost communally or regularly in one spot, produce in general the most useful pellets. Gull, crow and wader pellets can be collected in quantity on occasions, but it is the birds of prey which are the most helpful, particularly the owls.

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flycatcher, tree pipit and grey wagtail.

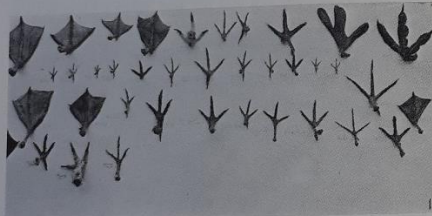
I found this outing very interesting and enjoyable, and I am looking forward to the next one which is to Fairburn Lags, a West Riding nature reserve of great interest to ornithologists.

A Collection of Birds' Feet

By BRUCE TAGGART (Y.O.C. member)

AMONG the many advantages of Y.O.C. courses is the fact that one is told of other hobbies connected with bird-watching. On one such course, the leader showed us his collection of birds' feet and later told us how to mount them.

When a dead bird is found, the foot should be cut off at the tarsus joint (see diagram). If the bird has died recently, it will be possible to move the toes and the foot can be mounted immediately.



Bruce Taggart

However, soon after death the foot becomes stiff and if this has occurred it must be left in cold water until it softens. A piece of wire (the thickness varies according to the size of the foot) is then cut about 1/2-inch longer than the tarsus, pushed down the back of the tarsus and out at the bottom of the foot. The wire should then be pulled through until it is flush with the tarsus joint and protruding 1/4-inch at the bottom. This 1/4-inch of wire is bent forward, pushed through some stiff cardboard and fastened with sticky tape. Normally the toes spread out naturally, but with webbed feet the

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toes have to be pinned apart so that as the webbing dries it stays taut. A coat of clear varnish will preserve the foot and give it an attractive appearance.



The card must be labelled with the name of the bird, date and locality it was found and, if possible, the cause of death.

Gradually your collection will build up and any 'swops' that you can get can be exchanged with fellow ornithologists.

Nestbox for Spotted Flycatchers

By PAUL ADAMS (Y.O.C. member)

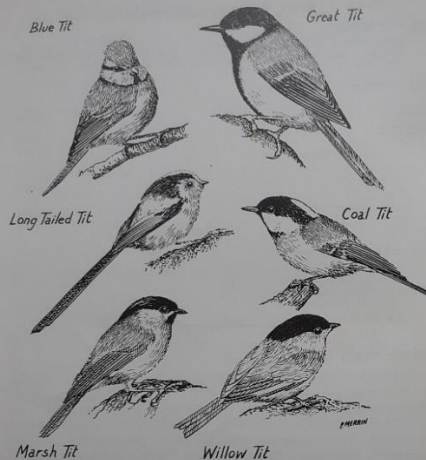
THIS winter when you put a coconut shell out for the tits don't just throw the empty shell away—save it and make a nestbox for spotted flycatchers.

First of all cut only a quarter of the coconut away, then hang it up for the tits, then when they have eaten all the coconut, take the shell down and you will find you have an open nestbox which spotted flycatchers can use.

The best place to put your nestbox is in a honeysuckle because spotted flycatchers are attracted to this creeper, but if this is not possible any type of creeper will do.



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Identification of the Tit Family

By ANDREW CRAMB (Winner of the "Describe these Birds" Competition)

THE **great tit** is easily recognisable by a black stripe down its breast and stomach, and distinctive white cheeks. Its back is greenish-yellow.

The **blue tit** has no black stripe and is mainly blue and yellow with a blue cap.

The **coal tit** differs from the marsh and willow tits by having a white patch at the back of its head and neck. It has two light wing bars, grey back and whitish front. This is the smallest tit.

The three tits mentioned above are widespread and common

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throughout Britain and Ireland. However, marsh and willow tits are both very alike and always liable to be confused.

An adult **marsh tit** has a shiny black cap, small black bib, brown back, and light breast and belly. Call is repeated "Pitt-chew". Common in England and Wales, local in Scotland, but not found in Ireland.

The **willow tit** has a duller black cap and a light patch on its wings. The main difference from a marsh tit is high-pitched, vibrant call notes of "si-si-si". Distribution is very local (in England, Wales and Southern Scotland) tending to inhabit marshes, flooded areas and margins of lakes and ponds, unlike the marsh tit.

All five tits are resident and often seen in gardens. Sexes are alike.

Also illustrated is the long-tailed tit which was not part of the competition, being easily distinguished by its long tail, darkish and lightish plumage with tinges of pink.

The Bird-watcher's Calendar

By TERENCE WALSH (Y.O.C. member)

January—Exciting numbers of duck, geese and swans on large lakes, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea. Hard weather movements can easily bring in an unusual bird. Very large flocks of waders, mainly knot and dunlin on the coasts. Finch flocks regularly hold bramblings, and raptors are more in evidence in open spaces.

February—Very similar to January but more chance of an uncommon bird and of sea birds seen inland. Unfrozen patches of water and land attract birds and your bird table probably has its highest numbers of birds this month.

March—Movements of larks, finches and winter visitors to breeding quarters. Some birds begin to sing a lot. The end of the month heralds changes in bird populations as chiffchaffs and wheatears come in and duck and other winter visitors leave. Bird-watchers have to travel to different habitats to get early arrivals and late departures.

April—Larger movements of birds to breeding quarters. Summer newcomers are arriving every day and give the bird-watcher a very good month. Also winter visitors are very much decreased. The large numbers of waders on the coast leave, but more variety in species is the compensation. Also waders inland are seen regularly at sewage farms, reservoirs and lakes. Terns arrive and are also seen inland. A lot of song to be heard in the dawn chorus.

May—Dawn choruses are beautiful and the last of the summer

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I hope this has brought back childhood memories and the absolute joy of discovery that we were able to do back in the days before 'all-encompassing small screen information' became the norm. Let's hope children can still experience birdwatching and natural history from being out there and physically searching for it..... wherever they live.

Another trip down memory lane and my top 20 birds of the world

By Sue Bryan

Having been fortunate to have spent my lifetime watching and enjoying birds around the world I am often asked what my favourite birds that I have seen are. The answer for me is quite easy; but when asked what my top 10 birds are, I thought this would be easy too, until I tried to write them down. With the latest IOC list standing at 10 806 species and having seen over half of these, I had a lot to choose from, so I thought I would narrow it down a bit and only choose from birds that I had personally taken a photograph of. This unfortunately did cut out one or two that I might have chosen but don't have a photograph of. However, I still could not get it down to 10 birds so I had to have a re-think and have chosen 20 birds that I thought were either stunning in their own right or brought a tear or two to my eyes because of the special circumstances that I saw them in. Some birds will also be repeats of my previous article too but with a little additional story to go along with them.

