



THE HOBBY

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PROGRAMME MATTERS

Welcome to the September 2019 edition of The Hobby. Autumn is now with us, as can be felt in the weather most days, the shorter evenings and as noted in the list of species included in the bird news in this bulletin. This month sees the first event of our Indoor Meeting program as published recently in our super Winter Programme 2019/2020. Thanks to Stuart Elsom for putting together this program and setting up a great selection of speakers. This first meeting is rapidly approaching on 24th September so please put that in your diary. On this evening Jonathan Forgham will talk to us about birding at Hel on the coast of northern Poland. This location is on the end of a spit that sticks out some 20 miles into the Baltic Sea in the Gulf of Gdansk and attracts an array of migrants.

As usual our December talk will be a selection of video taken over 2019, (the vast majority in the county) of birds and maybe some other topics. We would ask all members as usual to consider what they have already or can capture through the autumn and share it with Richard Bashford to enhance this presentation. Richard is happy to receive files on CD, DVD, memory stick or online through Dropbox, Google drive or similar platforms.

Indoor meetings are as usual in the Village Hall in Maulden, doors open at 7:30pm and talks beginning at 8pm. Volunteers are welcome to help with setting out seats and serving refreshments; if you have a knack for making a good cup of tea or coffee, please contact Sheila Alliez. Non-members are always welcome if you wish to bring any along so they can see what we do (donations welcome) – we hope of course that this leads to new members for 2020 !

Our outdoor program continues with day trips planned to two top locations for observing autumn migration and wintering species. On Sunday 13th October, John Tomlin is leading a day trip to Landguard Point and Trimley Marshes, near Ipswich in Suffolk. This will be an early start with meeting at 9.00am.

On 17th November, Kevin Sharpe will lead a trip to Welney and Burwell Fen when returning wintering wildfowl and raptors should have arrived and be settling in for the harder months.

All details are in our program and on the website at bedsbirdclub.org.uk
Contact can also be made to Kevin Sharpe for making arrangements on 07827 440394

JULY – AUGUST 2019 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.

July 2019

Little Egret – high counts were 13 at Houghton Brook Pools on 8th, ten at Millenium CP on 18th, ten at Dunstable STW 29th

Great White Egret – one at Priory on 7th

Quail – sound recorded over Potton at night on 8th

Black-tailed Godwit – seven at Chimney Corner North CIP on 1st and 7th, nine at Grovebury on 7th, one at Chimney Corner North CIP 18th, two at Millenium CP 20th, and 13 at Broom GP on 31st.

Whimbrel – four at Millenium CP 28th

Curlew Sandpiper – one each at Grovebury and Chimney Corner North CIP on 7th

Greenshank – over Priory CP 9th, one Chimney Corner North CIP 12th and 18th

Wood Sandpiper – one on pool by Dunstable STW 28th-29th

Common Sandpiper – good numbers reported including four at Broom GP on both 21st and 29th

Grasshopper Warbler – a few recorded singing early in the month including one at Leagrave Marsh, Luton on 26th

Stonechat – A male was at Brogborough Tip from 9th into August.

Black Redstart – A pair bred in Luton Town centre for the second year running, being seen on a few occasions on the rooftops between the main railway station and the Arndale Shopping Centre

Crossbill – a single bird was noted at The Lodge on 23rd

August 2019

Garganey – one at Broom East from 19th in to September.

Pintail – two at MCP Wetlands 17th, presumably the same two then at Chimney Corner North CIP from 26th

Marsh Harrier – one female around the brick pits through the month

Little Ringed Plover – five at Grovebury SP 25th was a good count

Dunlin – one at Brogborough Tip 19th, one at Grovebury SP 25th



Pectoral Sandpiper – a juvenile was found at Broom GP on 31st and remained into September

Greenshank – two at Brogborough Tip 8th, one at Grovebury 11th, one at Broom from 21st

Black-tailed Godwit – two at Chimney Corner North CIP on 5th and three there 8th

Curlew – one over Henlow 25th

Whimbrel – one flew over The Lodge on 23rd

Common Sandpiper – maximums of four at Grovebury 18th, five at Brogborough Tip 17th

Wood Sandpiper – one on pool by Dunstable STW from July to 11th, one at Broom East 8th

Great Skua – one was found at Grovebury SP late in the evening of 19th and was observed eating a Coot. The bird was present at duck but left overnight.

Caspian Gull – one adult regularly roosting at Grovebury SP throughout the month

Mediterranean Gull – individuals regularly found in roost at Grovebury SP including four juveniles on 31st. One at Brogborough Tip pools on 28th

Black Tern – one at MCP Wetlands on 24th

Arctic Tern – one juvenile at MCP Wetlands and Stewartby Lake 17th, also reported on 21st

Yellow Wagtail – passage through the county was towards the end of the month and included nineteen at Stopsley Common on 22nd, seven over Pegsdon 25th and nine over there on 26th.

