



THE HOBBY

Website: www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk

Issue 143: Published January 2016

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first 2016 edition of The Hobby. Winter still seems to be eluding us and as a result county birding has been difficult with lower than normal numbers and variety of wildfowl and small birds well dispersed around the fields and woods.

The county's now annual Duck Hunt takes place on 17th January and data from last year is presented to whet the appetite for this years event while as a reminder of how good birding in Bedfordshire can become when the real cold sets in, Barry has prepared an article reminiscing on January and February 1985, now over 30 years ago. Also included this month is an extract from a recent Penguin book courtesy of John Tomlin which shows an insight into the family life of the Blue Tit that draws on experience of the studies undertaken at Dunstable Sewage Works. Good birding to all...

Andy Grimsey

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2015 BIRD NEWS

Contributors: please phone Steve Blain on 07979 606300 or email recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk with any news or records. Records are preferred via the online system BirdTrack, using the Excel file found on the Bird Club Website, singly using the online form (<http://tinyurl.com/2v6oweh>), or on paper.

November 2015

Pintail - Two were at Broom GP on 21st, and three were at Grovebury SP on 22nd, with two there on 29th.

Red-crested Pochard - Four were at Broom GP from 15th

Greater Scaup - A pair were at Cuckoo Bridge Lake from 13th, and a drake was at Brogborough Lake on 21st.

Great Northern Diver - One was at Stewartby Lake from 28th (SCB)

Shag - One was found freshly dead on the road adjacent to Chawston Lakes on 19th (RIB)

Merlin - A female was at Broom GP on 7th, with additional sightings on 13th.

European Golden Plover - Over 3700 were at Meadow Lane GP towards the end of the month

Black-tailed Godwit - One was at Broom GP on 7th

Mediterranean Gull - Singles were at MVCP on 18th, Tempsford on 21st, Stewartby Lake on 22nd, MVCP on 28th, and Stewartby Lake on 29th.

Caspian Gull - One was at Derek Whites Eggs pit on 10th (RIB, SCB)

Short-eared Owl - One was at Broom GP until 3rd

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - One was at the Lodge on 17th, and again on 22nd.

Great Grey Shrike - One was found at Poppy Hill, Langford on 8th and remained in the area until the years end (RH).

Tree Sparrow - One was near the Old Warden Raptor watchpoint on 8th.



Brambling - Small numbers were noted throughout the county

Lesser Redpoll - Up to 50 were at Sandy Smith NR

December 2015

Pink-footed Goose - The injured bird at Harrold and Odell CP was still present on 16th.

Brent Goose - One was at Stewartby Lake on 28th (MG)

Pintail - Two were at Broom GP on 29th.

Greater Scaup - A female was at Brogborough Lake from 5th, with a drake at Meadow Lane GP on 6th, with the Cuckoo Bridge pair also still present during the month. A second drake was present at Meadow Lane GP on 15th.

Great Northern Diver - One was present at Stewartby Lake all month, with a second bird joining it from 28th after having a brief trip to Brogborough Lake beforehand (NW).

Great White Egret - Two were found - one at Cuckoo Bridge Lake from 12th-25th (RIB), and another at Woburn on the Bird Club Boxing day walk.

Merlin - One flew over Biggleswade on 16th, another was near Luton on 2nd.

Mediterranean Gull - A first-winter was at Meadow Lane GP on 15th. An adult was at Stewartby Lake on 18th and 27th, and MVCP on 23rd. A further adult was at Southill on 20th and at Broom GP on 21st.

Caspian Gull - An adult was at Broom GP on 28th (JP, SCB)

Short-eared Owl - One was at Ravensden on 3rd, at Shillington on 11th-20th, with another at Kempston Mill from at least the 23rd.

Great Grey Shrike - The Poppy Hill bird was present but elusive.

Common Chiffchaff - A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Marston Sewage Works from 28th (NW, PW)

Black Redstart - One was at Cardington on 6th, with a singing bird found in Luton on 8th.

Lesser Redpoll - Up to 70 were at Sandy Smith NR, 60 at Broom GP, and 15 at the Lodge.