My top 2 birds will always be Andean Cock-of-the-Rock (1) and Northern Lapwing (2) with both birds having been favourites from my childhood.



Andean Cock-of-the-rock

Regular readers of the newsletters will remember my tale of my collection of Brooke Bond tea cards. The Andean Cock-of-the-Rock was the bird on the front of the Tropical Birds album that so inspired me as a child which I eventually saw in 2006 down the Manu road in Peru at a Cock-of-the-rock lek. This bird had brought tears to my eyes as the bird my mother had told me as a young child that I would never see.



Northern Lapwing

At the number 2 slot is the Lapwing as my childhood home backed onto a cemetery with fields beyond, where I was fascinated with the birds that used to sky dance over them as I played around with my playmates. I could hear them calling as they went up into the air to defend their young against potential predators (and in my innocence possibly me!)

I was fortunate to have a father that knew the names of most of the farmland birds and a grandfather that told me tales of the birds of the countryside. Living in Wiltshire the Peewits, the local name of the Northern Lapwing, were familiar to us as country folk and I was fascinated that they called out their own name as they sky danced. The Lapwing will always be my favourite UK bird. The iridescence of its plumage when it catches the sunlight is just stunning.

My next 18 chosen birds are in no particular order as I found this impossible to do since they all have their own particular merits. I did try an order but kept changing my list and eventually found it too difficult to do as there were too many reasons as to why I had chosen them, which lead to unfair comparisons. Some birds are iconic which you will all

have heard of, but some of them are of my choosing because of the circumstances which I enjoyed/endured/was determined to see.

So here they are:

Back in 1998 I was lucky enough to have inherited an amount of money. Most people would have bought a new car or new furniture etc but I knew exactly what mine was going to be spent on. So after giving some to my immediate family I booked a trip to Antarctica as I wanted to get to South Georgia after reading Cindy Buxton's 'Survival: South Atlantic' and her tales of being a wildlife film maker on South Georgia not realising that she was going to be stranded when the Argentinians invaded for the start of what became the Falkland's War. Her tales of filming Penguins, Elephant Seals and Albatrosses had me hooked.



Wandering Albatross

I eventually set sail from Ushuaia at the tip of Argentina, after being kept in the harbour for the night as the conditions were too rough. Passing Cape Horn in a gale force 8 is not to be recommended, as most passengers would testify by them being sea-sick and confined in their cabins for 3 days, but me? Where was I? Up on the bridge, sea-watching of course, along with a few other intrepid birders! After

touring around the Antarctic peninsula, we finally arrived in South Georgia. I was entranced with the Elephant Seals, and who could forget the sight of Salisbury Plain with thousands of King Penguins, but what I really wanted to see was a Wandering Albatross (3) on its nest. What a treat I had in store as I watched a young bird begging its magnificent parent for a meal. The vermiculation of its plumage was wonderful as I stood in awe.

Southern Carmine Bee-eater

One of my favourite families of birds to sit and watch, are the bee-eaters. I like how they sit and stare, swoop or fly up to catch an insect and then often return to the same perch. My favourite colour is red and so why would I not choose one of the red bee-eaters? So here is bird number 4, Southern Carmine Bee-eater (4) that I photographed in Namibia in 2012 on a road trip done in a very old camper van.



Lilac-breasted Roller



This photograph of a Lilac-breasted Roller (5) was taken in Uganda in 2017 having seen this species 20 years earlier and in 9 different African countries. In 2010 I watched a displaying pair and soon learnt why they are called rollers. To see the male bird 'rolling' was spectacular as it did its performance to entice the female bird.



Blakiston's Fish Owl

In 2017 Gunnar Engblom came to one of my bird clubs to give us a talk. The previous year he had advertised a trip to Japan which had failed to sell to enough participants and so never went. I had asked him to keep in touch with me as I was still interested in going. After the talk was over, we sorted out a few arrangements and I joined him and two others a year later to Japan on an extremely cold trip, but not before having a clothes-

packing failure for a pre-extension to Okinawa which had a tropical climate, due to my lack of homework where the island actually was in the world! Birding in tropical heat with fleece-lined trousers is not to be recommended!

What a fun trip this one was. Gunnar and I burst a tyre, took the famous Bullet Train and watched swimming Japanese Macaques in the snow. I also abandoned Gunnar on a boat whilst he argued with the captain and crew, whilst I ticked the birds on Hachijojima island (which Gunnar never set foot on) and finally flew to Hokkaido where 5 foot of snow was challenging with me doing all the navigating with a Japanese Sat Nav The Sat Nav had that many faulty charging wires attached to various phones/laptops etc on my lap that I ran out of hands! After watching Red-crowned Cranes dancing in the snow, seeing birds 6 and 7 didn't exactly go to plan.

We had birded all day and arrived at our hosts at Washi no Yado a bit late for an evening meal, giving us no time to get ourselves sorted for what was to come. The cabin-style hide here was a bit similar to the Welney set-up with a kitchen and tables at the back. I grabbed a few essentials and enjoyed my hot steaming meal along with many others. As we were last to arrive the 30 or so participants had grabbed the best spots by the heaters (it was minus 10 degrees outside). Our little group was up the far end of the hide and I was passed a sheet of A4 paper explaining how to set up my Canon camera to cope with the strobe lighting to get the best photographic results. It was now 7pm and dark outside. We were told that Blakiston's Fish Owl (6) often came in at about 10pm to fish. It was nice and warm in the hide and so I settled down to wait along with everyone else. What happened next I was not prepared for. The lights were put out and we were told not to talk. The owner was down the other end and started to take all the windows out. By the time he got to our windows the temperature plummeted to minus 10 degrees! I was tired and several hours later frozen to my core. By 10pm and no owl, 15 people left. By midnight and no owl another 5 people left. By 2 am and no owl, those that were left, were fast asleep. I wanted to give up but Nick

Watmough was sending me messages from the UK to keep awake, as he had been in the hide the week before and knew the routine. Several others gave up and went to bed but our little car load stuck it out. All of a sudden after a bit of a doze, I looked up and saw an owl fly in at 4am. My frozen body was ecstatic but was extremely pessimistic that I would get a photo with such a slow shutter speed of this huge owl sitting out in the snow in the dark but with a light shone on it, overlooking a pool stocked with fish. I attempted a few shots as I watched this owl swooping down to catch its prey. The reward for sitting it out was overwhelming as the four of us had big grins on our faces. Thanks must go to Nick for encouraging me to stay with his messages sent from the UK to stick it out.