Redstart – two at Pegsdon 11th and 18th, four on 25th and 26th, at least six there on 31st. Four at Streatley 15th, two on 19th, one in Flitwick on 21st, one at Stopsley Common on 22nd, one near Pottton on 22nd, one at Brogborough Hill on 26th and 28th. one on Biggleswade Common on 30th

Wheatear – two at Luton Airport on 9th, one at Henlow on 11th, Pegsdon three on 8th, one on 11th, five there 17th and 20th

Whinchat – one at Henlow on 11th, three at Meadow Lane GP on 25th, two at Pegsdon on three dates, two at Sharpenhoe 29th, three at Sandy Heath on 30th, four at Blows Down and five at Thurleigh 31st

Stonechat – one throughout the month at Brogborough Tip, with two at Sandy Heath from 24th

Spotted Flycatcher – High counts included at least eight at Pegsdon on 26th and three there on 31st. Another six at Sandy on 26th and eight at Ampthill Park on 31st

Pied Flycatcher – One of the best autumns in decades for this species in Beds; One at Brogborough Hill on 2nd with two on 3rd-4th, at least one remaining to 5th. One at Streatley 24th at least, two at Pegsdon on 26th, with one remaining to 27th, one at Brogborough Hill on 26th and 28th, one at Coopers Hill 26th, one in Luton 27th. One at The Lodge 30th. One at Ampthill Park on 30th and 31st.

Firecrest – one at Coopers Hill 18th

Tree Pipit – one near Pottton on 22nd, two at Hawkesbury Meadows Sandy on 24th, with several additional records from nocturnal sound recording stations in Biggleswade and Meppershall.

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

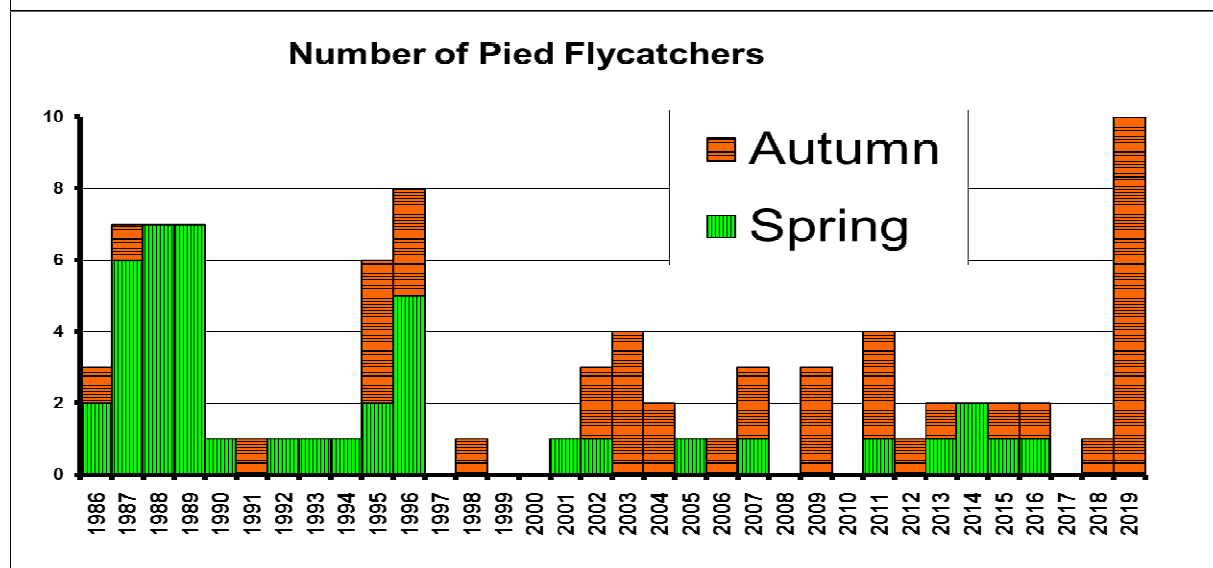
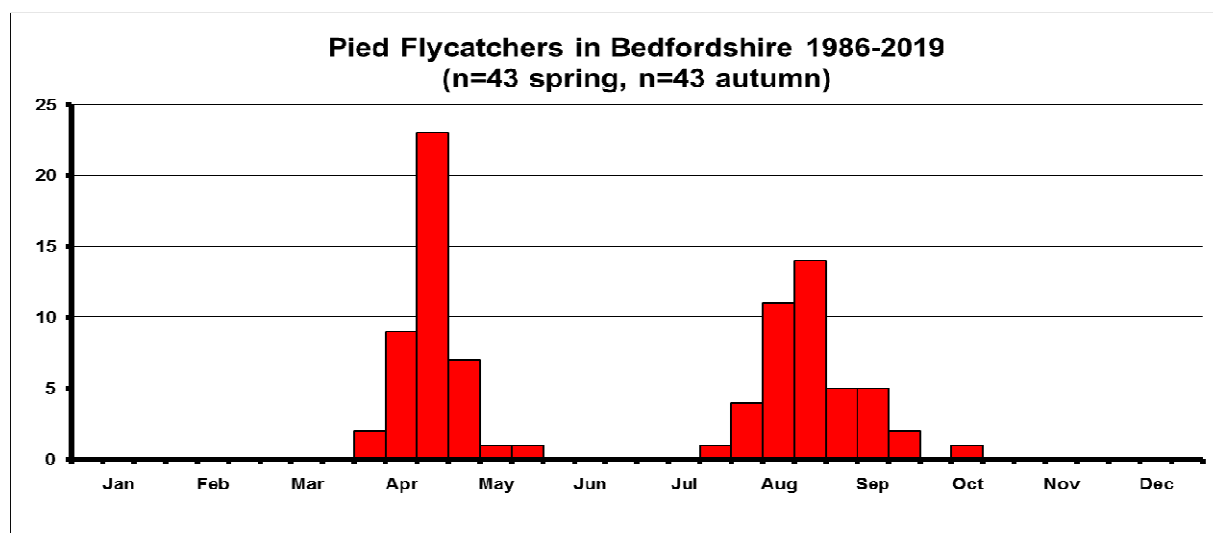
PIED FLYCATCHER IN BEDFORDSHIRE