Common Redpoll - Two were in the Broom GP redpoll flock at the end of the year (SCB)



Firecrest - One was at Meadow Lane from 11th-22nd.

Observers:

SCB - Steve Blain; RIB - Richard Bashford; MG - Martin Green;
NW - Neil Wright; PW - Paul Wright; JP - Jim Porter

We thank all contributors who have submitted their records directly to the Recorder, or via Bedsbirds Email Group as well as other sources.

Compiled by Steve Blain
recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk

PROGRAMME MATTERS

Forthcoming events

Tuesday 26th January. ‘Birds interaction with the landscape – BTO research at global to local scales’ by Dr Andy Clements, Director, British Trust for Ornithology. Reviewed in the last issue, a late reminder of this important event.

Tuesday 23rd February STARTING AT 7.45pm. Bird Club’s brief AGM followed immediately by ‘Snow, Sand and Sea’ a talk by Alan Davies and Ruth Miller of *The Biggest Twitch* fame. This promises to be an inspirational talk about birding in Morocco. If you’ve been there you will agree that it’s a brilliant destination for birds, if you haven’t, you will want to start planning.

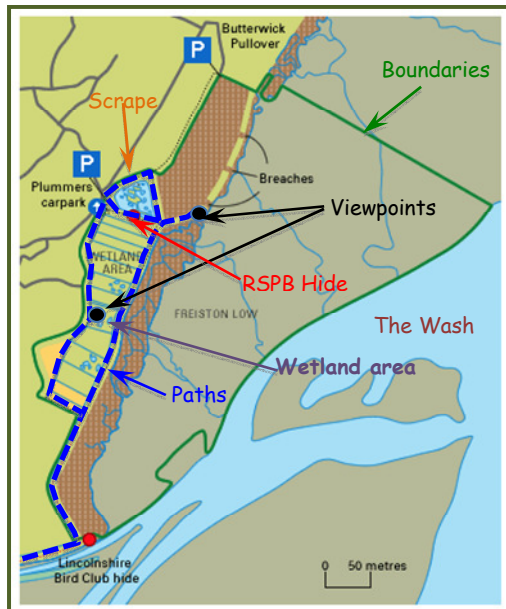
Sunday 13th March. Club trip to the Blackwater Estuary, Essex. Directions to the meeting place, Old Hall Farm car park, TL959124 : from A12 take B1023 via Tiptree to Tolleshunt D’Arcy. Turn left at village maypole then right into Chapel Rd (back road to Tollesbury). After 1 mile turn left into Old Hall Lane. Do not stop in narrow lane. At Old hall Farm go around garden in front of Farmhouse, through gate, over cattle grid to sign-posted carpark.

Tuesday 29th March. ‘The Wild World of Corvids: understanding behaviour and cognition’ by Dr Gabrielle Davidson, University of Cambridge. Corvids are renowned for their sophisticated intelligence, but what exactly do these birds understand about the world around them? This talk will explore how tool-using corvids tackle problems involving the physical world, and how wild jackdaws have adapted to ecological and social challenges. Come along and be amazed!

Don Green

**BEDS BIRD CLUB FIELD TRIP TO LINCOLNSHIRE –
SUNDAY OCTOBER 4TH 2015 – FREISTON SHORE AND FRAMPTON MARSHES.**

With a reasonably high tide forecast on the Lincolnshire coast – 6.64 meters at 11:06 - seven club members met just before 9am in the car park at the Freiston Shore RSPB reserve just a few miles north of Boston with its notable landmark, St. Botolph's Church ('The Stump' – and no doubt it's resident Peregrine Falcon).



Mixed flock of waders on Frieston Shore scrape. (Mary Sheridan)

A quick scan from the car park across the scrape revealed good numbers of **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Canada Geese** and numerous **Wigeon** and distant groups of waders (to be identified later once we reached the hide). After short walk to the wetland area viewpoint, usually good for waders, we were disappointed to find it very dry and bird-less but added **Tree Sparrow**, **Robin**, **Reed Bunting**, **Goldfinch**, **Willow Warbler** and **Blackcap** to our day list. Taking the hedge lined path alongside the scrape we reached the hide where we set about identifying the numerous waders seen earlier but now much closer and as the time approached that of the high tide many more birds joined the flocks. A mixed group just in front of the hide included **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Ruff**, **Red Knot**, **Common Redshank**, **Turnstone**, and **Dunlin** most in advanced state of plain but immaculate winter plumage. Further across the scrape were a large group of roosting **Oystercatcher** and on an adjacent island a group over 50 **Ringed Plovers**.