Steller's Sea Eagle

We left the hide and went to our booked accommodation where, after a shower, there was no time for sleep as we were booked on a boat for an 8am sailing out into the sea-ice. With eyelids propped up by matchsticks we boarded the small boat dressed up like Michelin men with so many layers on plus a bulky life jacket. Off we set out into the sea-ice and I could not believe just how many eagles greeted us. White-tailed Eagles and Steller's Sea Eagles (7) were everywhere but I had the wrong lens as the birds were so close. I had to choose the birds carefully and waited until a Steller's Sea Eagle swooped down and took a fish that was



thrown out of the boat. It was a challenge to say the least in the buffeting icy-cold winds and snow on a small boat. However, the image above now adorns my dining room as a large picture and has pride of place along with an image of the Blakiston's Fish Owl. The other photo that adorns my dining room is another eagle, the iconic Harpy Eagle (8), which I saw in Venezuela in 2014.



As one of the world's largest eagles it was a 'must see' bird and having spent several birding holidays in South America, one that I didn't want to miss. A tour that had Harpy Eagle as a target bird was therefore booked. It was certainly a rough ride in a smelly old 4x4 down a boggy track to where a nest had been located by foresters.

The final journey to the nest had to be walked

through the jungle, where we looked up at a tower that had been erected by the BBC for filming right by the tree with the nest. The juvenile bird looked down on us as we took photos before leaving it alone to wait for its parents to feed it.

My next couple of birds are owls, one of which is my personal favourite and one which I know I will be joined with, as the favourite by many people.



Great Grey Owl

I wish I had a better photograph of this stunning owl as my photograph of the Great Grey Owl (9) does not do it justice. A customised trip to Finland for a few of us was organised so that we could see all the owls of Finland and a couple of other specialised birds of the northern forests. The Great Grey Owl has always been a favourite of mine and although I was very pleased to see it on its nest, it was pouring with rain and was hunkered down. Who could blame it?

The next bird on my list is probably one of the U.K's favourite bird. Like other people I love to watch this owl as it quarters the ground looking for its prey. It is without question a beautiful bird and one I always feel lucky to see. When I leave home for a 'twitch' I always hope to see a Barn Owl (10) on the way, as I associate it with being a lucky charm that I will see the rare bird that I am travelling to see.



As many of you know I have worked with young people for many years, either as a teacher or an education ranger as well as working for conservation charities where I try to encourage young people (and older people) to care about wildlife. One of the ways to engage with young people is to look at what Barn Owls have consumed by pulling apart owl pellets. After asking friends who kindly collected the pellets from

underneath owl boxes, I hate to think how many owl pellets I have dissected over the years. The look on childrens' faces as they dissect the pellets says it all and I have been so impressed by their enthusiasm.

Diademed Sandpiper Plover



My next choice of bird is Diademed Sandpiper Plover (11) another iconic bird that all wader fans would wish to see. It is a bird of the high Andes and quite difficult to find and see. It takes a bit of determination to get to the location and then if you are like me, probably suffer some altitude sickness in getting there. It breeds between 3 500m and 5000m high in the puna grasslands often in the damp mossy tundra. I first saw this bird in 1998 at El Yeso in Chile and always had a feeling that I would return one day, which I did in 2010. As I had been before I knew exactly where to find the bird and after a pre-dawn start watched the



sun rise up over the mountains that lit up the valley floor as if someone had just switched the light on to reveal the magical scenery that surrounded us. After a bit of a problem crossing a fast-flowing mountain stream, it didn't take long to see this enigmatic little bird once again.

Sue at Mai Po, Hong Kong

The photograph of me standing in front of the sightings board at Mai Po bird

observatory with Spoon-billed Sandpiper written on the board is a substitute for my extremely poor photograph that I took of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper (12) that is not worth printing as it is on an old slide taken before I had a digital camera and the image is too small. My trip to Hong Kong in 1998 with a tour group had been cancelled at the last minute and so I was left with little choice of to either not go or travel alone. I am not easily dissuaded and asked the tour company to book my flights (pre-internet days) and arrange the various permits that I would need to enter through fences into Chinese territory. I said I would stay at the Mai Po bird observatory, self-cater and make my own way there once I had landed at the airport. I had an interesting time watching the famous Hong Kong teams of bird racers, who raised thousands of pounds for conservation. The estuary that the Mai Po series of scrapes runs alongside, is accessed through a series of fences for which permits were necessary and meant bobbing up and down on boards tied to oil drums forming a pontoon walkway. Walking carrying scopes and cameras to get over the mud, water and mangroves was not easy. At first, I sat alone in a hide over-looking the estuary at thousands of waders, including Red-necked Stints, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, Terek Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers and Temminck's Stints. I didn't have a hope of finding one little Spoon-billed Sandpiper amongst so many birds on my own. Luckily, I had made friends with my new room-mate at the observatory and got invited into the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society hide which made life a lot easier for looking at the birds along with ex-pat local birders far more experienced than me. The following day I had just arrived at the floating pontoons when I seemed to going the wrong way. Panic ensued as all the birders were running in the opposite direction. I followed them and there on one of the scrapes was one lone Spoon-billed Sandpiper! Success!



Marvellous Spatuletail

One family of birds that everyone wants to see is the family of hummingbirds of which there are currently 361 species. These little delightful birds zip in and out of flowers or hummingbird feeders with such a fast wing beat that getting a good photograph is tricky to say the least, especially if the light conditions are not ideal. Picking just one hummingbird out of the many that I have seen was difficult but I have settled on the Marvellous Spatuletail (13) which have a pair of spatules at the end of their tail feathers. In

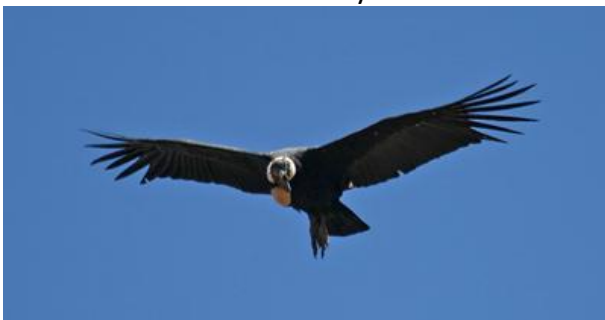
2013 having been to Peru once before I travelled on what was known as the northern route, where I took in the hike to see the Long-whiskered Owlet and visited the Huembo Hummingbird Centre, where after a great deal of patience and numerous attempts in low light conditions I eventually managed a few reasonable photographs of the Marvellous Spatuletail.



