



THE HOBBY

Website: www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk

Issue 160: Published November 2018

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the November 2018 production of The Hobby. In this bulletin we have included detail on recent birds in the county and by complete contrast a short travelogue from Graham Goodall on his recent trip to the Seychelles to remind us all perhaps of sunnier, warmer times and that we should start looking at next year's holidays sooner rather than later.

Also included is the 2019 subscription renewal form which we would invite all to return for the start of the year.

Good birding to all for the winter...

PROGRAMME MATTERS

Programme of Indoor Meetings 2018 / 19

Our next indoor meeting will be on 27th November 2018 when Dr Simon Gillings from BTO will present on the study of nocturnal migration. This subject has become one of the new frontiers of birding with new technology and smart phone applications readily available to collect and identify recordings of overflying migrants and allow more information to be gathered on which species, and in what numbers, pass over us at night. The study in Bedfordshire has already added Ortolan Bunting to the county list. Dr Gillings is Head of Population Ecology and Modelling at the BTO and if his talk meets the standard set by previous visitors from the BTO, then this will be well worth attending.

Our pre-Christmas meeting on 18th December will be our now annual review of birds in the county through the year, led by Richard Bashford and comprising a compilation of video recordings of the rare and scarce visitors into the county, and additional footage of our more regular birds doing interesting things, sometimes with a bit of non-avian action thrown in for added interest.

Richard has begun work on this already and would welcome any contributions that any members would wish to share and if you have any footage, unusual sightings, common sightings, odd behaviour or simply something you think the audience will enjoy, he'd love to hear from you.

Richard would be happy to receive DVD, CD, Memory stick or transferred files via Dropbox or similar platforms such as OneDrive or GoogleDrive. Any questions, please contact Richard on 07742 616025

Our indoor talks all take place at Maulden Village Hall at 8pm, with doors open from 7:30pm. Our December meeting will also include provision of some seasonal snacks alongside the normal tea and coffee.

Outdoor Meetings

Our next two meetings are relatively local. Firstly, Sheila Alliez will lead some morning birding around Stockgrove and Rushmere Country Parks on Sunday 9th December, then in the New Year, a visit to Rye House Marsh and Amwell Pits NR will take place on Sunday 13th January, led by John Tomlin.

Contact Kevin Sharpe (07827 440394) if lifts are required or with any queries regarding attendance of events in the outdoor programme.

Details about the entire winter outdoor meetings program are also included on our website at bedsbirds.org.uk and on the leaflet enclosed with hard copies of The Hobby Sept 2018 for those who received the bulletin in that format.

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2018 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. Another option for recorded is now available on the internet; If you only have one or two bird records to send us (or if you're not keen on trying the rather fabulous BirdTrack website) please use the iRecord form at <http://bedsbirdclub.org.uk/irecordbirdrecord/>

September 2018

Honey-buzzard - A juvenile flew over the Lodge RSPB on 20th (SCB), and another flew over Dunstable on 30th (FB)

Black Kite - One was reported near Upper Caldecote on 7th (GS)

Osprey - One flew over Sutton on 21st, with presumably the same individual over Upper Caldecote later that day.

Merlin - One flew over Dunstable on 16th, and another was at Wood End on 30th.

Red Knot - Two flew through Priory CP on 18th.

Little Stint - One was at Grovebury SP on 13th.

Pectoral Sandpiper - A juvenile was present with the Grey Phalarope at Grovebury SP on 25th (JL) making a unique double in the county.

Ruff - One was at Grovebury SP on 11th.

Eurasian Curlew - One flew over Wigmore CP on 4th.

Greenshank - One was at MVCP on 2nd, with two at Brogborough Tip Pools on 8th with one there on 13th-14th, and two at MVCP on 12th.

Wood Sandpiper - One was at MVCP on 2nd, another at Brogborough Tip Pools on 9th-14th.

Grey Phalarope - Juveniles were present at Brogborough Lake (SCB, DOM) between 21st-22nd and Grovebury SP (JL) 22nd-30th.

Mediterranean Gull - An adult was at Broom South Quarry on 2nd.

Caspian Gull - Two were at Grovebury SP on 12th including a polish ringed juvenile which was also present on 14th.

Common Redstart - One was at Chicksands on 1st, one at Pegsdon Hills on 2nd

Whinchat - One was at Chicksands on 1st, one at Pegsdon Hills on 2nd, three at Brogborough Tip Pools on 5th with two there on 9th and three on 10th-13th, and two there on 22nd. One was in Southill Park on 9th. One was on Sandy Heath with three at Broom GP on 13th, and one on 17th.

Common Stonechat - One was at Broom GP on 17th, and another near Clifton on 29th.