Trio of Dunlin on Frieston Shore scrape. (JT)



Pristine winter plumaged Red Knot. (JT)

Pied Wagtails and one or two *Meadow Pipits* were also feeding along the shingled edge of the one of the islands. After hopefully identifying all the birds in front of us, and listing some of the many colour ringed Godwit to send to the University of East Anglia's sightings programme, we left the hide and continued our walk towards the northern end of the reserve. On reaching the high point of the footpath our view over the scrape was much improved and *Greenshank*, & *Little Grebe* were found and a couple of flyover *Lesser Redpolls* were initially heard by our trip leader and then seen by all. By now the high tide was at it's maximum but not substantial enough to move many more birds on to the wetlands or tidal marshes making them difficult to identify as they fed on the distant waters edge of 'The Wash', the heat shimmer contributing to the poor visibility. However we were able to add *Cormorant*, *Black-headed Gull*, *Brent Geese*, *Curlew*, and a couple of small raptors having a mid-air battle one of which was identified as a *Peregrine*, to our day list. Now approaching mid day and time to move on, we made our way back to the cars, at least three nice *Goldcrests* being seen feeding along the path side bushes. Back in the cars we were now on our way to the south side of Boston to the RSPB reserve at Frampton Marsh. After a picnic lunch around the tables outside the visitor centre we made our way on to the reserve with some of the group going into one of the hide whilst others continued towards the sea wall in the hope of seeing the reported Merlin.



Frampton Marsh - visitors centre in background.



Frampton Marsh from the sea wall.

Fortunately right on cue the *Merlin* was spotted on a distant gate and after phoning the rest of the group to join us, we all had distant but acceptable views, including an unsuccessful chase of a *Pied Wagtail*. With water levels not as high as usual, very few wading birds were on the reserve, but good numbers of *Wigeon* were feeding on the grass and a few *Teal*, *Black-tailed Godwit*, *Common Snipe* and *Ruff* in the small wet areas available. From the elevated position on the sea wall, from where the complete area of the reserve can be seen, a mystery duck initially thought to be a Tufted Duck or possible a hybrid was eventually confirmed by our trip leader to be a winter plumaged *Scaup* – a nice end to a good day, with in the region of 70 species being recorded.

Thanks to our trip organiser Don Green and our leader Pete Marshall for a good day and to all who joined the trip for their company, making for another excellent days birding.

John Tomlin 6/10/15

THE GREAT DUCK HUNT

The Great Duck Hunt has taken place in the county each year since 2009. This year's event is scheduled for 17th January 2016 to coincide with the monthly WEBS count and as in previous years, club members attempt to count waterbirds on as many of the lakes, ponds, wetlands and stretches of river as possible. Co-ordination of the count will be managed by Steve Blain and a list of the sites and their counters is maintained on the bird club photo blog at:

<http://bedsbirds.blogspot.co.uk/p/2016-great-duck-hunt-sites.html>

a page which is also linked from the website homepage

As a guide to what might be expected here is a list of the previously unpublished records for the count that was conducted on 17th/18th January 2015 when a total of over 22000 birds were counted.

