



THE HOBBY

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PROGRAMME MATTERS

Welcome to the May 2020 edition of The Hobby. With the difficult times at the moment, this edition will be published and distributed in electronic form only. Birding has not been the same in the last two months with imposed lockdown restrictions and the Bird Club makes it clear that they do not support travelling to see birds outside of the garden except under the permitted exercise rules and as such we have discouraged the reporting of scarce and rare birds while they are present at any site. I trust that our members are in support of this policy. As plans to ease lockdown restrictions emerge, this will be reviewed but social distancing and the resulting safety of our members is considered priority. Please also see the information from the BTO included at the end of this bulletin.

Unfortunately our last indoor meeting of the season was cancelled but we would wish to inform members that we have a plan in place for next year with seven dates starting on September 29th. We will keep this under review and report through the next copy of The Hobby and through the website. Similarly, our outdoor meetings have been cancelled until further notice with more information to follow as circumstances change.

We hope you can still enjoy your birding and that new insights into some previously under-watched local patches will reveal some interesting observations. Stay safe...

MARCH – APRIL 2020 SPRING BIRD NEWS

March 2020

Great White Egret - one noted around Priory CP/Meadow Lane area from start of the month until 18th

Brent Goose - recorded as nocturnal migrant over Biggleswade on 23rd

Red-crested Pochard - one at Roxton 8th and 21st, male at Blunham on 12th

Ring-necked Duck - still present at Priory CP throughout the month

Common Scoter - birds sound-recorded on nocturnal migration over Biggleswade on 16th and 25th, Meppershall on 25th/26th and 31st and Eaton Bray on 26th

Goldeneye - reported only from Harrold Odell CP and Brogborough Lake during the month, other than one at Priory CP on 11th

Goosander - reported only from Harrold Odell CP in the month, with one at Broom GP on 3rd

Avocet - two at Broom GP on 26th

Grey Plover - one on flash near Dunstable STW on 22nd

Ringed Plover - first for 2020 at MCP Wetlands NR on 4th

Little Ringed Plover - first for 2020 arrived mid-month on typical date of 15th at Black Cat GP with birds present later in the month at Dunstable STW, Grovebury and Broom GP at least

Black-tailed Godwit - one at Meadow Lane GP on 18th, seven briefly at Houghton Brook Pools on 19th, three at Dunstable STW from 27th to 30th

Mediterranean Gull - one adult regularly to roost at Grovebury SP during the month, one in the roost at Stewartby on 22nd, one at Broom East GP on 26th

Little Gull - two at Grovebury SP on 19th

Short-eared Owl - one near Potton on 23rd

Merlin - one at Henlow on 5th, near Upper Caldecotte on 9th, possibly same near Biggleswade on 13th and Broom on 20th, another at Brogborough on 18th

Ring-necked Parakeet - pair nesting in Wardown Park, Luton

Sand Martin - First returning bird at Priory CP on 9th, then Grovebury on 14th

Swallow - first reported on 9th over Henlow

Black Redstart - one at Bidwell on 25th to end of month, one at Potton on 27th, another at Blows Down on 31st

Dartford Warbler - one in Houghton Regis CP from 6th to 12th was well watched by many observers. Excellent photo taken by Graham Trew.



Stonechat - strong passage in the first two weeks of the month

Wheatear - arrived in a number of locations on 17th including five at Blows Downs

Black-throated Thrush - reported at Whipsnade Zoo until 14th

Great Grey Shrike - still present by Brogborough Hill during the month but rarely reported

Waxwing - six reported near Thurleigh on 7th

Hawfinch - one over Eaton Bray on 17th

Crossbill - two at The Lodge on 9th

Tree Sparrow - reported again in the month at two farmland locations, one near Chicksands and one north-east of Bedford

April 2020

Bewicks Swan - one at Broom GP on 3rd

Brent Goose - recorded over Biggleswade and Meppershall on nocturnal migration on 1st and 4th

Pink-footed Goose - at least one still roaming around being reported at Tythe Farm, Roxton, Willington, Priory and Meadow Lane

Shelduck - four together at Broom GP on 6th, one at Astral Park Lake, Biggleswade on 16th

Garganey - a pair at Broom East GP on 11th for much of the month, drake still present on 30th

Pintail - one at Woburn on 27th

Ring-necked Duck - still present at Priory CP throughout the month

Common Scoter - noted on twelve recording occasions over Biggleswade, Meppershall, Eaton Bray and Eaton Ford on nocturnal migration between 1st and 7th