Tree Pipit - One flew over Pegsdon Hills on 15th (SCB, AG)

Water Pipit - One was reported at Broom GP on 27th (TH, GN)

Ruddy Shelduck - Two were at MVCP on 30th.

October 2018

Whooper Swan - One was at Grovebury SP on 28th. The last remaining feral bird in the county was seen over a year ago now so any Whoopers in south Beds are fair game again!

Pink-footed Goose - 11 flew over Old Warden Tunnel on 7th (JP)

Northern Gannet - A juvenile flew over Sandy on 1st (SCB)

Great White Egret - One was at Radwell Lakes on 16th.

Hen Harrier - A ring-tail was at Cockayne Hatley on 18th.

Merlin - A male was near Upper Caldecote on 31st

Black-tailed Godwit - One was at Brogborough Tip Pools on 27th.

Mediterranean Gull - A second-winter was at Broom on 13th.

Caspian Gull - The Polish ringed first-winter was again at Grovebury SP on 6th, with an adult there on 27th-28th.

Kittiwake - Up to eight were in the Stewartby Lake roost on 27th, with another past Sharpenhoe Clappers the next morning.

Short-eared Owl - One was at MVCP on 21st and another over Gravenhurst on 27th.

Wood Lark - One went over Sharpenhoe Clappers (AG) and two over Blows Downs (JL) on 21st.

Yellow-browed Warbler - One was at Sandy on 8th-9th (SCB)

Ring Ouzel - One was at Pegnut Wood, Potton on 28th.

Black Redstart - One was in Biggleswade on 11th, with three there on 17th and one remaining on 18th, and another on the border with Northants at Chelveston airfield on 14th-16th, and two on 17th-19th (but mostly in Northants).

Whinchat - One was near Potton on 18th

Common Stonechat - Birds were widespread during the month with a peak of five together at Sandy Smith NR on 4th.

Richard's Pipit - The first for Bedfordshire was found at Chelveston airfield, right on the border with Northamptonshire on 13th-15th (finder unknown). It was extremely elusive during its stay and only seen by a lucky few.

Common Crossbill - Small numbers were found around the county with a peak of ten at Stockgrove CP and Woodbury.

Hawfinch - Two flew over the Pinnacle on 20th, another over Meppershall, two over Sharpenhoe and two over Blows Downs on 20th. One flew over the Lodge RSPB on 25th.

Ruddy Shelduck - Two were at Eversholt lake on 21st and at nearby Woburn Park on 22nd.

Observers:

Darren Oakley-Martin – DOM; Andy Grimsey – AG; Stuart Winter – SW; Jim Porter – JP;
Tony Hukin – TK; Guy Shorrocks – GS; Graham Nunn – GN; Francis Buckle – FB;
John Lynch – JL; Steve Blain – SCB

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

SPECULATION ON VISIBLE MIGRATION OF HAWFINCHES 2018

Following the large influx of Hawfinch in autumn 2017, most Bedfordshire records of which were noted on visible migration watches in the second part of October and early November, there was much debate as to whether this was a one-off occurrence, or at least a once-in-a-generation occurrence. Fortunately for us as birdwatchers there have been a few this autumn, albeit mostly single birds but in greater numbers than the long term average, which have been seen exclusively so far on visible migration watches. This result was discussed briefly over a beer and one of our own theories is that

there are birds that came to the UK last winter as first-winter individuals that have followed an instinct to do the same migration route as was successful the previous year, as they know no alternative. There is no information yet to indicate whether birds from last year's influx went back to the locations where they had bred in Eastern Europe but it would be great news if this spectacular finch species was to become more widespread in the UK as a result of a new and successful migration strategy, rather than be remembered as an increasing distant memory of a one-off irruption.

GREY PHALAROPE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

In mid-September a series of low pressure areas with winds and rain fronts pushed rapidly westward across the UK and deposited over fifty Grey Phalaropes inland in the midlands of England around the 20th and 21st of the month, mostly as single birds on larger waterbodies. On the following Saturday morning 22nd September, albeit in difficult birding conditions, it was not too much of a surprise when two were found in Bedfordshire, one each at Grovebury SP and Brogborough Lake. It later emerged that the second of these birds at least had been present for two days, having potentially arrived on the same day as the majority of other regional records. The bird at Grovebury SP was available to view for some time being present at least for the following weekend also being last reported on 30th. These birds represented the eleventh and twelfth records for the county and the fourth in this decade.

Previous records indicate that this species is very much associated with the autumn season, and is a likely find in the right conditions of strong westerly winds.

The first noted county record is a bird shot Elstow Brook 22/9/1866. The same fate seems to have befallen the other five other 19th century records; all listed in "Birds in Bedfordshire" (Trodd & Kramer 1991) as shot in wetland locations, only one of which specifies the date of 2nd October.