SPECIES	2015 TOTAL	SPECIES	2015 TOTAL
Mute Swan	545	Great Crested Grebe	161
Whooper Swan	2	Black-necked Grebe	1
Black Swan	3	Little Grebe	168
Barnacle Goose	560		
Canada Goose	1270	Cormorant	372
Egyptian Goose	11	Great White Egret	1
Greylag Goose	1446	Grey Heron	101
Greylag Goose (domestic)	9	Little Egret	17
Greylag Goose (re-established)	3		
Pink-footed Goose	2	Moorhen	570
hybrid Canada x domestic Greylag Goose	3	Coot	2317
Hybrid/Domestic Goose	8	Water Rail	18
Muscovy Duck	4	Golden Plover	528
Mandarin Duck	1	Lapwing	1274
Gadwall	811	Woodcock	2
Mallard	2529	Jack Snipe	12
Mallard (domestic)	21	Snipe	157
Shoveler	112	Redshank	2
Teal	651	Green Sandpiper	5
Wigeon	1185		
Hybrid/Domestic Duck	19	Kingfisher	17
Pochard	550		
Red-crested Pochard	6	Black-headed Gull	4406
Tufted Duck	1952	Common Gull	411
Ferruginous Duck	1	Herring Gull	19
Hybrid Pochard x Tufted Duck	1	Lesser Black-backed Gull	50
Goldeneye	59	Greater Black-backed Gull	2
Goosander	10		
Common Scoter	1	Grand Total	22395

2015 was the first year in which Great White Egret made the list for the Great Duck Hunt but, with the recent increase in the number in southern England and the records of two birds in the last month in the county, we may expect more of these in the future. The photo below shows a typical view of the recent bird at Cuckoo Bridge Lakes near Great Barford



A COLD WINTER REMEMBERED

It has been said on many occasions that very cold, wintry weather can bring the best of birding to Bedfordshire. That was certainly the case 30 years ago, in January 1985, and indeed the county bird report for that year opened with the statement 'In the wake of Siberian weather conditions in January and February came the most exciting period ever known in the county.' The Meteorology report in the journal said 'At the start of the year, very cold air from continental Europe moved steadily into Britain bringing three weeks of severe wintry weather to Bedfordshire. Snowfall was frequent but generally light, and the ground was snow-covered for up to 20 days.'

Most of the smaller, shallow waters became frozen over quickly and thereafter birds and birders alike centred largely on the deeper waters in the Marston Vale, notably Stewartby Lake, which even in the most severe spell kept some free water, and Brogborough Lake.

The first few days of January were fairly unremarkable, although a lingering Red-necked Grebe from 1984 was still to be found at Millbrook CIP (now part of MVCP), Pochard numbers reached 500 at Brogborough Lake and a Hen Harrier was seen near Haynes. A Great Grey Shrike put in an appearance at Biggleswade Common on the 3rd before 21 Bewick's Swans, part of an influx to come, were at Carlton on the 4th. But then very cold northerly air arrived over south-east Britain on the 6th, with some heavy snowfalls and that kick-started a period of great interest in the county. A Hen Harrier was seen at Luton Hoo on the 7th, and by the next day Barry Squires noted that most of the waters there were already frozen. There were two 'wild' Whooper Swans at Blunham on the 10th, joining two long-staying feral birds there, and five Ruddy Ducks at Stewartby increased to eight by the 12th. On that day six Bean Geese (the first in the county in the 20th century) flew over Brogborough Lake, there was a Red-crested Pochard at Blunham, four Smews at Stewartby, two Glaucous Gulls and seven Goosanders at Brogborough, together with a Scaup there, the latter the first in the county since 1976.

The coldest spell was from the 13th to the 18th January, with the temperatures continuously below freezing. On the 13th a 'large influx', certainly by 1985 standards, of Wigeons occurred, with 267 in the Stewartby area, before peaking at 300 by the 20th. An impressive count of 1,600 Common Coots was made at Brogborough, also on the 13th. A Hooded Crow was at Brogborough on the 15th and the next day there were four Goosanders at Stewartby and 16 at Luton Hoo. The coldest night of the year, with air temperatures down to minus 15.6°C, occurred on the 17th. Even the maximum temperature that day failed to rise higher than minus 4.3°C in many places. By that day Goosanders had increased to five at Stewartby and another 17, considered different to those there the day before, were at Luton Hoo, where, by this time, there was little free water. The next day saw 130 Moorhens at Luton Hoo – they were to increase to 200 there on the 24th, but attention was largely focussed on Stewartby on the 18th. Star turns there included a Black-necked Grebe, three Bewick's Swans nearby, 247 Pochards and nine Ruddy Ducks.

