Cambridge Local Group Newsletter

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Editor's Notes

Hope that you had a good summer; it’s amazing how quickly it has gone! September already and our first indoor talk for this autumn should be interesting, particularly as it is based on one of our local reserves, Ouse Fen. This will be followed, a couple of weeks later, by a warden guided walk on Sunday 5 October. Please refer to the details elsewhere in this letter, if you wish to sign-up for this.

Melvyn and I have had a good summer and hope you have all been able to get out and about enjoying the natural world. We have been noticing the moths that come in our garden and were lucky to find a privet hawkmoth on our fence post one morning and then later in the summer, an elephant hawkmoth caterpillar on the willow herb. A weird looking caterpillar, but does show how the moth got its name as the front of it looks like an elephant trunk!

I would like to thank all the contributors who wrote the field trips for this newsletter, it is nice to have reports and articles from different people and I look forward to this continuing. I am looking for photos to accompany reports and articles, so if you go on trips and take photos then please send them to me to use in the newsletter.

The cut of date for the next newsletter is 31 December 2014

Brenda

Group Leader’s Notes – May 2014

Welcome back after the summer break!
There have been some good Field Trips during the summer months although conflicting events have meant that Brenda and I have missed some. However, it is good to see excellent reports from other members and to remind us of what we have missed! One event we did not miss and are pleased that we did not, was the “Wales Weekend” in early June – “fantastic” accurately describes the weekend – accommodation, food, company, weather and the birds all fulfilled our dreams! We do, of course, have a good programme of events leading up to the end of the year and another weekend away in November. Please note the dates for this weekend have been moved to Friday 21 to 23 November. This time we are off to the Forest of Dean, taking in a visit to WWT Slimbridge. These trips are limited to 10-12 people, depending on availability of accommodation so, do contact Andrew Camps as soon as possible, if you wish to join the trip.

In the previous Newsletter and at the AGM, I announced my retirement as Group Leader, with effect from May 2015. In my report for the May issue, I suggested that I would continue in some other role. However, I have now considered this position and, in order that positive action is taken to replace me I have decided that I will be breaking away from the Group for period of time, to allow this to happen. I do hope that someone will step up to continue the
Group; I feel that it is in good health, as I described in May, and I’m sure that whoever takes over will find the job of steering the Group to greater success, very rewarding.

Melvyn

Field Trip Reports

A Dusk Chorus, Paxton Pits Evening Walk 14 May

The next best thing to a Dusk Chorus is to go out and listen to the birds in the evening as dusk approaches. So I was very glad to join the RSPB Cambridge local branch trip to Paxton Pits arriving there at 7 p.m. on Wednesday 14 May.

The day was well chosen. For about a fortnight beforehand, the weather had been mostly rainy and unsettled but that evening it was calm, warm and sunny – just right for nightingales and it was possibly the peak of their singing season. They did not disappoint! But there were other species to listen to first.

As we left the cars, the chorus was getting under way, with blackbirds and robins already shouting down the warblers. The willow warbler was hardly audible among the others, but I just managed to catch its thin mournful song of ‘Things are getting too much for me, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!’ And from time to time chiffchaffs would give a metallic reply ‘chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff…’ or ‘cheer up! cheer up!..’. Later, there were the unmistakeable silvery notes of a blackcap; but near the cars, the notes sounded slightly lower-pitched and more gabbled, reminding me of a garden warbler, but since I have known a real expert confuse the songs of the two species, I would not dare to pronounce on these without visual clues. Later on, there may have been the ‘Sweet Georgie, Georgie, Georgie!’ scratchy song and dance routine of a whitethroat but there was no-one around at that moment to confirm the species. As dusk drew on, the insects almost drove me to trawl through my pockets for a head-net, but the warblers must have found the insects more difficult to see and their songs became more sporadic.

The tit families must have been too busy for song and the seed-eating finches were not much in evidence – just a few chaffinches with their song that ends in a call for ‘ginger-beer!’ Although we were passing by ditches, pools and lakes, the non-passerine species were not very vocal. Occasionally, there was the urgent honking of a few greylag geese or the menacing nasal calls of black-headed gulls. There was the ‘vet’ call from a great-spotted woodpecker, and a ‘yaffle’ from a green woodpecker and a ‘jack’ from a jackdaw. And to my delight, the distant ‘cuckoo’ that hovered on the horizon from time to time, eventually came nearer.

The thrushes were the real stars of the evening - with their large eyes suited to finding the worms, snails and slugs that come out as dusk falls. Blackbirds uttered superb songs. They group saw a pair of red-crested pochard before they flew – a fine finale to a great summer’s day birding dominated by ‘the young ones’.
have been called the ‘Beethoven of the birds’. Their voices remind me of a stage Welshman with a little squawky ‘Look-you!’ at the end of a string of languid fluty notes. The robins continued their varied trills, each with a little whistle, till well after 9 o’clock. It was the distant repeated phrases of a song thrush that brought my first nightingale into focus, and then there was no mistaking the rich quality of the song of this highly praised species. However, when poets try to imitate the nightingale, all they can come up with is ‘jug, jug’. As well as the classic song-like phrases, we heard two more characteristic sounds. The song often begins with or includes a high-pitched ‘pew, pew’ known as the Melba note, after the famous Australian soprano. Several people were fortunate enough to hear the other call – a frog-like croak uttered from near the ground. It is difficult to say how many nightingales we passed. There were two groups of perhaps 3 to 5 singing males and another back at the car park - in all enough to send us well-contented on our way.

Jessica Finch

‘The Young Ones’ Sculthorpe Moor and Titchwell Marsh Trip Report, 18 May 2014

A party of 8 birders arrived at the wonderful Hawk and Owl Trust 45 acre reserve at Sculthorpe Moor on a bright and sunny morning. Sculthorpe Moor was acquired by the Trust in 2001 with the aim to restore the reed and sedge beds, which had been home to overwintering hen harriers until the 1990’s when they had become overgrown with scrub and woodland. Sculthorpe Moor is the only place in the Wensum Valley where saw sedge occurs which is now a European conservation priority. More flexible than reed it was used traditionally for thatched roof ridges and is the preferred habitat for roosting hen harriers. In addition to the fen and reed beds, Sculthorpe also contains other valuable habitats including ancient coppice woodland, meadow, dykes and pools and adjoins the River Wensum. A boardwalk and four hides allow easy access.