In 1928 one was noted with Mute Swans in Bedford on 21st October, then there were no more reports for over sixty years until two more recent records are noted as an unseasonal bird at Stewartby Lake on 21st June 1987 with another the same year following the severe storm of that autumn at Blunham Lake on 17th to 22nd October.

[Two phalaropes noted in adverse weather conditions at Stewartby Lake on 12/13 September 1969 were not seen well enough to enable specific identification, similarly one there on 24th August 2005 which falls more within the likely period for a Red-necked Phalarope perhaps.]

Most recent occurrences suggest that the species is getting slightly more common, maybe as a result of suitable larger lakes being created in the county by mineral extraction. These are listed below and demonstrate clearly the seasonal bias of autumn storm blown birds in the records:

Stewartby Lake 15th to 17th September 1994
Stewartby Lake 29th October 1996
Stewartby Lake 9th October 1997
Priory CP 14th October 2002
Stewartby Lake 29th September 2007
Radwell 11th to 16th November 2008
Dunstable STW 12 to 17th December 2012
Broom GP 2nd to 4th December 2016
Brogborough 20th to 22nd Sept 2018
Grovebury SP 22nd to 30th Sept 2018



Note: Four confirmed records of Red-necked Phalarope records were documented in The Hobby 140 published in July 2015. This report compiled by Andy Grimsey, data confirmed by Steve Blain

BTO TAWNY OWL CALLING SURVEY

There's still loads of time to take part in the Tawny Owl Calling Survey (<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-calling-survey>) so if you're not already signed up please do!

It's easy to take part - just listen for 20 minutes during at least one evening between now and 31 March 2019. You can listen from your garden, local park or woodland. You can even listen whilst lying in bed with the window open! All information is valuable, even zero counts.

If you enjoy taking part you can repeat your survey in subsequent weeks. The more weeks that you can listen the better, but you can do as many or as few weeks as you are able. Gaps between weeks don't matter.

You can listen for their familiar 'hooting' and 'kee-wick' calls any time between sunset and midnight. All we ask is that you record the date, start time of your survey, an estimate of cloud cover and importantly whether or not you hear an owl. If you hear a Tawny Owl at another time of the week outside the survey period you will also be able to record this. You record your weekly results online. And I am sure the county recorder would welcome more Owl records.

Roger Hicks

SEYCHELLES: 27TH SEPTEMBER – 15TH OCTOBER 2018

The Seychelles are a group of 115 granite and coral islands located in the Indian Ocean, 1,500km off the east coast of Africa, just south of the Equator. As a result, the climate is hot and humid.

Following our eleven hour flight to Mahe, the main island, we transferred by light aircraft to Praslin for the first week of our trip. Here we found our first endemic birds, whose names are all prefixed by the word Seychelles: Blue Pigeon, Bulbul, and Sunbird; plus, Madagascar Fody, Barred Ground Dove and Common Mina. White-tailed Tropicbirds and Fairy Terns were seen from the beach; however, far better views were to be had when we visited other islands.

A short boat trip took us to La Digue, where we visited La Veuve Reserve, a remnant strip of mature tropical woodland, where we had excellent views of Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher. Another boat trip took us to Cousin, a closed island nature reserve, where despite heavy rain we saw three more endemics: Seychelles Magpie-robin, Seychelles Fody, and Seychelles Warbler. We also has excellent close views of White-tailed Tropicbirds, Fairy Terns, plus Brown and Lesser Noddies.



Seychelles Magpie-robin.

Hiring a car for the day, we found Seychelles Black Parrots feeding in Mango trees close to the Britannia Hotel on the south-west coast of the island; they are very difficult to see at the Valle der Mai reserve.

We transferred to Bird Island for the second week, staying in one of only twenty-four simple ‘cottages’. The island is just 1.5km long by 1km wide, set on a large, shallow coral reef. Snorkelling over the reef offered good opportunities to see turtles, rays and tropical fish. Giant Tortoises grazed the grass around the cottages and we were enchanted by their friendly nature; as you approached, they stood up to allow us to stroke their legs and necks. They looked at you directly and appeared to listen when you spoke to them. Esmerelda, the oldest giant tortoise in the world (c.250 years) was originally thought to be a female; in fact, he is a male.

Fairy Terns, Brown and Lesser Noddies nested next to our cottage and were very noisy during the night. White-tailed Tropicbirds were breeding close to the dining room and a Red-billed Tropicbird, presumably from the Persian Gulf, was present for two days.