Great White Egret - one at Broom on 21st, one at Radwell on 24th

White-tailed Eagle - an immature over Houghton Regis CP on 2nd and just to the west near Sewell on 3rd (one of at least three birds noted around the home counties in this period with two in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, and one in Cambridgeshire at least). This bird is not one of the satellite tagged individuals from Isle of Wight reintroduction scheme and is considered to be one of those that have wandered from the growing population in the Netherlands

Osprey - one over Henlow on 21st

Hen Harrier - one over Meppershall on 10th

Stone Curlew - two nocmig records, Luton on 8th and Meppershall on 11th

Little Ringed Plover - eight at Broom GP on 6th

Curlew - recorded over Biggleswade on nocturnal migration on 2nd and 3rd, Luton on 5th and Meppershall on 6th and 10th. One over Blows Down on 3rd and noted at Brogborough on 13th and 26th

Whimbrel - recorded on nocturnal migration between 15th and 29th on six occasions at Biggleswade, Meppershall and Eaton Ford. Three were seen at Broom GP early on 18th, one over Sandy and another at Houghton Brook Pools on 27th

Bar-tailed Godwit - recorded on nocturnal migration from Eaton Ford and Meppershall. One at Grovebury SP on 23rd and 25th, another flew over Potton on 29th

Black-tailed Godwit - three at Harrowden Meadows on 23rd

Ruff - one at Broom East GP on 3rd

Little Gull - recorded at Priory CP on 6th, 7th, 8th, 13th and 24th, one at Stewartby Lake on 18th and a flock of six over Upper Caldecotte on 21st

Sandwich Tern - one recorded on nocturnal migration on 8th

Little Tern - one at Grovebury SP on 30th

Arctic Tern - birds noted at Priory CP on 22nd and 23rd, five at Stewartby Lake on 24th and two on 29th, one at Grovebury on 30th

Black Tern - one at Grovebury SP and six at Stewartby Lake on 18th, two at Brogborough on 29th

Ring-necked Parakeet - pair still attending nest hole in Luton, one over Wootton on 7th

Cuckoo - first report on 12th near Potton, more widely reported from 17th

Turtle Dove - reported from six locations in the month so looks to be hanging on in the county

Swift - a few early reports this year from 18th when first record received from Broom



Hoopoe - one in Ampthill on 12th, another in Milton Bryan on 13th. Who wouldn't want to open their curtains and see this on their lawn. Picture is of the Milton Bryan record taken by Clare Francis

White Wagtail - one on Stopsley Common on 4th, another there on 15th. Also noted at Broom GP.

Wheatear - noted in low numbers at various sites in the first half of the month

Whinchat - noted at Blows Downs on 13th, Houghton Brook Pools on 18th, near Meppershall on 19th

Redstart - one at Henlow Grange on 8th, one near Potton on 12th, one at Blows Downs on 13th, one near Chalton on 19th

Black Redstart - birds remained on 1st and 2nd at Bidwell and Blows Down, one in Wigmore, Luton on 3rd, one near Meppershall on 19th, one south of Broom on 29th

Nightingale - first of the year at Stewartby Lake on 7th with subsequent reports from a few brick pits locations, with one also near Sandy

Ring Ouzel - one at Barton Hills 5th, one at Potton on 6th, another at Blows Down on 6th, three at Dunstable Downs and one at Streatley on 10th, noted at Warden Hill Luton early morning on 10th (2), 12th and 16th (4) and 24th (3), and at Pulloxhill on 11th, one at Pegsdon on 12th with a count of eight there later in month. Also reported from Kensworth Quarry on 26th and near Potton on three dates

Wood Warbler - one reported at Priory CP on 7th, another heard in Maulden on 16th, another at Woburn GC on 28th

Firecrest - reported from Maulden Woods on 7th and near Southill on 23rd

Great Grey Shrike - Bird at Brogborough first noted in December, still present on 7th April

We thank all contributors who have submitted their records directly to the Recorder, or via Bedsbirds Email Group as well as other sources. Please note that we currently have no official appointed County Bird Recorder and that this role is being supported in the interim by Peter Nash and Andy Grimsey. Records are welcomed to the email address below, and any questions, requests or reports otherwise can be directed to Pete on 07753411786 or Andy on 07402429312.