We arrived at the reserve to the exciting news that a young tawny owl had been seen by one of our party on the boardwalk. As we made our way along the boardwalk to the first hide (Frank Jarvis), the owlet was spotted having made its way into a nearby tree to roost. Tawny owlets are renowned for spending time on the ground when they leave the nest, which they do about 10 days before fledging. This phase is known as ‘branching’ when they walk, climb, jump and flutter around the trees at night, the adult birds finding them to feed by their contact calls. Adult birds are very defensive of their nest and young, attacking intruders with their sharp talons – the bird photographer, Eric Hosking, lost an eye during such an encounter, later calling his autobiography ‘An Eye for a Bird’. Talking to a volunteer in the hide, another tawny owl female had died in another nest box. On examination, the vet had found that the bird had been egg bound and that her old age may have been a factor – research quotes a typical lifespan in the wild of 5 years, although 18years has been recorded and 27 years for captive birds. Avian malaria is an increasing
threat to tawny owls with the incidence increasing in British owls from 2-3% in 1996 to 60% in 2010 related possibly to increasing global temperatures.

Moving on, a male cuckoo was heard nearby and an oystercatcher called as it flew overhead. The woodland was full of activity with adult birds busy feeding young; a pair of nuthatches were observed flying to and from one of the nest boxes, blue tits from another, with chaffinches and greenfinches seen feeding fledglings. A male blackbird caught our eye with one white tail feather jutting out at right angles. A great spotted woodpecker was seen and warblers including whitethroat, blackcap and chiffchaffs identified. Arriving at the next hide (Whitley), a live feed from a camera on a marsh harrier nest was on display showing a female on eggs, one of which had recently hatched. Since our visit, five eggs have hatched with four of the chicks fledging (the fifth, like the Springwatch bitterns, helped unwittingly to keep its siblings alive when food was in short supply).

Plentiful numbers of male and female bullfinches and greenfinches feeding from around the bird tables kept our attention for a long time with great photographic opportunities. Moving on eventually, we wandered to the reedbed hides (Paul Johnson and Victor’s) listening to the sounds of reed and sedge warblers and reed buntings. With little to see there and appetites growing we moved quickly back to the visitor centre for a picnic lunch.

During lunch we decided to miss out Syderstone Common in favour of spending more time at RSPB Titchwell and made our way there. Again young life was the theme of the day with goslings of greylag and Canada geese and young coots providing the ‘aah’ factor. Over the reedbed we saw our first of at least five marsh harriers (four male). Two red-legged partridges were heard and then seen landing nearby. Following the East Trail, lesser whitethroat and Cetti’s and willow warblers were heard, identified by their distinctive songs. With only a small number of birds on Patsy’s pool we moved back to the visitor centre some of us picking up ice-creams to quell the increasing heat as we headed down the West bank trail. From the hides facing the freshwater marsh, including the grand Parrinder hide, we saw a large variety of waders including avocets, redshank, dunlins, turnstones, black and bar-tailed godwits and grey plovers. The grey plovers caused some confusion and much book searching; discussion and scope viewing ensued! It was concluded that both winter and summer plumage birds were present. The grey plover is known as the black-bellied plover in North America and breeds in the high Arctic. In winter they migrate to coastal areas through Western Europe the majority continuing to winter in West Africa with juveniles following about a month later. In spring and summer, adult birds develop a black face, neck and belly and the upperparts are spotted silver and black with females looking more patchy with white intermixed. In winter, it loses the black feathers becoming more browny-grey while juveniles are similar to the winter plumage but appearing browner. A few non-breeding birds stay in Britain for the summer, the juveniles not breeding until two years old generally staying in their wintering grounds. With large numbers of wildfowl to add to our lists, including shoveler, teal, pintail, tufted duck, pochard and shelduck, we moved on to the beach. There, several groups of brent geese were seen near the water’s edge and a little tern flew overhead. With time marching on we headed back to
the car park and with a final flourish, several of our group saw a pair of red-crested pochard before they flew – a fine finale to a great summer’s day birding dominated by ‘the young ones’.

Rachel Lowry

**Wales Trip 5 – 8 June**

**Thursday**

Ten Group Members managed to arrive, after a long journey for those who had not travelled the previous day or earlier, at RSPB Gwenffrwd-Dinas reserve, within a half hour of each other and just at lunch-time. Sitting at picnic tables to enjoy our lunch, our first birds of prey for the weekend, a red kite and then a buzzard, came in to view.

Dinas, is an RSPB reserve in mid Wales consisting of alder and oak woodland on a steep sided valley by the River Tyw. Our walk was to be two and a half miles through enchanting woodland. It was not long before we heard and saw our first of many wood warblers. A busy Dor beetle appeared to be struggling with a ball of dung which was twice the size of the beast handling it; the female lays its eggs in dung which is then buried. There were lots of caterpillars hanging on threads from the oak trees; they use this strategy to escape from predators. As we made our way along the path above the river we heard a bird of prey and looking up through a gap in the trees some of the group were lucky to see two goshawks soaring overhead but were soon lost to view by the tree canopy. Other good sightings were: spotted flycatcher, redstart, tree creeper, coal tit and marsh tit. A very good afternoon and start to our weekend, having already seen three of our target species. Back at the car park, preparing to leave for our hotel, a cuckoo appeared to add spice to the day’s sightings! Our hotel was “Ty Morgan’s” in Rhayader. On arrival, the tricky bit was getting through the narrow passageway to the rear and only car park but once negotiated, we soon all checked in. After a tasty meal we wandered down the main road to the River Wye and watched bats flying under the bridge.

**Friday**

A couple of “early birds” walked to the River Wye and then along its bank. The early start paid dividends in the form of a dipper, grey wagtail and a female goosander which latter bird flew low over the water as it escaped from the perceived threat from humans.