Adeile Penguin

It would not be right not to include a penguin in my top 20 choice of birds, as a representative of a flightless bird and although the sight of thousands of King Penguins at Salisbury Plain, South Georgia is a sight that will remain in my memory forever by far the funniest penguins are the wonderful little Adeile Penguins (14). The comedians in my photograph were like a little

gang all trying to decide between them whether to leap off the ice ledge and into the freezing cold water or to stick it out and continue to watch our antics bobbing up and down in our zodiacs (rubber dinghies) wondering what all these people were doing in their environment miles from anywhere.



Andean Condor

As one of the world's iconic birds it would not be right to miss this one out either. If birding in the high Andes in South America the Andean Condor (15) is probably on most peoples' 'wants' list. I will never forget arriving in Ushuaia, ready for my Antarctic trip in 1998 and looking up at the mountains to see an Andean Condor come

sailing over the mountain tops. What an experience that was. The exuberance that my fellow travellers all had was memorable as we all danced a little jig. Of course, I have seen quite a few since that day and this photograph were taken at Farellones in Chile which was part of my round the world trip in 2010.

Due to kindness of friends in 2019 I had been invited to be part of a small group to visit West Papua and some associated islands to see some birds of paradise, an invitation that I

could not possibly refuse. They have always been some of the ultimate birds of the birding world to see. But they are not the only exotic birds to see.



Victoria Crowned Pigeon

Back in 2010 I had visited the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore where I had seen some large pigeons with fancy 'hairdos'. I thought then that the chances of me seeing them in the wild were slim. However, one day in West Papua the gods were shining down on me. The day before I had bailed out of a gruelling walk in mud where some of the group had had brief distant views of a Victoria Crowned Pigeon, I was very envious. The following day the group had

been split in two and given a choice as to what they wanted to do: one to go and search for Shovel-billed Kingfisher on only a 50% chance of seeing it, sliding down a steep bank in wellies or to have an amble along the road that had been quite productive the day before mopping up a few species that we had failed to see. I chose the easy option. Thank goodness that I did because after a few hundred metres one of the local guides asked us if we wanted to see Victoria Crowned Pigeon (16) as he knew a spot for one. Did we? Did we just! We had a few interesting stream crossings to do over logs in our wellies grasping onto various sticks but after a few near misses of falling into the streams our guide could hear the pigeon calling. Up in the tree I had a very narrow gap within which to get a photograph. I was ecstatic!



Red Bird of Paradise

A few days later I sailed to Waigeo, off the western end of West Papua. One afternoon after a bit of a trek through the jungle I arrived at a hide made of woven palm fronds and waited for an hour or so. I peered out of a few narrow gaps and looked up at the trees. Several Red Birds of Paradise (17) had flown in and proceeded to hang upside down displaying to female birds. I didn't know where to look first. It was an amazing display to watch.

Wilson's Bird Of Paradise



out with a shutter speed of 1/10 second. I didn't think I stood a chance of a photograph. All of a sudden, a male Wilson's Bird of Paradise (18) appeared along with a couple of female birds. The male bird hopped around the forest floor before hopping up onto the sticks to display to the females. In a matter of minutes it was all over. I laid my camera on the screen,



The following morning, I found myself sitting at a screen in the pouring rain, in a deep dark jungle. Along with a few others I found myself staring at some well-placed sticks on a cleared forest floor. I was concerned for my camera equipment and delved into my pockets for some plastic bags. This didn't seem a lot of fun as we got wetter and wetter. Luckily the rain eased off but it was still exceedingly dark even when dawn finally arrived. I was sat too close to use my DSLR and so my little bridge camera was brought

out with a shutter speed of 1/10 second. I didn't think I stood a chance of a photograph. All of a sudden, a male Wilson's Bird of Paradise (18) appeared along with a couple of female birds. The male bird hopped around the forest floor before hopping up onto the sticks to display to the females. In a matter of minutes it was all over. I laid my camera on the screen, pressed the shutter and hoped for the best!

Shoebill

Like many of you I have watched numerous David Attenborough programmes over the years which I have drooled over and envied the opportunities that have come his way of seeing so much wildlife up close and personal. One of the programmes which we all remember is the one with David sitting with Mountain Gorillas. I had longed wanted to have this experience and Uganda with its amazing birdlife was on my target list of countries. I have been very fortunate and have some wonderful friends that

I often discuss my hopes for birding trips with and one evening I was offered an opportunity to make this dream come true. After a few phone calls and emails a plan was hatched and I could jet off to Uganda to stay with a friend of my friend who would organise for me to also stay with other friends and places where I could amass a good forest bird list as well as see Mountain Gorillas, Chimpanzees and of course the huge Shoebill. Harriet could not have made a better trip for me. It was so good to stay with some locals and see real life in Uganda as well as staying in a hostel where women who suffer from domestic abuse are safe from their abusers where they work and make a living from selling products that they make to tourists. I also stayed in some wonderful safari-style lodges too right by the River Nile with Hippos outside my tent as well as Justice taking me around the forest on his motorbike. His expertise on butterflies and monkeys was so enjoyable too.

On one of my first days Harriet arranged a canoe trip out into a marsh where after a bit of struggle the boatman got us through the vegetation and there in front of us was the bird that every birder who visits Uganda wants to see, the huge heron otherwise known as Shoebill (19). What a beast of a bird it was. The trek to see the Mountain Gorillas was awesome and the experience will long live in my memory, especially as I had had a tooth extracted by a Ugandan dentist the day before! Thanks Harriet!