Records are preferred via the online system BirdTrack,

Compiled by Andy Grimsey
recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk

BLACK-THROATED THRUSH AT WHIPSNADDE

According to British Birds magazine article published in March 2020, the Whipsnade Black-throated Thrush has raised "an exceptional c.£62,000 from additional gate receipts". With this statement covering up to early February no doubt this figure was eventually even higher. No doubt with the Zoo now closed, this was useful revenue for this year, I wonder what they will find next year!

[Info shared from Mike Russell]

COLOUR RINGING INFO

Questions frequently come up with us on reporting of colour-ringed birds. As was recently noted on the email group, the first source of information about colour-ringed birds can be found on the

You can always check colour-ringing schemes on the European Colour Ring Birding website database at <http://www.cr-birding.org/>

On this site, there are links to recording schemes and contact points for each of these so that records can be submitted and responses requested on any individuals found.

BOOK REVIEW - Wilding. The return of nature to a British farm.

Wilding. The return of nature to a British farm by Isabella Tree (2018) is a fascinating book and one that I thoroughly recommend you read if you have not already done so.

It describes how the owners of the Knepp Estate in Sussex, located on heavy clay soils, have returned the land to nature having come to the conclusion that their farm is no longer financially viable. The book is well researched with easy to understand science on a range of agricultural and ecological subjects. It describes how by letting natural processes develop, new habitats and species have taken up residence on the farm, including many species of butterfly and scarce birds never recorded before.

Above all, the book illustrates what can be achieved and offers an alternative view of what could be achieved for biodiversity if an adequate area of the UK was given over to 'wilding'. There are mechanisms in place: agri-environment schemes, replanting of native woodland, and new wetlands following minerals extraction.

However, it should be noted that the book does not offer a complete answer; certain habitats, in particular the uplands, moorland used for grouse shooting, reed-beds, lowland wet grassland and heathland are not covered and these are habitats that need different solutions and continued habitat management.

What is required, is a change of attitude by landowners, government agencies and politicians to enable the natural environment to recover.

Graham Goodall.

TUFTED DUCK DUCKLING RIDING PIGGY-BACK

During the spring of 2019 a flock of Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* of up to 8 males and 6 females, was present on Whiteman's fishing lake, Henlow (map ref. TL183396). When this has happened in previous years, Tufted Duck have bred on the fishing lakes, e.g. in 2013 and 2018, so it was no surprise on 01/07/2019 to see two female Tufted Ducks accompanied by ten small ducklings. It may only have been a single brood as the ducklings tended to swim together and gather around only one of the females. On 03/07/2019 a single female Tufted Duck was seen swimming and diving at the edge of a reed bed while two ducklings swam just inside the reeds nearby. I am not sure if this was all that remained of the brood of ten seen a couple of days earlier. When the female began swimming across a small bay towards another patch of reeds, one of the ducklings jumped onto the females back and stood there. It did not nestle down between the female's wings (as young grebes). Once near the reedbed it jumped off the females back and swam into the reeds. The second duckling swam close beside the female, only leaving her side when near the reeds. I had not previously noted this behaviour in Tufted Ducks.

Two further broods, of 4 small ducklings on 23/07/2019 and 6 small ducklings on 31/07/2019 were noted on the same fishing lake. Sadly, none of the broods appeared to survive for very long.

Roger Hicks

LOCKDOWN BIRD RACE – MAY 2ND AND 3RD

In recent years, a few members have taken part in bird races around the weekend at the start of May, with the intent to record as many species as possible within certain time and location parameters. Traditionally, a bird race was conducted on a countywide basis for 24 hours. More recently, teams have “competed” under a different format which has become known as 10x10. This more restricted format has a lower impact on the environment, and the stamina of the participants! Under the rules of 10x10, species lists are recorded over a ten hour period only within a nominated 10km by 10km OS square. The record in Bedfordshire obtained last year was 102 species in square TL04 which includes Stewartby Lake area and Priory CP with some farmland, urban area and limited woodland that just about encompasses the habitats required to reach the magic three figures provided some migration is occurring on the day. In previous years, 99 had been counted in both TL04 and TL14 (includes Broom GP).

This year the restrictions on movement made that impossible and bird race activities could only take place under the rules of “Big Sit”. This concept is all about recording species from one location bounded roughly in a few metres circle over the course of the day, and inevitably this year means sitting in a garden looking at the surrounding trees and sky for as much of the day as possible.