After breakfast we travelled via the mountain road following part of the Elan Valley to RSPB Ynys-hir. A couple of stops, to take in the spectacular scenery en-route, also included sightings of red kite and a buzzard hovering as it faced into the strong wind. Other birds included meadow pipit, skylark and stonechat.

At the Ynys-hir car park a tree creeper and nuthatch diverted our attention. On feeders, viewed from the veranda of the Visitor Centre, were blue, great and coal tits and siskin,
whilst grey squirrels took advantage of seeds dropping to the ground. As many of you will know, this RSPB reserve was headquarters for the BBC Spring Watch series for three years, and one of the main reasons must have been the variety of habitats, including sessile oak wood, salt marsh and wetlands.

At the Visitor Centre an RSPB Visitor Engagement Officer informed us what was about and suggested routes to take. We decided upon the “Wetland Trail” taking us through the oak wood and leading to the wetland area. Just outside the rear entrance to the reserve the officer pointed-out a robin’s nest in a bush with the adult bird seeming indifferent to visitors stopping to see the young chicks on the nest. Through the wood we saw redstart, spotted flycatcher and a family of blackcaps, as well as the more usual woodland birds. “Ynys-hir hide” provided distant views over the river Dovey (Dyfi) estuary, the largest estuary emptying in to Cardigan Bay and on which we were able to spot shelduck and a large flock of Canada geese. Out of the wood we proceeded to Ynys Eidiol viewing screen and with little to see continued along the track towards the breakwater. On some bushes a family of small birds at first puzzled us as to their identity. After some discussion and reference to our bird identification books it was agreed that these were juvenile stonechats, the “juvenile” aspect being the reason for our identification difficulties. As we watched the stonechats a grasshopper warbler ‘reeled’ in the reedbeds. Retracing our steps and continuing along the wetland trail we arrive at Ynys Feurig hide; a sculpture of an adder in the grass by the trail added interest to our walk to the hide. The hide over-looks the estuary and here we spotted redshank, oystercatcher, little egret, cormorant and, on the pool in front of the hide, a family of Canada geese. A crow flew over the reserve its leisurely flight interrupted as it was mobbed by lapwings.

Returning to the visitor centre, some of us enjoyed an ice cream as we sat looking to the bird feeders before leaving for our hotel. All but one car returned by the direct, main road, the remaining car returning by the mountain road. The occupants of this car were rewarded with sightings of wheatear, sand martin and raven.

After another excellent dinner, an evening walk along the river, with the majority of the group in attendance, not only helped our digestive systems, but also added a young song thrush and a family of carrion crows to our lists as well as unusual sculptures suspended from a few of the trees by the river.

**Saturday**

This morning we woke to a thunder storm and some heavy rain so, a walk before breakfast was ruled out by all but the foolhardy! A “foolhardy” couple did brave the weather and were rewarded with sightings of bullfinch, and again, goosander and dipper.

After breakfast, we drove up the Elan Valley Visitor Centre, which has the Victorian Caban Coch Dam as a back drop. This is the starting point for RSPB Carngafalldt reserve, which
covers approximately 386 hectares of upland woodland, moorland and grassland. The start of the walk took us below the dam and by the river where we saw a grey wagtail. Continuing, we followed one of the woodland walks but before long, found it necessary to stop and don our wet weather gear as the drizzle became more persistent. It was fairly quiet in the wood but we were lucky to see redpoll, treecreeper, wood warbler and goldcrest. On the way back we heard the bubbling of a female cuckoo but were not able to see the bird. We arrived back at the centre at lunchtime, the drizzle having abated and with improving weather, sat outside to enjoy our lunch near the river. A pair of common sandpipers entertained us as they flew up and down the river and a goosander also caught our attention as it flew up river and over the dam. Making our way back to the car park we spotted ravens which, as they flew down to a cliff face, led our eyes to their nest. Whilst watching a carrion crow fly down it caught a blackbird, and then it moved it up the slope and lightly covered it with a tuft of grass. Some of our group caught sight of a goshawk as it soared over the cliff top and then quickly disappeared before the rest of the group could add this elusive bird to their lists.

Our final destination for the day was Gigrin Farm, not far from Rhayader, and famous for its red kite feeding station. Red kite had been roosting at Gigrin farm in the winter for many years and were encouraged when the owners of the farm fed them when they were able. Following a request by the RSPB it became an ‘official’ kite feeding station in 1993. The numbers have increased from a dozen to around 400 counted in the winter of 2005/6. The kites that come to the feeding station are native to Wales and not the continental stock introduced in other parts of the country. DNA testing has been carried out on the kites and it has been found that they are all descendants of a single female. The meat used for feeding is beef which is ‘fit for human consumption’ and up to a quarter of a tonne of meat is purchased weekly depending on time of the year. Gigrin farm in conjunction with the Welsh Kite Trust and started in 2003, also serves as a rehabilitation centre for red kites. As we settled in one of hides, several kites were flying round, with crows and rooks waiting in the nearby trees. Once the meat is thrown out the crows and rooks are the first birds to come in to the food. Then the kites start to swoop down and grasp the meat before flying off with the meat in their talons, beneath their tails. It was not long before ravens moved in and landed to pick up the food. The kites also swooped over the heads of the corvids to try to make them rise from the field with the food, before chasing and robbing them of it! The kites take the food aloft to clear airspace to eat the meat whilst in flight. Buzzards came down later and landed to take the meat. It was amazing to see all the birds in the air flying around and difficult to keep an eye on one particular bird. The meat did not last long and after about three quarter of an hour all had been consumed! Before returning to our hotel, we treated ourselves to tea and cake in the farm café. Outside the cafe a male peacock displayed to uninterested peahens that were sunning themselves.
Returning to the hotel we parked our cars and with sufficient time before dinner, once again walked down to the river. In one of the nest boxes on a tree near the river was a spotted flycatcher going in and feeding its young. On the path in front of us we found a young nuthatch and found a way round it so as not to frighten it far from where we found it, in the hope that the parent would find it. On the river we saw grey wagtail and a female goosander with six young. The walk took us to the main road into Rhayader, so, instead of returning by that road, we re-traced our route back along the river. In the evening we walked across the road to the George pub for our evening meal.