In March 2014 edition of The Hobby, a pair of graphs was published showing the occurrence of Pied Flycatcher in Bedfordshire. In recent years, sightings have averaged around two birds per year but the last week of August 2019 saw an unprecedented eight birds recorded over a period of a few days as listed in the Bird News. These records followed the arrival of large numbers at east coast locations on favourable south-easterly breezes. (Flamborough Head noted 34 birds on Saturday 24th August, Gibraltar Point noted 17 birds on Sunday 25th August).



Pied Flycatchers, a nice treat for Bank Holiday Monday 26th August at Pegsdon

To put this influx into context, the previous published graphs have been updated to include the August 2019 data. It is noticeable from this graph that this species has become less common in spring and slightly more common and regular, albeit in small numbers, in autumn.



Andy Grimsey

SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS – A WELCOME RETURN

When my wife Sandy and I moved to our present house in Eversholt in June 1992 we were delighted to find a pair of Spotted Flycatchers breeding. A pair returned to breed with us every year until 2006.

Imagine our delight when a pair visited one of our nest boxes on 20th June 2019. We were surprised by the late arrival but by coincidence Jim Lawrence came to see me on 24th June and confirmed that a pair had only just returned to his north Norfolk garden.



Luckily the open fronted nest box was viewable from my first floor office window. Through a 40x telescope I followed the activities of the pair on an almost daily basis. Our pair immediately started nest building. On the 29th June, the female was sitting on three eggs. During incubation, the male brought food intermittently to the female but at other times she would leave the nest and feed herself. I could not identify all the prey items but several butterflies were caught including a Marbled White.

On the 15th July, the adults started feeding the three hatched young. At this point the male became much more active, bringing food on a more regular basis whilst the female sat tight brooding the young. As the weather was hot and sunny the female did leave the nest unattended for brief intervals.

As the three young grew in size feeding by both adults become much more intensive. It was also obvious that two of the young were larger and pushing themselves to the front of the nest begging for food; despite this the smaller young was still receiving some food. As the young grew they began exercising their wing muscles and at the same time their feathers were rapidly developing.

On 30th July all three fledged young left the nest. They were seen during the day feeding around the garden. This was the last we saw of the family party, they had left abruptly and could not be found the next day. From arrival on 20th June, they had completed their breeding cycle in just under six weeks.

After a period of ten days when it was obvious that the female was not going to lay a second clutch of eggs (Spotted Flycatchers rarely do) I removed the nest for examination. I confirmed that there were no unhatched eggs or dead young. The nest was constructed of very fine twigs, moss and hair compacted with cobwebs of which there was a plentiful supply around our stables.

We will now have to wait until 2020 to see if they return. We sincerely hope they do !

Peter Smith, Eversholt

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

BROOM EAST (GYPSY LANE EAST GRAVEL PIT) COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE. 20 YEAR BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PLAN (2019 – 2038).

The Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) objectives are monitored and reported on annually. Agreed management for 2019 was as follows:

- Information boards were erected in April.
- The site is being grazed by Dexter cattle. Wiltshire Horn sheep will graze the north basin following a hay cut.
- Access around the site is via sign-posted public footpaths.
- Signs to prevent public access inside the stock fencing have been erected.
- Scrub and ruderal vegetation. A site meeting took place on 20th June to discuss the invasive willow, which will be monitored to see if grazing keeps it under control. If grazing does not control the willow, then chemical treatment will need to be considered.
- The three gravel-topped 'islands'; A pair of Common Terns raised one chick to fledging from the new islands this year.
- It is proposed to graze a selected area of the south basin with pigs, during January-February 2020.

The second annual management meeting should be held in October; the outcome of this year's management will be discussed and works agreed for 2020.

Graham Goodall. Hon. Research Officer.



Cattle grazing at Broom East – who will find the first Cattle Egret there ?

ABNORMAL PLUMAGE OF A COAL TIT

Storm Gareth came with gale force westerly winds. In such conditions most small birds seek out sheltered locations. On 19 March 2019, on my local patch of Henlow Grange, this was along the eastern side of a small plantation of conifers where there was a mixed-species foraging flock including Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest and Coal Tit.

One of the Coal Tits *Parus ater* flew to an exposed perch and faced the early morning sun with its breast feathers puffed up. First seen from behind, it appeared as normal, with black crown and nape, a

white nape spot and cheeks and greyish back with spotted, double wing-bar. However, its underparts appeared all black. Closer inspection through 10x40 binoculars at a distance of <10m and later perusal of video footage showed the bib was black while the underparts from breast to legs was a very dark grey with buff on flanks showing under the folded wing. The understorey in the plantation has recently been cleared and the brush burnt and I thought at first the breast feathers might have been stained with ash, but that did not seem to be the case. Other Coal Tits in the flock were normally plumaged.



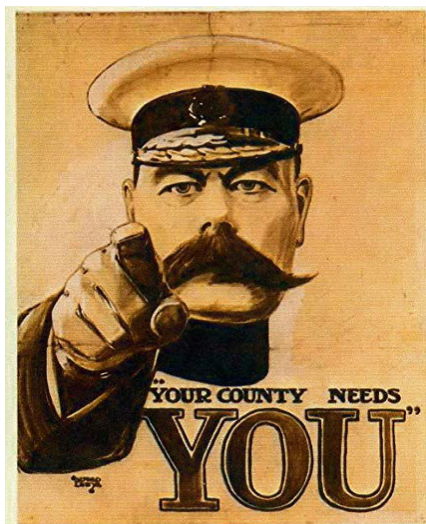
Coal Tits range across Eurasia and south to North Africa and Asia Minor with some 20 sub-species described. All have a black chin and bib. Only in the Cypriot race, *P.a.cypriotes* does the black of the bib extend on to the upper breast (Harrap & Quinn, 1996) although not onto the belly.

Coal Tits are year-round residents, breeding in small numbers, on my Henlow Grange patch and are regularly recorded occurring on 46% of complete BirdTrack lists for the area. I had not previously noted such abnormal plumage. Presumably the same bird was seen once more on 05/04/2019, c.150m to the south of the original sighting.

Harrap, S. & D.Quinn. 1996. Tits, Nuthatches and Treecreepers. Helm.

Roger K. Hicks

NEW COUNTY BIRD CLUB RECORDER REQUIRED - WE NEED YOU !



So far I have no expressions of interest in the Bird Recorder position for Bedfordshire. Perhaps people are put off by the range of work the current recorder undertakes? I believe the key task for the Bird Recorder role is to become the figurehead, mainly dealing with correspondence and overseeing the range of tasks that need doing.

To help I have split down the main tasks I currently do in this role, however please fully recognise that all these jobs could be split up around a range of folk so the Bird Recorder role does not have to do them all!

- Correspondence (mostly via email, phone call, or text message)
- Writing the bi-monthly bird news section for the Hobby
- Member of the Rarities Panel

- Compiling the database of bird records (including verifying of BirdTrack data)
- Working with the bird report editor on the accuracy of the annual bird report
- Provide data to RBBP, BBRC, Scarce Birds panel, occasionally BTO and JNCC

If you are interested in helping in any of the tasks above please do get in touch. It is just a few short months before I step aside and the role will be vacant. This will impact on the clubs effectiveness in providing the current level of service including the annual Bird Report. Please also note that Barry Nightingale is also stepping down as Bird Report Editor around the same time, so new volunteers are desperately needed!

Steve Blain

IMAGES BY:

Steve Blain:	Pectoral Sandpiper
Graham Goodall:	Cattle at Broom East
Andy Grimsey:	Spotted Flycatcher, Pied Flycatchers
Roger Hicks:	Coal Tits



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