To encourage some watching and sharing of sightings, we decided this year to encourage members to take part and submit records based on garden big sits and collate the scores and see what could be seen just from birding in this restricted form. We also asked that sightings were shared from permitted walks and cycles (no driving) to see what additional species were available within easy reach of home.

From an individual garden point of view it was unsurprising that Peter Nash was able to provide the biggest list from his plot in Sandy adjacent to the river, though the good fortune of a Black Tern on his list was certainly unexpected. As Matt Burgess had a group of six Little Gulls over his garden in Upper Caldecote a couple of weeks earlier, it would seem that living in close proximity to gravel pits when these sorts of birds are migrating does make them possible to see from gardens; perhaps as they reduce altitude and have a look around at potential temporary stop off points for a snack or rest before continuing on across country. Good luck to all of you who have that opportunity. (Peter also had a Whimbrel on a subsequent day which has only otherwise been noted “in gardens” from electronic signatures found by birders using nocturnal migration recordings).

Overall however across the county, our participating members logged a total of 65 species seen from back gardens alone over the weekend. The list is included on the website from a link on the front page and through the Surveys tab on the menu.

On permitted exercise, additional species noted brought the total up to 102, interestingly matching the total achieved during the county record 10x10 bird race. I guess this shows that in our well populated county we are fortunate (or unfortunate however you look at it) that most decent habitat can be reached easily within a mile or so of where a birder happens to live.

I trust that all those that took part enjoyed the experience and were encouraged to spend more time looking locally and recognise that there are more opportunities to find interesting birds at, or close to, home.

Andy Grimsey

SOME EXTRACTS FROM *BRITISH BIRDS* MAGAZINES

I have recently come into possession of some old editions of the *British Birds* magazine, some dating back to 1946. Reading through some of the volumes I've noted some comments on birds in Bedfordshire, or at least where Bedfordshire gets a mention and these, for your interest, are repeated here, as shown in the original format. Comments in square brackets are my additions.

Vol. XLVI, No.3 publ. March 1953

LARGE GATHERINGS OF TURTLE DOVES – With reference to the note on this subject (vol. xlv, p. 424), Mr. Michael J. Seago reports that on September 3rd, 1943, he counted 154 Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) at Great Plumstead, Norfolk. They flew up from a stubble field and all landed on overhead wires. There were 108 at the same place on September 7th, but only 30 on September 14th. Similar records are given in *The Bedfordshire Naturalist* for 1951, p. 33 (about 100), and in *The Sussex Bird Report* for 1951, p. 16 (about 200).

Vol. XLVI, No.4 publ. April 1953

In almost every BB at this time there were several reviews of bird books and also county bird reports. In this particular edition James Ferguson-Lees (who knew Bedfordshire well of course) wrote a 400-word review of *The Bedfordshire Naturalist* for 1951, or at least the eight pages that dealt with birds. He described it as a “well-planned and very full publication”, based “on the records of some [only] 16 observers”. He mentioned the account of the first breeding attempt of breeding in the county of Little Ringed Plovers and full details of the Bedfordshire counts of Heron and Great Crested Grebe in 1951, then adds that the “most remarkable occurrence of the year was that of a bird identified from the description of the observer as an immature White-tailed Eagle”. Although he considered the evidence convincing the record was later turned down on review. He also mentions “An abnormally large Starling roost” that developed at Elstow of “not less than a quarter of a million birds”. Red-backed Shrikes were reported from five areas and there was an unidentified leaf-warbler in December. He clearly wasn't very impressed with “A somewhat early (August 25th) flock of Fieldfares is included without any details, without even the name of the observer” and he added “there is an unfortunate tendency in some reports for such records of this species to be readily accepted, although there have been many cases where a critical examination has shown the birds concerned to be juvenile Mistle Thrushes”. Mention was also made of other highlights, including Bitterns, Bewick's Swans, a Gannet, the flock of 100 Turtle Doves mentioned in an earlier edition of BB, a Kittiwake, a Corncrake and a Quail. He finished his review by adding “It should particularly be mentioned that this is one of the very few reports that adopts the excellent policy of including mention of *all* the species occurring in the county”.

Barry Nightingale

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the following new member to the Beds Bird Club:

Ron Bowler, Marston Moretaine

We hope you will enjoy many years of membership with us.