Sunday
This morning, after breakfast, we packed our belongings before settling our hotel bills and thanking the staff for their excellent service during our stay.

This morning we were to finish our weekend with a tour of the Elan Valley, stopping off at interesting places before returning home. The valley is 72 square miles of outstanding scenic beauty, the dams and reservoirs provide a lasting amenity in their own right for visitors to enjoy as well as safeguarding the natural habitats of numerous species of flora and fauna.

There are four visible dams, Garreg Ddu, is a submerged dam and Dol-y-Mynach was started but never finished and is submerged when the reservoir is full. The first dams were built a hundred years ago to supply desperately needed clean water for Birmingham. This was an epic feat of civil engineering in an area of outstanding scenic beauty. Claerwen is the newest dam and by far the largest and opened in 1952. There was potential for producing renewable electricity from the 199 million tonnes of water stored in the reservoirs and since 1997 there has been hydropower production from turbines installed at the base of all the dams and one in the Foel Tower.

These sites are interconnected by a 12 kilometre, 11000 volt underground cable which terminates at Caban Coch. From Caban Coch the power is transmitted to Rhayader via a further seven kilometres of underground cable where it enters the National Grid.

We travelled along the mountain road and to Pont ar Elan where we stopped. Here the rest of the group caught up with wheatear which they had missed during the previous days. We also saw red kite, buzzard and raven, and a curlew flew over. At Graig Goch Dam we stopped and walked up to a viewpoint. A common tern came over our heads, and one of the group spotted a small bird that took off from a small tree, singing as it rose up airwards and parachuted down. Eventually we were able to get a good view of the bird to identify it as tree pipit. Another small bird seen in the trees was a redpoll. Continuing our tour along the valley, we crossed over Pen y Garreg Dam and stopped at a roadside car park near to Penbont House Tea Rooms. Coffee, teas and cakes were enjoyed at tables in the tea room gardens; a lovely setting from where we spotted a garden warbler, pied and spotted flycatchers and great spotted woodpecker as well as hearing a wood warbler. Wonderful! After this stop some of the group decided to travel to the last dam, while the reminder set-off for home. The last dam was Claerwen Dam where a parking place was found and from
where we walked down to a stream bank, not far from a small waterfall. Here we sat to have our lunch. In a tree by the stream a male redstart was spotted. A short walk proved fruitful as a couple of peregrine falcons flew to a ledge on a nearby cliff face. We then watched a wheatear feeding its young before it was time to call an end to our weekend of birding. A brilliant weekend – excellent food and accommodation, enjoyable company and superb birding! Many thanks, Andrew, for arranging another memorable weekend.

Brenda & Melvyn

Evening trip to RSPB Lakenheath Fen - 11 June

About ten of us assembled in the Lakenheath car park on a beautiful warm, still summer evening. As we got out of the car, almost the first sound I heard was a cuckoo. That seemed like a good omen for the evening, and so it turned out to be. After a look at the pool and feeders outside the visitor centre, which didn’t produce anything of particular interest, we set off around the trail in a clockwise direction. We had the reserve more or less to ourselves, and as we walked we could hear plenty of bird song. We didn’t give the poplar plantations the attention we might have done on previous summer visits, in the knowledge that sadly no golden orioles have been seen or heard at Lakenheath this year. Approaching Fen Viewpoint a kingfisher was heard, and glimpsed by a few people at the front as it streaked away. We spent some time at the viewpoint, quietly watching the pool and surrounding reed bed. It wasn’t long before we heard the first bittern of the evening, booming from somewhere ahead. A water rail squealed from close by, but didn’t reveal itself. It seems to be a bird you either hear or see, but not both at once. Soon a call went up of “barn owl”, and sure enough we had our first sighting of one quartering over the reeds away to the right. This was to be the first of several views during the evening. We continued slowly on our outward route, stopping from time to time to scan the reed beds, and keeping an eye out for raptors overhead. At one point we stopped to marvel at the sight of dozens of black caterpillars with white dots devouring the nettles close to the path, their appearance so different from the peacock butterflies they would eventually turn into. Marsh harriers showed several times, and the reeds seemed to be full of the sound of warblers and reed buntings – the males of these showing well with their smart black heads and white collars, so much easier to find than the skulking reed warblers. Cuckoos were calling and more than once we saw one flying, reminding us how easy it can be to mistake them for small raptors when they fly overhead. One or two hobbies were spotted but these stayed quite high, not coming down to oblige us with an eye-level view. Eventually, we arrived at Joist Fen Viewpoint – the furthest part of the trail. From here, anything seems possible as you scan hopefully into the near and far corners of the reeds. We certainly weren’t disappointed. There was a feast of cuckoos, with at least two birds settling obligingly in close view, calling as they moved around among the bushes. At one point a male and female flew past, the female giving her bubbling call which is not often heard, let alone at such close range. Later, one landed close to where a Cetti’s warbler had been calling repeatedly from the reeds. Do cuckoos parasitize Cetti’s warblers’ nests? We thought probably not.
The birds we had all been hoping to see were the common cranes. At one point we were lucky enough to hear their bugling call from not too far away, but despite constant looking they didn’t appear in view. Sadly, it seems that although a pair nested at Lakenheath again this year, the young did not survive.

After spending a considerable time at the viewpoint, we reluctantly had to tear ourselves away if we were to get back to the car park before dark. As we were about to leave, a bittern suddenly flew up from a few yards in front of us and dropped back into the reeds a bit further away. It must have been in there all the time!

As we set off on the return route along the river bank, a barn owl flew across the top of the reeds, close enough for us to see that it was carrying what looked like a small rodent. As we watched, it flew into an opening in an old building, presumably to feed its hungry chicks. Further along the bank, we stopped to watch as a bittern made a leisurely flight, crossing the path ahead of us and continuing over the reedbed. Looking back, the sky was full of the pastel pinks and lilacs of a beautiful sunset. The reserve seemed to have a special magic in the evening. It was 10pm when we finally reached the car park, tired but happy. I could still hear the sound of cuckoos in my head as we drove home.