Agami Heron

My final choice of bird is Agami Heron (20). You may think that this is a strange choice but when travelling on birding trips, I always produce a checklist of birds before I go, which is based on my Wildlife Recorder programme that I keep on my computer. This produces a list of the birds that I may be able to see for the trip and makes note of the birds that I have already seen elsewhere in the world. Of course, I hope to 'plug' some of the gaps in my forthcoming trip and see some new birds which are then 'world ticks'. Having travelled extensively around South America I have always had a very annoying gap in my list on one of the pages...that of Agami Heron. This heron is a difficult bird to find and after

discussions with knowledgeable friends it was suggested that my best chance was to take a trip to The Pantanal in Brazil. I searched around for trips and asked for some costings as I wanted a customised trip to target several other bird and animal species too. Once again Gunnar came up with suggestions and I joined an American herpetologist and photographer and along with a local guide, flew out to Brazil and had an amazing trip. Dee's knowledge about snakes and spiders was superb and his photography was stunning. Our local guide helped us with the birds but we were rather let down by the vehicle that kept breaking down and we despatched him to find another one! So, we had a few days without a guide but all was well as we commandeered a boat owner and he took us for day trips along the river to watch Jaguars! Dee took me out at night with a spotlight and we tracked spiders by their eye shine! You just never know what you might get up to on a birding trip with me! However, we got into a dispute with a lodge as due to our lack of a vehicle, our itinerary had gone a bit astray and we had missed our slot for Agami Heron searching. Once again, my dogged determination came to the fore and I was not going to have paid for something I didn't get. Our guide, who had now returned to us having found another vehicle was now ill and laid up in bed. After a bit of argy-bargy I insisted on the lodge owners finding a boat for us, which they eventually did and Dee and I went boating down the river for the day. What a day we had as birds came and went and we dictated when and where to stop. Our boatman could not have been better as he found a quiet little creek and turned the engine off. Using just an oar he paddled us through the vegetation and with the jungle closing in on us, we had close-up views of the prettiest heron that I have ever seen in serene quietness with the sun beating down and just the lapping of the water on the side of the boat. The annoying gap of Agami Heron in my list is now filled!

Notes from the Wensum Valley: 1999

By Stewart Betts

With notes from Nigel Mears, Charles Sayer and John Williamson.

February's newsletter reprinted the 1985 "Notes from the Wensum Valley", originally published in the Norfolk Ornithologists Association's annual report for that year. This time we're reprinting the notes from the 1999 NOA report – the final year of a series of submissions from the Valley. Over the period of reporting, a small group of Wensum Valley birders collaborated to provide the summary notes for inclusion in the NOA annual report.

There are some striking records from 1999. Ruddy Ducks were a regular valley visitor, and both Willow Tit and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker were still featuring. Large flocks of Golden Plover and Lapwing were recorded, along with sizable gull flocks. The latter were almost certainly due to the then still active landfill site at Attlebridge.

A free-flying Night Heron flock was the result of an aviary blowing down at the Great Witchingham Wildlife Park in the 1987 "hurricane", and records continued for several years. However, it does seem a stretch to continue to attribute current Night Heron records to this occurrence, with no subsequent evidence of breeding or of juvenile birds.

In a year with no "rarities" a Black-bellied Dipper at Lyng in March was a real highlight.

Notes from the Wensum Valley – 1999:

These notes mainly concern bird records for the valley parishes from Norwich in the south to Guist in the north. After a very full year in 1998, 1999 proved to be a relatively quiet year.

January:

A Barn Owl was at Morton on the Hill on New Year's Day, and a Jack Snipe was at Lyng Easthaugh on the 2nd. A good year for Buzzard records began with a bird over Sparham on the 2nd, and a similarly good year for Grey Wagtails saw one in residence at Bylaugh SF from the 9th. On the 5th a large gathering of plovers on fields at Lenwade included 4,500 Golden Plover and 500 Lapwing. Increasingly Great Crested Grebes are remaining on valley gravel pits during the winter, and six on Lyng Easthaugh GP on the 16th was noteworthy. A flock of 60 Siskin at Sparham Pools on the same day is now a fairly typical record – the increase in records for this endearing little finch being a little compensation for the remarkable decline in Redpolls.

The fields just north of Lenwade continued to be attractive to Golden Plover during the month with a flock of over 1,500 and an increase in Lapwing to over 1,000 on the 17th. Also on the 17th, a large flock of finches at Taverham included over 200 brambling. Willow Tits are still fairly frequent in the valley, one on gorse at Sparham Pools on the 30th being a typical record.

February:

A Barn Owl was regular over rough fields at Alderford throughout the month. There were two Jack Snipe at Lyng Easthaugh on the 6th. A Buzzard was again reported at Sparham on the 8th,

and a Goosander was seen on Sparham Pools on the 12th. Little Owl had taken up territory at Bylaugh by the 19th, with additional records later in the month from Weston Longville and Primrose Green. The Grey Wagtail remained at Bylaugh SF throughout the month and another was at Costessey GP on the 8th, where Kingfishers were also active. A Red-crested Pochard was at Lyng GP on the 28th, as was a Goldeneye – one of very few records for this normally fairly widespread valley visitor.

March:

The resident Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher were active at Costessey GP on the 8th. The first Chiffchaff arrived at Sparham on the 16th. One Jack Snipe remained at Lyng Easthaugh GP on the 19th and another Buzzard record came from Lyng Easthaugh, also on the 19th, when Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were active at Sparham Pools.

A Black-bellied Dipper stayed for three days from the 22nd at Lyng Bridges, where Grey Wagtails had taken up residence. On the 26th there were three Grey Wagtails together at Lyng Easthaugh. Displaying Kingfishers were in evidence at Alderford and Lenwade Common towards the month's end, and the first Sand Martin appeared at Sparham on the 31st.

April:

The 1st saw the arrival of Little Ringed Plover at Lyng Easthaugh GP and Sedge Warbler at Swanton Morley GP. Grey Wagtails were at Lyng Easthaugh also on the 1st and Ruddy Duck were at Sparham Pools – a drake – and Swanton Morley GP – five birds.

Blackcap at Alderford and Willow Warbler at Lyng Easthaugh were new on the 2nd. On the 4th a visit to Sennowe produced a pair of Red-crested Pochards, a female Goldeneye, four Little Ringed Plovers and four Tawny Owls. Oystercatchers were nesting at Sparham Pools by the 5th. The first Swallow arrived at Sparham on the 8th. More Ruddy Duck records included birds at Sparham GP on the 8th and both Lyng Easthaugh and Swanton Morley GP on the 11th. Also on the 11th, House Martin records began with one at Lyng Easthaugh and, on the same day, a Goshawk was over Sparham.

On the 15th a Golden Pheasant appeared at Sparham and was then present for about one month. On the 19th Little Owls were with recently fledged young at Sculthorpe. The 21st produced Wheatear at Fustyweed, a Buzzard over Hellesdon, Common Sandpiper at Lyng Easthaugh and Cuckoo at Worthing.

The first Common Terns – three at Lyng Easthaugh – arrived on the 23rd and also on the same date, a Yellow Wagtail appeared at Sparham GP. The 24th brought the first Garden Warbler at Lyng Easthaugh and the first Sedge Warbler at Swanton Morley GP. Also at Swanton Morley GP on the 24th were Grey Wagtail and Barn Owl.