Clearly anxious to catch up with the excitement (I'd been to both Stewartby and Brogborough on the 13th), my notebook for the 19th at Stewartby lists the following: a Black-throated Diver; two Red-necked Grebes; a Black-necked Grebe; a Glaucous Gull; nine Ruddy Ducks; four Smews; 24 Goosanders; four Red-breasted Mergansers; a Spotted Redshank; a Ruff; 200 Great Crested Grebes; 200 Pochards; three Bewick's Swans nearby and a Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher. Has there ever been a better day than that at Stewartby? There were also two Knots and a Greenshank there, which I failed to see, whilst elsewhere there was a Bittern over Luton Hoo and a total of 16 more Bewick's Swans at another four county sites. Much of the same assortment was still on view at Stewartby the next day, plus ten Pintails, and with Goosanders increasing to 38 (with another nine at Barker's Lane GP) and a Hen Harrier at Brogborough. On the 22nd two more Red-necked Grebes were found, considered different to those earlier, with one each at Stewartby and Brogborough, another Glaucous Gull was

found in that area, and on the 23rd a White-fronted Goose was at Stewartby, whilst the Smew count there had risen to seven. There were still five Smeews at Stewartby on the 25th, when there were another five at Dunstable STW, whilst a Red-crested Pochard dropped into Brogborough. A Scaup was at Barker's Lane GP on the 26th, with another there the next day, and on the 27th another Red-crested Pochard was found at Blunham, whilst the Ruddy Duck count at Stewartby had increased to ten.

Winter plumage Ruddy Duck – remember these ?



By now, though, the weather had turned milder, before another very cold spell occurred from the 8th February, when there was a substantial snow fall of up to 15cm in some local areas. Curiously however, that second period didn't have the same impact as the cold spell in January, although records in February still included more Scaups, a Merlin at Stewartby Lake, Hen Harrier at South Mills, a Slavonian Grebe at Elstow and a Black-tailed Godwit at Dunstable STW.

As I read through the bird report for 1985 I was reminded of some familiar birders' names, many of whom were the finders of the birds mentioned, including Martin Palmer, Dave Odell, Lee Evans, Steve Williams, Barry Squires, Duncan Woodhead, Andy Tomczynski, Paul Trodd and Ian Dawson, and many of those are still active in the county today. I hope that if they read this article they will also be reminded of some remarkable, if somewhat cold, excursions out in the county during January and February, 30 years ago.

Barry Nightingale

FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT BLUE TITS – extracted from 'Window into a Nest Box'
by Geraldine Lux Flanagan and Sean Morris.

(Supported by photos, observations and records of nest boxes at Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works (DSTW) over the last 6 years).

Male and females pair up in mid winter keeping close company in a feeding flock – 'a winter couple'. 'Pair Bonding' commences with the female vibrating spread wings which encourages the male to feed her, a very important requirement to promote further sexual development in both birds

Early New Year small amounts of powerful chemical substances (sex hormones) are produced by special glands and released into the blood stream to start the development of reproductive organs.

February – March.

Reproductive organs continue to mature triggered by longer daylight hours, food, and warmth of weather and sunshine. Birds have no teeth; their stomachs have a gizzard, a section which contains grit and stones to function like a mill. Blue Tits' 'winter stomachs' take up a large part of their abdomen to cope with harder food, while their reproductive organs are quite small. Once their reproductive organs mature their stomachs shrink to 'summer stomachs' to make way for greatly enlarged ovaries in the female and enlarged testicles in the male. Their stomachs are then only capable of digesting soft foods.

Male locates a suitable nest site and encourages female to inspect it by aligning his body with the potential nest entrance such that his white cheek feathers are prominent and his horizontal dark eye streak and bill act as a pointer towards the potential nest entrance. Males often draw attention to the nest site by hammering around the entrance hole with their beaks. Until anti-predator plates were added to the DSTW nest boxes quite a lot of damage was observed around the entrance holes. Acceptance of the nest site (if new to this couple) can take up to 8 weeks during which time they inspect it in all weather conditions to ensure the nest site's reliability, and it being a suitable size to raise a brood of possibly as many as 12 youngsters. During this time 'pair bonding' continues. By the end of March sexual maturity is almost complete and minute eggs are starting to form in the female. By now the nest site is as good as accepted and thoughts turn to nest building.