Jill Aldred

Dunwich Heath and Minsmere 14 June

Seven of us met up with a very promising start weather-wise – high cloud, blue sky and sunshine.

A decision was made to begin the bird watching at Dunwich Heath hopefully to see the Dartford warbler. Within 300 yards of the visitor centre and within 30 minutes of setting off we saw our first male Dartford warbler, flying low in short bursts over the heather. It perched on a clump of heather so we had good views. A colourful male stonechat was spotted which also perched on the heather. We saw two or three more Dartford warblers, both male and female and also more stonechats.

Amongst other birds were magpie, a buzzard being mobbed, the ubiquitous wood pigeon and a pair of geese flying south.

At around lunchtime we left for Minsmere and lunch.

Close to the visitor centre the sand martins were busy feeding their young which were perched at the entrances to their holes in the sand bank, sometimes four youngsters precariously leaning out and agitating for food.

A marsh harrier flew high over the visitor centre and on our way to Bittern Hide we saw a tree creeper and a great tit. From the hide a hobby flew low over the reed bed, also a marsh harrier, little egret and a bittern, also flying.
Walking towards Lookout Hide we saw a female blackcap and heard a Cetti’s warbler. From this hide we saw heron, several little egrets, avocets and lapwing. The day generally had warmed up and it was hot in the hide, however with hatches opened on both sides the through draught was most refreshing. Common tern and a little grebe family with chicks entertained us. As the group were leaving another bittern flew by. Walking towards South Hide the cattle grazed away, indifferent to our passing.

Viewing from the South Hide was excellent with oystercatcher, gadwall, lapwing, common tern, ringed plover and shoveler in eclipse. Bees, butterflies and a few dragonflies added interest as shelduck, herring gulls and black-headed gulls went about their business. Also, a bearded tit was briefly glimpsed. Leaving the hide, swallows were seen flying in and out of the sluice and over the bridge. A slow worm crossed our path as we headed towards Lucky Pool. Not lucky! It was mostly dry and only two shelducks and one or two oyster catchers were paddling in the muddy part. Overlooking the pool we sat and looked at sheep sorrel through the “wrong” end of our binoculars (as instructed by our group leader/scientific advisor!). One piece of sorrel had a tiny petrol blue weevil crawling through – we passed it around for everyone to see.

A reed bunting was seen on our way to the Public Viewpoint and a flock of starlings flew by. Other birds seen from here were male shoveler in eclipse, pied wagtail, Canada goose with goslings, black tailed godwit, tufted duck, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull and black headed gull.

The view from East Hide provided several waders including redshanks, two spotted redshank and avocet plus teal and a barnacle goose on its nest.

Island Hide was the last visit of the day; a bittern flew high, as did a female marsh harrier. Great crested grebe swam by, reed warblers flew briefly in the reeds and several bearded tits flew fast, low and straight, across the tops of the reeds – “pocket rockets” was the apt name given them by the RSPB volunteer. A red deer waded across the water as a cormorant spread its wings for drying and a swan with two cygnets passed behind the cormorant.

Walking back towards the car park we were startled by a Cetti’s warbler alarm call but were delighted when it flew past – a fitting end to a lovely day out.

Many thanks again to Andrew for another excellent day of birdwatching.

Report and photographs by Sallie Jackson
n.b. To other members of the group that made an extensive bird list.

Cley Marshes 17 August

Weather wise, the journey to Cley Marshes did not bode well; drizzle! But as we neared the coast the clouds lifted and the day improved to dry but windy.

As we waited for the Visitor Centre to open a spotted redshank flew in a circle from the reserve, around the back of the centre and back to the reserve. Once in the Centre, hot drinks were purchased, some of us sat and chatted and others sat looking over the reserve. On Pat’s Pool a small flock of spoonbill and a larger flock of sandwich tern rested or preened. On the wet meadow cattle grazed and amongst them were lapwing; a green sandpiper flew in.
We made our way to the three hides ("Avocet, Dawke’s & Teal"). Our first visit was Teal followed by Dawke’s. Swallows and martins were flying around over the grass meadow and reeds. From Teal hide, looking out on Pat’s Pool, the spoonbills were no longer there, but several ruffs were on the muddy islands with numerous ducks and the flock of sandwich terns remained. At Dawke’s hide we turned our attention to the muddy areas on Simmond’s Scrape. Amongst some dunlins a little stint was found, giving a good opportunity to compare the two distinctly different sized, small waders.

Looking out further, both ringed and little ringed plover were spotted. A knot still with the hint of pink on its chest was also seen amongst the dunlins. Several black-tailed godwits were feeding in the water, some still in breeding plumage looking magnificent compared with those in their dull winter plumage. A greenshank was feeding near the godwits. Hidden in the vegetation on the one of the islands, a snipe was resting.

Profile of the top of the beach had completely changed, the high shingle dunes having been replaced by a flat featureless shingle beach. Swarovski hide had been washed away in the winter storms and now replaced by a viewing screen. This is not to say that this is a complete downgrade – there is no longer a roof but there is seating around the screen and a picnic table, at which some of us sat to eat our lunches. On the North Scrape were twenty spoonbills; a curlew flew over. It was difficult to identify the birds against the sun as they were just silhouettes. So, after lunch we continued on and were pleased to be heading west for we now had the strong wind helping us along the shingle. We stopped at East Bank and managed to hunker down the bank to get some shelter from the wind. With telescopes we scanned Arnold’s Marsh where there were several waders including redshank, a sanderling and a knot in breeding plumage; also, turnstone, curlew and more Sandwich terns.

Continuing along East Bank we stopped to look at and take close-up photographs of a young bank vole on the edge of the path. Eventually, the creature crept in to the long grass but not before several photographs had been taken. A couple of birders approaching from the opposite direction must have wondered why we appeared to be taking photographs of the gravel!

Finally, we stopped at Bishop’s hide to look, once again, across Pat’s Pool. A swift flew over, probably one of the last of the season to leave our shores, then a marsh harrier was seen quartering over the reeds, putting up the waders.