Another Buzzard record over Lyng on the 25th, when Whitethroat arrived at Fustyweed. Nightingales arrived at Alderford and a Marsh Harrier passed through Sparham. A White Wagtail was recorded at Fustyweed on the 28th. On the 30th Lesser Whitethroat and Reed Warbler arrived at Lyng Easthaugh GP.

May:

The Buzzard put in a further appearance over Sparham on the 2nd, when one of the few valley reports this year for Dunlin was at Sparham GP. Swifts arrived in the valley in numbers on the 3rd. Three Black Terns were at Lyng Easthaugh on the 6th, and a Ruddy Duck was on Swanton Morley GP on the 8th. A Hobby was at Lyng Easthaugh on the 22nd with the first Spotted Flycatcher at Sparham on the 26th.

June:

A visit to Sennowe on the 18th produced three pairs of Little Ringed Plovers with five young, 101 Egyptian Geese, a pair of Pochard with two ducklings, 78 Canada Geese and a single Hobby. Later in the month, on the 25th a pair of Kingfishers were busy feeding two young at Sennowe. A Willow Tit visited gardens in Thorpe Marriott on the 25th, and on the 27th a Hobby was at Attlebridge and Grey Wagtails were at Elsing Bridges.

July:

Valley records of Night Herons from the free-flying flock at Great Witchingham had been scarce until the 12th, but thereafter records were regular through until October. Little Ringed Plovers were with young at Swanton Morley GP on the 17th, when a pair of Grey Wagtails were present at Bintree Mill. A Hobby was over Helledon on the 18th. Forty two Egyptian Geese were at Lyng Easthaugh on the 21st, a Greenshank was at Lyng on the 24th, the first returning Green Sandpiper appeared at Sparham GP on the 29th and five Little Gulls moved west through Sparham GP on the 30th.

August:

A screaming flock of over 100 Swifts was around Sparham on the 1st. Kingfishers were carrying prey at Guist on the 4th when at Lyng Easthaugh Common Terns had young and 48 Egyptian Geese had gathered.

Another Marsh Harrier showed at Sparham on the 7th, with another at Dunton on the 14th. A Greenshank was at Sparham GP on the 11th and a Western Yellow-legged Gull was with other gulls at Sparham on the 13th. On the 15th a Hobby was seen at Bawdeswell and on the 19th a Bittern was present at Sparham GP.

October:

An unusually quiet month, although a drake Pintail was in residence at Sparham whilst nearby on the river itself, Otters were seen.

November:

Another Western Yellow-legged Gull appeared at Costessey on the 15th. Kingfisher and Pintail were at Lyng Easthaugh GP on the 21st and, on the 24th, over 1,000 Golden Plover had gathered on fields at Lenwade.

December:

A Barn Owl was hunting roadside verges at Little Witchingham on the 5th. On the 11th a male Blackcap was in gardens on Thorpe Marriott. On the 8th 130+ Pinkfeet flew north over Taverham. The gull gathering at Attlebridge on the same date held 340 Greater Black-backed, 105 Herring, 1,200 Common and 350 Black Headed. On the 24th they had been joined by three Lesser Black-backed and a Western Yellow-legged. A Jack Snipe was at Lyng Easthaugh on the 19th and a finch flock feeding on stubble at Thorpe Marriott yielded 12 Yellowhammers.

Recent Events

Zoom Presentation 18.02.2021: A Sheepish Story from the Spanish Steppes

Speaker: Dr Dave Horsley

Reporter: Sue Gale

Dave is a fan of birding in the Spanish Steppes, parts of Spain close to the Portuguese border and very much inland. They are between 600-900 metres above sea level, so the numbers of large raptors that we often associate with mountains are not too surprising. Also, some of the passerines like the lovely Rock Bunting he showed us. The Southern Steppes identified by Dave were in Extremadura, and many of the areas were familiar to those club members who travelled to Spain in 2019, bringing back happy memories. The Monfrague National Park and the plains around Trujillo and Caceres especially. The Northern Steppes, around Salamanca, included the Arribes National Park along the River Duero – the border with Portugal – and the Villafafila wetlands (not so wet in summer). These Northern Steppes are no longer natural grassy plains but are irrigated for agriculture, in particular for vines. Rueda, the local wine, came much recommended. Sadly, the vines present a hazard to low-flying birds, particularly the Great Bustards, whose numbers are now decreasing.

Dave treated us to some great photos of raptors including Booted Eagle, Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagles and of course the Spanish Imperial Eagle. Dave was able to get close views of raptors feeding on carcasses in front of the hides, and took some great video footage. The other stars of these were the Vultures, particularly Black and Griffon Vultures. A long video of the fate of a sheep's carcass, made available under licence and placed in front of a hide was a great way to end the talk. It was a couple of hours before the carcass was discovered, original by some Ravens, which attacked the more vulnerable parts of the body. When the much more powerful Griffon Vultures arrived progress really began to be made. Eventually the carcass was completely covered in Black Vultures until it was stripped completely clean. All of the birds looked very full! Dave reported the ring numbers on some of these Black Vultures and found that some four- or five-year-olds were about 100km from where they had been ringed as chicks. Another 2-year-old came from the nearby mountains. It seems they don't travel very far!

By no means the only birds to be seen in the Steppes are eagles and vultures. Dave interspersed his talk with pictures of some of the others, including what he called the 'gaudy threesome' – Bee-eaters, Rollers and Hoopoes. We saw some Gull-billed Terns, who catch fish in the winter but subsist on voles in the dried out Villafafila wetlands in summer. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse are scarcer but also present there, as are Azure-winged Magpies. Although he wasn't there at the right time of year to photograph male Great Bustards displaying, he still had some great shots of these birds.

Many thanks to Dave for giving us a great tutorial on raptor ID as well as some fascinating footage of their lifestyles.

For any members that would like to view a recording of this presentation, please use the following link and passcode:-

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/MJVBV7LbPNsRVYXLeyHFJjhfohg_mpMn7-fDaT7uAguO29UVhDqjWaxjei_U-7Ad.0R-VXPb-aujuH6UT

Passcode: *b07wpu&

Quiz: 'Black and Bluebirds'!

By Stephanie Plaster

Birds can have very strange names, but man has tended to stick to colours when naming species....

Can you work out what 'Black and Bluebirds' are below?