Mary Sheridan

ARTICLES FOR THE HOBBY

If you have any articles for *The Hobby*, particularly those that relate to birds and birding experiences within Bedfordshire, please forward text, graphs, pictures and any other information to editor@bedsbirdclub.org.uk for inclusion in a future edition.

GUIDANCE ON UNDERTAKING SURVEY WORK FROM THE BTO (May 2020)

All guidance issued by BTO for BTO/RSPB/JNCC partnership surveys is based on the position adopted by JNCC, who have liaised with the appropriate members of government in all countries of the UK. The JNCC position clearly states that survey and monitoring work undertaken by volunteers is not classed by government as an essential activity, meaning that surveyors, including ringers and nest recorders, are subject to all constraints on travel and other areas of life currently imposed on the general public. It is therefore vital that:

- All activities adhere to government guidelines at all times, noting that these may now vary across countries and crown dependencies (e.g. Isle of Man, Channel Islands).
- Volunteers ensure that the guidance being referred to is up-to-date - guidelines are subject to change, dependent on the prevalence of disease over coming months.

There is now significant divergence of guidance issued by governments in different parts of Britain & Ireland, which has significant implications for survey operations. It is vital to ensure that you adhere to the guidelines issued by the country in which you are operating, regardless of the country in which you are based; this is clearly particularly important for volunteers operating close to national borders.

A key message we'd like to get across is that our highest priority during our activities must be to protect the welfare of volunteers and members of the public; there is no obligation to take part in BTO survey work and if you have any doubts about the impacts of your activities on yourself or others, please do not undertake them.

Below is the wording used on the survey specific home pages:

BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey

England, Bailiwicks of Guernsey & Jersey and Isle of Man: You may undertake your BBS visits *but*, please ensure visits take place within three or four days either side of your usual visit date as normal. This is absolutely critical this year as we will largely be working with Late visit only data and need to remain as consistent as possible with this limited dataset. If you cannot survey within this timeframe when looking at previous dates for the site, we advise the survey is not carried out for that visit. Although two visits are normally recommended, there is some scope, depending on the coverage we achieve, to produce trends for some species in England based on Late visit data only. Of course, any data collected will be valuable and available for other research purposes regardless of what we can achieve with trend production for 2020. Please ensure that you have the landowner's permission to visit, where necessary. Please be sensitive to the feelings of some landowners at this time and if it doesn't feel right to approach them, please leave fieldwork for this season.

Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland: no fieldwork is possible at this time.

BTO/JNCC/RSPB Waterways Breeding Bird Survey

England, Bailiwicks of Guernsey & Jersey and Isle of Man: You may undertake your Late WBBS visit *but*, please ensure visits take place within three or four days either side of your usual visit date as normal. This is absolutely critical this year as we will largely be working with Late visit only data and need to remain as consistent as possible with this limited dataset. If you cannot survey within this timeframe when looking at previous dates for the site, we advise the survey is not carried out for that visit. Although two visits are normally recommended, there is some scope, depending on the coverage we achieve, to produce trends for some species in England based on Late visit data only. Of course, any data collected will be valuable and available for other research purposes regardless of what we can achieve with trend production for 2020. Please ensure that you have the landowners permission to visit, where necessary. Please be sensitive to the feelings of some landowner's at this time and if it doesn't feel right to approach them, please leave fieldwork for this season.

Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland: no fieldwork is possible at this time.

BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey

England, Bailiwicks of Guernsey & Jersey and Isle of Man: You may undertake your WeBS counts

provided you follow the social distancing guidelines. If you are able, you can carry out your May Core Count visit late (preferably on Sunday 17th May). However, you should feel under no pressure to visit your WeBS site if you do not feel comfortable doing so, or if you are concerned about the impacts of carrying out survey work on relations with landowners or other members of the public.
Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland: no fieldwork is possible at this time.

Heronries Census

England, Bailiwicks of Guernsey & Jersey and Isle of Man: You may visit your heronry to undertake counts provided you follow the social distancing guidelines. However, you should feel under no pressure to visit your heronry if you do not feel comfortable doing so, or if you are concerned about the impacts of carrying out survey work on relations with landowners or other members of the public. Grey Heron chicks may already have fledged from many nests, but Little Egret nests are likely to still be active. If you do visit your site, please indicate in the comments box whether any Grey Heron estimates are considered representative for the year or are likely to be an under-estimate.
Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland: no fieldwork is possible at this time.

Supplied by Graham Goodall



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