Eventually, we made our way back to the centre to finish the day with hot drinks and a rest from the bracing wind.
Lackford Lakes and Weeting Heath on Saturday 5 July

Lackford Lakes which is managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust is one of my favourite local reserves: it has good variety in habitat and the staff and volunteers are not only knowledgeable but always very friendly and welcoming.

It was mid-afternoon when ten people met in the car park at Lackford Lakes visitor centre. The weather forecast was a mixture of sunshine and showers. There were reports of turtle doves and kingfishers at the reserve and a late brood of ducklings on the pond by the visitor centre provided an “aaah” factor. After the usual discussion about whether waterproofs or boots would be needed, we began with a quick look around the shrubs near the car park and then on to the feeders and meadows adjacent to the sailing lake. This revealed the usual range of tits, corvids and common woodland birds. We checked the wires for turtle doves but no luck there, however a buzzard was spotted quartering in the distance and the chiff-chaffs were still in full voice.

We took the path alongside the sailing lake to Bill’s Hide where we found a real treat: green sandpipers - the first sighting of the season for most of us. One of Lackford Lakes’ part time leaders was in the hide when we arrived which was great timing on our part because he was keen to help us with identification tips. However, our study of the sandpipers was interrupted by great sightings of a kingfisher obligingly posing for the photographers on a nearby branch. A reed warbler was working the reeds in front of the hide whilst out on the lake were more waders and waterfowl including oystercatcher, great crested grebe, Egyptian geese and, teal. A jay flashed by, bringing our sighting so far up to thirty-one.

Time to move on and the first few of us decided to pop in to the very small Reed Hide where we were totally transfixed by the sight of a kingfisher fishing right in front of the hide window. Trying to keep as quiet as possible to avoid frightening it away, more people squashed into the tiny hide to get some great shots of the bird slapping its catch on the branch. Eventually the bird flew off and we were able to breathe again and wonder what else we might see that would better such a superbly intimate encounter.

From the Double Deck Hide we saw and heard three redshanks flying by, then as this was summertime, we took the aptly named Summer Path alongside the watercourse that leads to the fishing lake. Alongside the path were numerous dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies and also burnet moths. The path is a lovely and useful addition to the reserve because it’s only when this path is open in the drier months, that you can do a circular walk to the lakes and back, and of course it contributes to the variety of habitat that makes Lackford such a great place to visit.

Fuller’s Mill Hide looks over the fishing lake where we saw pochard and a juvenile great crested grebe which proved to be the precursor for what we were to see from Besse’s Hide which looks out over the opposite lake. We settled down as usual to scan the lake and noticed a family of great crested grebes with the juveniles begging for food. Unfortunately the black headed gulls had seen them too – every time the adult approached the juvenile with food, a gull swooped down to steal the catch. This happened time after time until the
grebe got wily and began to feed junior under the water. Good bird logic was demonstrated! Other sightings included more kingfishers, a little grebe and the resident gulls and geese. Time was escaping us and tea at the visitor centre had become a priority so we made our way back through the woodland to make use of the facilities and enjoy a picnic under the trees. The original plan had been to visit Cavenham Heath to look for nightjars but none had been seen there recently, so we decided to go to Weeting Heath where sightings had been confirmed albeit not in great numbers. At Weeting Heath we visited the West Hide where stone curlews certainly stole the show. As we watched in the increasing gloom we seemed to see more and more of them amongst the lapwings, corvids and rabbits. It’s amazing how in low light, a rabbit can look so much like a stone curlew – until the tail gives it away! After leaving West Hide we walked to the tiny woodland hide but as the light was low, there was little to be seen, so it was time to try for nightjars. The best place to find them is across the road where the forest path meanders through beech wood before opening onto the wide track through the conifer plantation. Here we found a group of people armed with cameras and various optics hoping to capture views of nightjars. We waited with them for some time, taking photographs of the amazing sunset but no luck with nightjars and frustration was mounting, so we decided to walk much further up the track towards the farmhouse. Here, as the darkness grew, at last we heard the incredible mechanical sound of a nightjar calling. They were few in number but it was a very satisfying end to the day.

Brenda Field

**Fulbourn Fen and Fleam Dyke Walk and BBQ 24 August**

Nine of our Group met for a walk through Fulbourn Fen and onto Fleam Dyke. Our walk took us first through Fulbourn wood; there were few birds - a robin was singing and a wren’s “tic-tic-tic” emanated from the under growth. In a clearing, migrant hawker dragonflies were prowling around the trees, ‘hawking’ for insect prey. Along the edge of the wood speckled wood, red admiral and meadow brown butterflies were a delight to see. Arriving at steps taking us up on to the Dyke bank, swallows swooped around and one entered, via a broken window, an old abandoned brick building. A flock of goldfinches flew away out of a nearby hedge. Out on a recently raked field a large flock of lesser black-backed gulls with at least one common gull and a couple of great black-backed gulls were gathered. Up on the dyke bank we spent time admiring and identifying some lovely late summer plants, several in flower. Some of these are only found on calcareous soil which prevails in this area. We were able to name most of the plants we came across. These included – common rock rose, white & black bryony (both have red berries), purging buckthorn, bird’s foot trefoil, ploughman’s spikenard, field wormwood, clustered bellflower and harebell. Further along out on another raked field two buzzards took off and flew in opposite directions. Where the vegetation on the dyke bank had been cleared and only small plants grew, we saw a few
chalk hill blue butterflies. In another direction, red-legged partridges were spotted in the corner of a recently harvested field and a hare lopped across it. With one-half of our field trip time used, we made an about turn to make our way back. At the spot where we had seen goldfinches we now saw linnets.

Back at our host & hostess’s garden we settled down for our BBQ. Salad, rolls and other tasty items were added to our own meat and this was followed by three desserts that had been brought along. As the early evening cooled we retired to the warmth of the house where hot drinks were served before we said thanks and goodbye to Brenda and Tony Fields, out hostess and host.