- 1) B ----- (9 letters)
- 2) B --- R --- T -----
- 3) L ----- B ----- B ----- G ---
- 4) B --- T --
- 5) W ----- W ----- B --- T ---
- 6) S ----- B --- W ---
- 7) B ----- T ----- G -----
- 8) B --- H ----- W -----
- 9) B ----- T ----- D -----
- 10) S ----- B --- R -----
- 11) B ----- H ----- B -----
- 12) R -- S ----- B -----
- 13) B ----- K ---
- 14) G ----- B --- H -----
- 15) B ----- S -----
- 16) R -- F ----- B -----
- 17) W ----- C ----- B ----- W -----
- 18) B --- C ----- B -- E -----
- 19) B ----- W ----- S -----
- 20) B --- J --

21) B - - - - W - - - - -

22) B - - - - - (10 letters)

23) B - - - - G - - - -

24) B - - - F - - - - B - - - -

25) B - - - - - (8 letters)

I will publish the answers in next month's newsletter

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

By Stephanie Plaster

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Nightingale | 22. A Kestrel for a Knave |
| 2. Rumer Godden | 23. Sheryl Crow |
| 3. The Birds | 24. The Owl Service |
| 4. A Flock of Seagulls | 25. Noggin the Nog |
| 5. The Goldfinch | 26. Ralph Vaughan Williams |
| 6. John Huston | 27. He was a Merlin |
| 7. The Thieving Magpie | 28. Mockingjay |
| 8. Means 'Winding' | 29. A White Dove |
| 9. Burt Lancaster | 30. Blackbirds |
| 10. Rockin' Robin | 31. Jonathan Swift |
| 11. The Children of Green Knowe | 32. The Eagles |
| 12. Cuckoo's | 33. Chakchek - The Peregrine's
Saga |
| 13. Eagle | 34. Snowy Owl |
| 14. David Attenborough | 35. Tchaikovsky |
| 15. 1970's - 1978 | 36. Chris Packham |
| 16. Albatross | 37. Sparrows Can't Sing |
| 17. The Partridge Family | 38. Counting crows |
| 18. Goshawk | 39. Northamptonshire |
| 19. Gregory Peck | 40. Goldeneye |
| 20. Simon and Garfunkel | |
| 21. The New Naturalist | |

Sightings in the Valley in February

Compiled by David Gibbons

With maybe all the records in for 2020, the final totals are 10,370 sightings
with 178 species.

Mute Swan 20 on 3rd at Ringland, DG.

Snow Goose 2 on 1st & 2 on 2nd at Great Ryburgh, NP, A&JB.

Pink-footed Goose 32 on 5th at Great Ryburgh, NP.
c200 on 9th & 100+ on 26th at HHP, SC. 20 on 22nd at Potters Fen, PA.
25 on 25th at Old Costessey, AB.

White-fronted Goose 20 on 6th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Greylag Goose 80 & 100+ on 5th at Worthing level crossing, BP, SP.
50 on 18th at Mill Road, N.Tuddenham, BP.

Barnacle Goose 22 on 18th at HHP, SC. 253 on 23rd at Pensthorpe, NP.

Brent Goose 1 on 16th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Mandarin Duck 4 on 1st at SHF, CS.

Wigeon 220 on 11th at Great Ryburgh, NP. 80 on 26th at Bintree Mill, BP.

Gadwall 80 on 1st at SHF, CS. 30 on 7th at Worthing level crossing, SP.

Teal 250 at SHF during the month, CS.

Pintail 3 on 1st at SHF, CS.

Pochard 2 on 6th at Costessey Pits, AB. 5 on 28th at Pensthorpe, NP.

Tufted Duck 100 on 6th at Costessey Pits, AB. 150 at SHF during feb, CS.

Goldeneye 10 on 12th at Pensthorpe, NP.

Goosander 3 on 2nd at Great Ryburgh, NP. 6 on 6th at Costessey Pits, AB.

Grey Partridge 2 on 10th & 21st at N.Tuddenham, BP.
P on 6th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Great White Egret 2 on 1st at SHF, CS.
1 on 7th & 1 on 25th at Costessey Mill, NE, AB.
1 on 19th at Lyng & 2 on 24th at Guist Common, SBe.
2 on 23rd & 1 on 24th at Great Ryburgh, NP, A&JB.

Little Egret 3 on 18th at N.Tuddenham, Fox Lane, & 3 on 20th at Worthing level crossing, BP. 3 on 21st at Rushmeadows, IB.

Grey Heron 1 on 21st at HBW, BH. 1 on 20th at Worthing, DK.
2 on 26th at Bintree Mill, BP.

Little Grebe 1 on 1st at HHP, SC. 1 on 21st at HBW, BH.
2 on 22nd at Sparham Pools, PR.

Great Crested Grebe 1 on 6th at Fustyweed, PL. 4 on 6th at Costessey Pits, AB.

Red Kite 10 on 6th at Honingham, DL. 3 on 25th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Marsh Harrier 2 on 6th at Great Ryburgh, NP. 1 on 24th at HHP, SC.

Goshawk 1 on 1st at HHP, SC.

Sparrowhawk 2 on 2nd at Potters Fen, PA. 2 on 11th at Marriott's Way, Reepham

to Cawston, DG. 2 on 16th & 2 on 19th at HHP, SC.

Buzzard 3 on 10th & 5 on 21st at N.Tuddenham BP.
6 on 18th & 4 on 19th at HHP, SC. 3 on 21st at Honingham, DL.
3 on 23rd at Longham, SP. 7 on 28th at Hockering, PR.
30 on 27th at Sennowe, NP.

Kestrel 1 on 3rd at Elsing, BP. 1 on 3rd at Booton, DG.
1 on 12th at Scarning, IB. 1 on 13th at Elsing bridge, PL.
1 on 20th at Honingham, DL.

Peregrine Falcon 1 on 13th at Great Ryburgh, NP.
1 on 20th at Rushmeadows, IB, PR. 2 on 26th at Norwich Cathedral, PR.

Lapwing c150 on 3rd at HHP, SC. 300 on 3rd at Great Ryburgh, NP.
228 on 10th at Bittering GP, PJ.

Knot 1 on 1st at SHF, CS.

Dunlin 2 on 1st at SHF, CS. 1 on 7th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Jack Snipe 1 on 14th at Great Ryburgh, NP. 5 on 28th at Horsford, SBe.

Common Snipe 70+ on 1st at SHF, CS. 75 on 7th at Great Ryburgh, NP.
19 on 10th at Elsing bridge, SBe. 35 on 10th at Bittering GP, PJ.

Woodcock 1 on 4th & 1 on 16th at Buxton Heath, SBe.
1 on 7th at Sparham Pools, PL. 1 on 9th at Great Ryburgh, NP.
1 on 16th & 1 on 27th at HHP, SC.