Late March early April.

With the onset of spring and the first buds opening on the trees and bushes the birds now find the first tiny insect larvae of the season. This new food along with the other signs of spring act as signals for the pair to advance to their next phase of courtship – more feeding of the female by the male - now **inside** the nest box as if to say “this is our home in which to raise our family”.

Not all birds have identical time lines - I have recorded nest building as early as 19th March and as late as mid-April, and it can take as long as 5 weeks to complete (box 1 in 2013) or as short as 3 days (box 17 in 2013). Only the female participates in nest building – the male keeping her supplied with food which further stimulates her nest building activities.

Usually the nest consists of three main layers, coarse straw as a “foundation”, moss as an intermediate layer, and finally soft bedding (animal fur etc.) as a lining to the nest cup, often located in a corner of the nest box. Feeding of the female by the male increases, the protein-rich caterpillars are essential for the female to produce nutritious eggs from which the chicks will grow.

By now the female starts to lose the downy feathers on her belly (formation of 'brood patch') caused by additional reproductive hormones that are also increasing the formation of eggs within her body.

Mid April to Mid May.

At this point nests are usually complete. Ripening eggs are now bursting from the female's ovary (meaning egg-ary), passing into the oviduct (egg-duct or tube) each containing a small almost invisible living dot attached to a food rich yolk. One at a time these minute eggs start a four-day journey down the oviduct.

Numerous copulations now take place ensuring sufficient microscopic sperm will fertilise the eggs prior to the white and the shell being formed around it. By around the end of April the first pale pink speckled eggs are laid, usually early morning, followed by one a day for up to the next 9 days (for a clutch of 10 – 12 not being uncommon). Sometimes not all will be fertile – the average fledging number recorded at DSTW in a good year being around 7. Incubation will not commence until all the eggs are laid, thus ensuring that all young hatch around the same time, also that incubation and feeding of the young does not overlap, and all young grow at the same rate and fledge simultaneously. During the egg-laying period the female will leave the nest and more often than not cover her incomplete clutch with soft nest material. This 'blanket' protects against unseasonal cold but more importantly will protect the eggs from the warmth of her brood patch so they stay dormant at an even cool temperature until the clutch is complete and brooding commences in earnest.

Once the female feels the bulk of eggs beneath her is complete it 'turns on' her urge to brood and 'turns off' production of egg forming hormones.

Brooding is almost continuous with only a few minutes every 2 hours taken to leave the nest to feed etc. It is only carried out by the female – the male occasionally visiting the nest to feed the female.

Once she is back on the nest the eggs are turned frequently to ensure even exposure to the female's 'electric blanket' brood patch which by now is inflamed and wrinkled due to the increased supply of warm blood, radiating a temperature of over 38°C.

After 12 to 14 days the eggs hatch, usually within a couple of days of each other. The female will eat a great deal of the eggshells to replenish the vast amount of calcium she lost from her bones in producing the shells for her eggs.

The young are still turned by the female, as she did her eggs, to ensure none get stuck at the bottom of the pile and miss out on being fed. Initially, while the young are naked, the female stays in the nest keeping the young warm relying on the male to deliver food for her to pass to the young. Although naked and blind at birth the young sense the arrival of the adult and beg for food with beaks wide open and necks extended. Nests are always kept clean, the young up-ending to offer a fecal pellet (dropping) for the adult to take away or sometimes swallowed by the female. After about a week the female will leave the nest more often in search of food and the male will take a more active roll in directly feeding the young.

During the second week the young are now much bigger and are large enough to be left on their own for a short period as stubble of feathers start to sprout from their heads, spine and wings – eyes also starting to open. Burrowing under the young by the female continues to ensure none of the young get 'lost' under their fast growing siblings. Now that the young can produce their own warmth the female's brood patch is no longer necessary and she starts to grow new downy feathers.



End of May to Early June.