Another ‘Tick’ off my birding Bucket List

Thanks to one of my dearest friends, Sunday June 15 was a day of spectacular birding accompanied by a ridiculously huge smile. A more recent convert to garden bird feeding and RSPB membership (since moving to East Yorkshire in fact), my friend took me up to Bempton Cliffs for the day during a visit to her home near Hull. We’d met the Sheffield Bird Group at a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve the previous day who, it seemed, had only spent a couple of hours at Bempton. We were there for about SIX and I can’t wait to go back for more! This is not a place for a swift dash around the viewpoints

Before we’d even got out of the car park there was the sight of two jackdaws being so confiding around the picnic tables (who knows when a tasty morsel may be dropped eh!), I doubt the chap trying to capture a photograph was able to get them into focus through his enormous lens. These opportunist characters that are usually so shy of humans have obviously adapted to the regular stream of visitors and are exploiting our pleasure in seeing them mere feet away.

And that was just the beginning. The colony of tree sparrows living on the reserve side of the visitor centre is the largest and most relaxed I have ever seen. There were feeding parents in and out of a Sparrow Terrace just below the centre roof, scores of chirruping birds in the nearby bushes and regular forays to the feeding station made them very easy to watch. No dashing for cover at the barest hint of disturbance like the Ouse Washes flock.

So with swallows also back and forth, we started our walk with a growing sense of excitement.

For those yet to visit Bempton Cliffs, two walks stretch out to North and South from the entrance. We chose the longer South walk first. Before getting very far I’d spotted a male linnet and the grassland behind the cliff top walk was full of displaying skylarks. There were also common spotted orchids in bloom, some surrounded by areas of flattened grass where photographers had been. The RSPB is growing wild flowers for insects and pollinators and
we did see notices asking people not to walk onto these areas. There were some beautiful spears right by the path too – if one exercised a little patience! What with a meadow pipit singing from a high perch and cliffs full of fulmars, razorbills and guillemots at the first viewpoint, it took us a while to get up close to the scores of gannets populating the grassy tops behind the safety barriers. These majestic and beautiful seabirds float by just a few feet above head height, so even binoculars hardly seemed necessary at times. We were entranced watching one pair greet each other with a mutual beak caressing session. But an even better sight awaited us at the final viewpoint, where the enthusiastic RSPB volunteer showed us a huge chick nesting beside one of its parents on a steep cliff face.

Surrounded by many other gannet pairs, several with much smaller offspring, this mound of white fluff was almost adult sized – possibly the first chick to hatch on May 6. With fleeting views of flying puffins and a lonely shag also achieved there, we decided lunch was calling and returned to the car park.

As if to emphasize the popularity of this superb place, every picnic table was occupied. So we ate in the car – avoiding the only shower of the day! Perhaps the otherwise persistent North Sea wind dropped just enough to allow a brief cloudburst. By the time we left the clouds had cleared, so my last memory of Bempton Cliffs is of a sunlit view across a grassy meadow divided by chalk white paths and ending with the (now blue) sea meeting a bright blue sky. A picture postcard scene to be sure. But first there was the North path to explore. Parts of this one ran between lush, tall vegetation. So until we got to the final viewpoint much of the walk was sheltered. On the way we scanned the birds lining the cliffs in a steep gully and found some tiny kittiwake chicks. It never ceases to amaze me how seabirds manage to raise their offspring on precarious little ledges and here was no exception. The cliffs at Bempton are far more dramatic than anything East Anglia has to offer, sometimes appearing to be ‘built’ from massive rock blocks. There is a real sense of ancient natural history, especially as the birds return year after year to the same spot and will have done so for generations.

Braving the wind at the top point, we finally saw enough puffins to make my friend happy. These comical characters kept flying up onto perching points within binocular distance, though when a couple actually stayed still long enough for me to capture them in my telescope we were both delighted. Some mottled brown herring gull chicks and the repeated calls of an invisible pheasant every time someone walked along the path back to the visitors centre (like an alarm it was!) all added to the experience. However my personal highlight had to be seeing scores of gannets sporting varying amounts of black on their wings and discovering that it takes five years to attain full adult plumage. Gorgeous and long-lived! I can’t recommend a visit to see them highly enough.

Lyn Guy
Introducing Bob

Hello everyone, I'm Bob - you might have heard a little about me recently. Well, here I am! I'm spearheading a new campaign – ‘Vote for Bob’ – to get nature on to the political agenda. I hear you’re an amazing bunch of humans who love wildlife and want to help. That’s exactly what I need.

I may be a red squirrel, but once you get past my bushy tail, pointy ears and primary diet of pine cones and nuts, there’s not much difference between me and you. Honest. I've decided I can no longer sit idly by while the woodlands, meadows and wildlife around me are disappearing. It’s time to make a stand. Squirrels are quite good at standing up when they sense a threat. I want to challenge politicians to take nature seriously. In the run-up to the General Election now is the time to get nature on their agenda. And over the next few months, I'll be doing just that through my Vote for Bob campaign.

With the help of folk from the RSPB, the campaign is off to a great start. Thousands of people have already cast their vote and shown their support for nature. You can learn all about me and my campaign and start getting involved by visiting my website voteforbob.co.uk.

A vote for Bob is a vote for nature. Sign the petition today. And please share my campaign with your friends and family.

Thanks

Bob

News from Local Reserves

Lakenheath Fen

Welcome to the latest news from Lakenheath Fen! I can’t believe it is nearly September already (mind you the weather has had a distinctly autumnal feel just lately!). Where did summer go?! In the last newsletter we were anxiously awaiting the returning migrant birds, now we are wondering what delights autumn passage may bring! It's been a great season, skipping past far too quickly (!), with the weather on the whole being good. The breeding season has gone well, as have the majority of our events. Now we are at the time of year where we review the season just gone (both people and wildlife), take stock and start planning our winter work.

Cheerio to Ali

We bid a fond farewell to Ali Blaney, our assistant warden for the past couple of years. She has headed south to work with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, and to be closer to family. She has been a keen and enthusiastic member of the team and will be missed.
**Reserve work**

Our Thursday work parties have continued throughout the summer season, with our volunteers being involved with just about everything! The main task at this time of year is ragwort pulling, which is unpleasant at the best of times, let alone when the horseflies are biting! However, we’ve got a huge amount done, with ragwort being cleared from all of the grazed areas on the reserve (we have left a bit in the un-grazed areas!). It is a shame that ragwort is so poisonous to livestock, as it is a fantastic nectar source for insects, and some like the cinnabar moth absolutely rely on it. Other jobs have included sorting out the staff picnic area (which had started becoming a dumping ground for timber), creating a storage area for timber (from the staff picnic area), fencing repairs, and vegetation control.