Redshank 5 at SHF during the month, CS.

Black-tailed Godwit 4 on 1st at SHF, CS.
5 on 11th & 20 on 13th at Costessey Mill, AB, AG.

Black-headed Gull 125 on 18th at Neatherd Moor, BH.
c100 on 27th at Honingham, DL.

Mediterranean Gull 1 on 21st at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Common Gull 54 on 3rd at Neatherd Moor, BH.
100 on 3rd at N.Tuddenham, BP. c40 on 27th at Honingham, DL.

Stock Dove 53 on 13th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Barn Owl 1 on 10th & 1 on 11th at Scarning, IB.
2 on 10th at Great Ryburgh, NP. 1 on 11th at Worthing, DK.
1 on 13th at Reepham, AD.

Little Owl 1 on 3rd at Worthing, DK. 1 on 4th at Lyng, PL.
2 on 26th at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Tawny Owl 1 on 5th at Honingham, DL. 1 on 5th at Reepham, DG.
1 on 5th at Hoe Common, BP. 1 on 21st at HBW, BH.
2 on 21st at Scarning, IB. 2 on 23rd at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Kingfisher 1 on 1st, 3rd & 20th at HHP, SC. 2 on 23rd at New Mills, Nch, SBe.

Green Woodpecker 1 on 4th at Honingham, DL. 1 on 20th at GWC, RG.
2 on 22nd at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Great Spotted Woodpecker 2 on 3rd & 2 on 27th at HHP, SC.
5 on 21st at HBW, BH. 3 on 27th at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker 1 on 26th at Old Costessey woods, AB.

Goldcrest 4 on 21st at HBW, BH.

Marsh Tit 1 on 10th at Lenwade, RG. 1 on 18th at HHP, SC.

2 on 21st at HBW, BH.

Woodlark 1 on 4th at Marsham Heath & 3 on 22nd at Buxton Heath, SBe.

Skylark 9 on 8th at Neatherd Moor, BH. 18 on 15th at Costessey Marshes, AB.

Cetti's Warbler 1 on 22nd at Sparham Pools, PR.

Long-tailed Tit 12 on 9th at CaSu Park, Reepham, DG. 14 on 21st at HBW, BH.

Chiffchaff 2 on 1st at Rushmeadows, PA. 2 on 10th & 2 on 26th at Bylaugh, SBe. 1 on 22nd at Sparham Pools, PR.

Nuthatch 2 on 1st at Bylaugh, PR. 2 on 3rd at HHP, SC. 2 on 10th at Lenwade, RG.

Treecreeper 1 on 1st at Bylaugh, PR. 1 on 21st at HBW, BH. 1 on 24th at N.Tuddenham Common, BP.

Starling 350 on 17th at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Blackbird 17 on 2nd at Neatherd Moor & 15 on 21st at HBW, BH. 15 on 10th at Swanton Morley, BM.

Fieldfare 100 on 2nd & 80 on 23rd at N.Tuddenham, BP. 100+ on 3rd & c100 on 27th at HHP, SC. 79 on 27th at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Song Thrush 3 on 1st at Neatherd Moor, BH. 4 on 3rd at HHP, SC. 5 on 21st at HBW, BH.

Redwing c50 on 3rd at HHP, SC. 15 on 21st at N.Tuddenham, BP. 17 on 26th at Marriott's Way, Lenwade, RG. 17 on 27th at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Mistle Thrush 4 on 3rd at HHP, SC. 2 on 4th at E. Tuddenham, DL. 4 on 11th at Longham, SP. 1 on 21st at Eades Mill, R&CG.

2 on 21st at HBW, BH.

Stonechat 2 on 4th at Marsham Heath & 4 on 4th at Buxton Heath, SBe. 2 on 10th at Bittering GP, PJ. 2 on 10th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Tree Sparrow 2 on 5th at Gateley, A&JB.

Grey Wagtail 1 on 10th at Bittering GP, PJ. 2 on 10th at Great Ryburgh, NP. 2 on 26th at Lyng, PL.

Pied Wagtail 112 on 18th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Meadow Pipit 25+ on 1st at SHF, CS. 50 on 7th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Brambling 20 on 10th at Bittering GP, PJ. 13 on 16th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Siskin 20+ on 7th & 30 on 27th at HHP, SC. 8 on 28th at Thorpe Marriott, SBe.

Linnet c60 on 11th at Horsford, SBe. 55 on 19th at Neatherd Moor, BH. 30 on 20th at Worthing level crossing, BP.

Lesser Redpoll c40 on 4th at Buxton Heath, SBe. C20 on 18th at HHP, SC.

Common Redpoll 3 on 18th at HHP, SC.

Common Crossbill 8 on 8th at SHF, CS. 4 on 11th at Thorpe Marriott, SBe, BHo. 23 on 22nd at Haveringland, SBe. 10 on 27th at Sennowe, NP.

Bullfinch 5 on 20th & 4 on 27th at E.Tuddenham, DL. 4 on 21st at HBW, BH. 1 on 22nd at Lenwade, HK.

Hawfinch 4 on 2nd at Gateley, A&JB, NP. 1 on 10th at Neatherd Moor, BH.

Yellowhammer 10 on 11th at HHP, SC. 10 on 15th at Great Ryburgh, NP.

Reed Bunting 13 on 10th at Bittering GP, PJ. 4 on 20th at Rushmeadows, IB. 2 on 27th at E.Tuddenham, DL.

Rose-ringed Parakeet 2 on 23rd at
Hellesdon Road, Hellesdon, AW.

HBW = Hoe Bird Walk.

HHP = Haveringland Hall Park.

SHF = Sparham Hall Farm. GWC = Great Witchingham Common.

Many thanks to the following for their records:

NE - Nick Edwards,	DL - David Laurie,	BH - Bob Hunter,
AD - Alan Dixon,	DK - David Knight,	SBe - Stewart Betts,
IB - Ian Brittain,	DG - David Gibbons,	AW - Ann Walker,
PJ - Paul Jeffery,	AG - Adrian Gardiner,	BM - Bernie Marsham,
PA - Paul Adams,	AB - Andrew Brown,	SC - Steve Chapman,
CS - Charles Sayer,	HK - Heather Kirk,	BH - Brian Howe,
NP - Nick Parsons,	PL - Peter Lambley,	BP - Barry Pummell,
SP - Steph Plaster,	PR - Paul Riley.	
A&JB - Alan & Jenny Baker. R&CG - Ray & Chris Gribble.		

This month we received 980 sightings with 110 species.