Young are now just under 2 weeks old – bright eyed and wing flapping – all feathers well emerged and look very much like a mini Blue Tit. Early morning is the busiest time of the day, but both parents work 15 hours a day from dawn to dusk with a parent visiting the nest with food on average every 3 to 4 minutes. During 'speedy catering service' one caterpillar was recorded being delivered every 40 seconds, the parents being stimulated by the amount 'begging' by the chicks.

During their third week the parents become quite worn and frayed from their miles of flight* whilst the young become plump, pristine and handsomely feathered. After about 21 days (weather dependent) the young birds will leave the nest encouraged by the adult calling them with food from **outside** the nest box. Amazingly without any practice the young birds are able to instinctively fly as soon as they leave. Once fledged, the parents will continue to feed the young for a few days but they soon learn to fend for themselves. Regrettably only about 1 in 5 (20%) will still be alive by the end of the summer, sufficient however to maintain a stable population.

A typical clutch of 7 young have been observed to consume between 600 and 1,000 caterpillars per day (average say 800*), that's around 115 each chick and during their nominal 21 days in the nest prior to fledging, equates to around 17,000 total, in excess of 2,400 each young bird.



For reference the image on the left shows a pile of 500 caterpillars compared to a £1 coin.

Relate these facts to the 190 birds that fledged from nest boxes at the Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works this year (2015) that's almost 22,000 caterpillars per day - 460,000 over the 21 day fledging period (excluding 36 young that unfortunately died before fledging).

*Assuming that each adult makes an average 200 feeding trips per day to and from the nest (say 2 caterpillars per trip); and that they had to fly say 50 meters to and from the food source (100m round trip), each bird would have covered 20 kilometres per day (200 trips x 100 meters ÷ 1000) – over 12 miles, and 420 kilometres over the 21 days the young were in the nest = 260 miles (excluding the numerous trips the female must have made whilst nest building).

Extracts from book kindly permitted by Penguin Books Ltd.

John Tomlin

NOTES ON CETTI'S WARBLER SONG

The following exchange took place on the bedsbirds yahoo group on 12th November 2015. It has been reproduced here for those that did not see it before as both a note on the behaviour of a bird, and the thought processes exhibited by two of our best birders in the field...

Les Dawson plays Cetti's... Interesting Cetti's Warbler song at Octagon Farm this afternoon, buried deep in brambles. All the usual notes, but not in the right order. As it also seemed a bit quieter than usual, presumably it was a sub-song, and a first year bird dispersing (as I haven't heard one here recently). Ended with a louder burst of more typical song, but just the first two explosive notes followed by a truncated version of the 'chitty chitty bang bang' bit. Dave Ball 12th November 2015

This bird sounds like the one that has been at the sewage works bridge for the last (almost) two months. This bird often sang a composite song composed, usually, of the main song phrase followed immediately by the second half of the song and further variations of this. It often sang fairly quietly, lacking the full strength song.

On one occasion it sang for twelve minutes almost without pausing and, on another, it sang for seven minutes without pause. To be anthropomorphic - it sounded as though it was singing quietly to itself (whilst it did the ironing!)

I hadn't heard a Cetti's sing such long sequences before. Dave Kramer

Yes. I meant to add, but forgot, that this bird was also singing almost continuously, probably for over five minutes, though I didn't time it. It must also have been quieter than usual as it was very close, though invisible - I managed to move about a bit and triangulate its position deep in the brambles. A normal volume Cetti's at that range would have been deafening :-). Interestingly, the last burst of song, which was nearer to a typical song, was considerably louder. Practising? Singing to itself? I think I've seen both explanations offered for 'sub-song'. No more sound after giving the fuller song, so wonder if it flew - heard a theory that they do after singing, though can't say I've ever noticed it much.

Actually, of course it was Eric Morecambe who played 'all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order'. Confused by memories of Les Dawson's ability to brilliantly mangle tunes on the piano but still leave them (just) recognisable. Dave Ball

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Beds Bird Club:

Glen Bowen, Bedford
Matt Bruce and Beth Aucott, Sandy

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

Mary Sheridan

IMAGES BY:

Martin Palmer: Firecrest
Mike Lawrence: Brambling
Richard Bashford: Ruddy Duck, Great White Egret



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