Red-billed Tropicbird (right) trying to pair with a White-tailed Tropicbird

The north of the island supported a huge colony of Sooty Terns. Great and Lesser Frigatebirds patrolled the skies. We walked to the beach on the north tip of the island and found Greater Crested, Bridled and Saunder’s terns. Due to the heat, we birded the airstrip early mornings, where we found the first of four Oriental Pratincoles; a juvenile which was identified by its oval nostrils, unlike other species of pratincole. The variety and number of migrating waders was real surprise and by the end of the week we had seen Turnstone (c50), Curlew (5), Whimbrel (c45), Pacific Golden Plover, Curlew Sandpiper (c30), Sanderling, Greenshank (4), Grey Plover (6), Common Sandpiper, Greater (7) and Lesser Sandplover.

We were lucky to meet Adrian Skerrett, the author of *The Birds of the Seychelles*, and he kindly gave us a location where we might see Crab Plovers. We had one afternoon on our return to Mahe and our driver knew exactly where to go, and there they were, four stunning Crab Plovers; a brilliant end to our trip.



Crab Plover

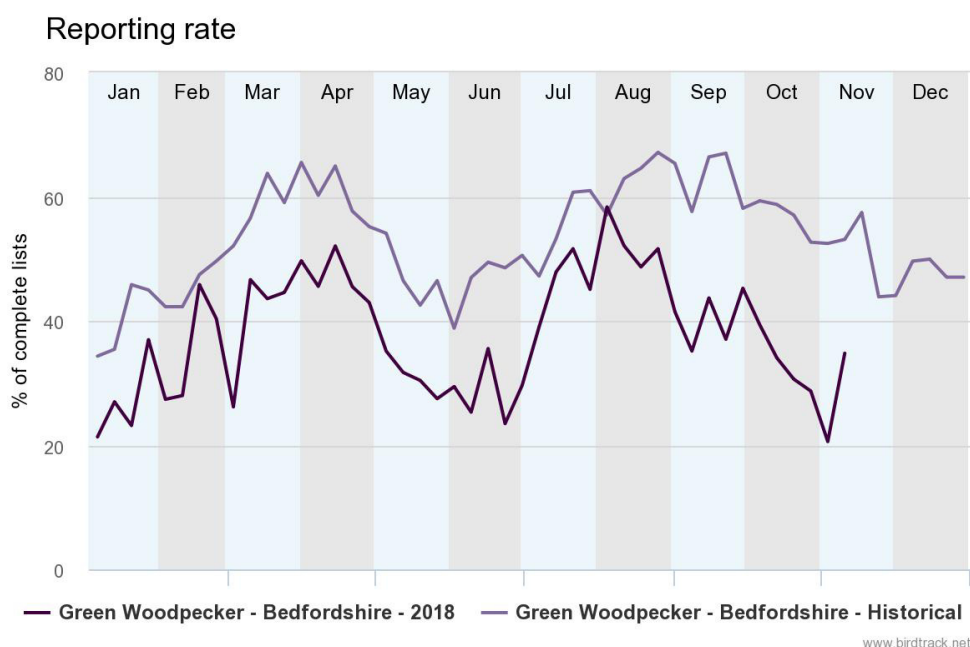
The Seychelles may not be an obvious choice for birders as the islands do not offer many species. However, they are unique and offer the opportunity to get extremely close to some of the worlds' rarest birds.

Graham and Carla Goodall.

BIRDTRACK: COMPLETE LISTS AND WHY THEY'RE USEFUL

One of the most useful features of BirdTrack is the ability to compare species found on complete lists people submit. A complete list is every species of bird recorded during a birdwatching outing. It isn't as hard as it sounds to note down every species you see or hear while on a walk. To give you some idea, on a typical walk around the Lodge at lunchtime I usually record fewer than 30 species, often less in winter, with today's list (11th November) being just 24 species.

So what value are they? A typical use for complete lists is to see a species fortunes over a period of time. A recent example is Green Woodpecker. I suspected that I was seeing fewer Green Woodpeckers on my travels around the county in recent months. A quick look at the reports in BirdTrack confirmed my suspicions – Green Woodpeckers have been consistently below the historical reporting rate during the past 11 months, including up to almost 30% below the typical rate in early November! See the graph below created from BirdTrack:



This type of very useful statistic is only possible by those of you who submit complete lists to BirdTrack. I thank everyone who has submitted complete lists so far and I encourage everyone who currently uses BirdTrack to consider submitting at least one complete list during the next few months. If you can do a complete list a month or even a week, even better! It is also more valuable to do complete lists for the same location repeatedly so these data are even more comparable over time. Give them a go and help further our understanding of our local bird populations.

Steve Blain

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new member to the Bedfordshire Bird Club:

Liz Anderson, Stotfold

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

Mary Sheridan

ILLUSTRATIONS BY:

Graham Goodall: Seychelles Magpie-Robin; Tropicbirds; Crab Plover
Steve Blain: Grey Phalarope



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*The Bedfordshire Bird Club is the ornithological section of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society
Registered Charity Number 268659*