**Plant beds**

I mentioned in the last newsletter that the long-awaited plant beds were finally completed and full of various Brecks, Fens and water plants. The Fens bed is doing particularly well, with the rapidly spreading water mint proving a very attractive nectar source for small tortoiseshell butterflies. The pond bed is full of waterlilies, diving beetles and water boatmen, while the Brecks bed is dominated by the blue flowers of viper’s bugloss. There’s even a sand digger wasp making a home in the sand!

**People and events**

The main event has been our Big Wild Sleep Out, which was a two-day camping and bioblitzing extravaganza. Big thanks to David White, who organised the weekend and made sure we had lots of happy campers! We were fully booked each night, with 42 people in total camping (30 adults and 12 children). The events through the day were well attended and covered dragonflies, birds and bats, and everyone enjoyed toasting marshmallows over a campfire. See wildlife highlights for my own personal highlight of the weekend.

**Wildlife news**

**Breeding update**

It has been a mixed season again this year. It started well with seven booming bitterns, but unfortunately we could only confirm a maximum of four to five nests. It is a tricky task to confirm bittern nests here, and the birds don’t always perform exactly as they should!

The cranes have had a disappointing year, with both pairs failing to fledge any young for the second year running. Marsh harriers have had an excellent year, with 22 nests fledging 38 young. Bearded tits, kingfishers and the barn owls have all done well, and there are young warblers everywhere! Cuckoo’s also seem to have had a good year, with at least 11 males being recorded on one day in May. Unfortunately golden orioles don’t appear to have returned this year. There have been several unconfirmed visitor reports, but despite many hours of watching and listening, neither staff nor volunteers have seen or heard a peep.

Prior to the downpours we’ve had recently, there was actually a nice bit of mud developing around the edges of the washland pools. This attracted a few waders, including redshanks, greenshanks, and up to four green sandpipers. Up to 10 grey herons have also been present around the washland pool, along with 10 little egrets and two great white egrets (24 July).

A cracking male red-backed shrike was present on 19 May. Two more unusual records were a woodlark on 2 June and a crossbill on 3 June.
Other wildlife sightings
Lots of dragonflies and damselflies are on the wing, with banded demoiselles being particularly numerous, along with brown hawkers and scarce chasers. Butterflies are also enjoying the sunny weather and numerous hemp agrimony plants; peacocks, small tortoiseshells and gatekeepers are particularly numerous this year.
Moth highlight of the year, so far, has been this particularly handsome goat moth, which I was delighted to find near the trap at our Big Wild Sleep Out event. I have wanted to see one of these moths for the past eight years, and so was chuffed to bits to find this one; my partner Michael however, was perhaps slightly less than overjoyed about being woken up by my excited 6am phone call!

For more sightings check out our blog on the website www.rspb.org.uk/lakenheathfen.

Hope to see you soon.

Cheers,
Katherine Puttick, Reserve Warden

Ouse Fen

With the breeding season coming to an end it is time to review the birdlife successes and failures on the reserve this year. Well, bitterns, our top target species did very well with 6 booming males, double last year’s figure and in July it seemed that young were on the wing across the reserve. This is above all expectations and bodes well for expansion in future years as gravel extraction continues and new habitats are created. All the work done by our sterling volunteers - from pre-dawn monitoring of boomers, to sowing and planting reed plugs, pays dividends when a young bittern flies from the reeds and right over your head. Following the mild winter we have also had a good increase in bearded reedlings with at least 24 pairs, up from nine last year, their pinging calls echoing across the reeds accompanied by the chatter of reed and sedge warblers through May and June. Overhead, marsh harriers sky-danced and had a reasonable year, six pairs raised 14 young. Hobbies are reported to be scarcer than usual this year, but at Ouse Fen they are invariably seen hunting dragonflies over the reedbeds on any sunny day. Barn owls are having a great year; we had four boxes with three well grown chicks in each in July. Other boxes have stock doves and jackdaws.
The black-headed gull colony did very well at Barleycroft Lake with 274 pairs and eight pairs of common terns, with lots of young. At Berry Fen, duck numbers and variety were good with a pair of garganeys present through the period. Breeding wader numbers were also plentiful with 23 lapwing pairs and 12 redshank. Over at Needingworth Pits turtle dove numbers picked up as some birds came in quite late (early June) and four calling birds were on territory. Migrants of note were three black-winged stilts seen on and off from 16/5 to 23/5. One of these was a ringed bird from a collection, and it remains with us until now. A great white egret was present at Berry Fen as the water levels dropped, along with 39 little egrets on 24/6 and there is a great white egret in the area currently.
Water levels have remained high through the summer so there has been a shortage of migrant waders due to a lack of mud, but green and common sandpipers have been regular

Goat moth by Katherine Puttick
with a few greenshanks, ruffs and snipe. It has been a good year for butterflies, the nettles and thistles have provided caterpillar food and nectar for hundreds of small tortoiseshells, peacocks and occasional sightings of painted ladies and clouded yellows. On the mammal front we have seen Chinese water deer, water shrew and lots of water voles so the new wetlands are providing secure habitats on a large scale. There have been occasional otter and mink sightings too, the latter are not so welcome. Autumn wildfowl numbers are building and into September thousands of ducks and geese will join us to spend the winter here. We have planned some works to improve and vary the margins of the reedbed and also to improve the viewpoint overlooking the reedbed at the southern end of the reserve. This should provide clearer and closer views of the special wildlife we have at Ouse Fen.

Barry O’ Dowd (Warden)

Fen Drayton Lakes

Fen Drayton Lakes has had another challenging season with the long lasting flooding over the winter period but has nevertheless had some excellent results from the surveys carried out on site. As the reserve begins to mature, including some of the scrub maturing into trees and bushes, some species have taken advantage such as the nightingales where 5 have been heard during the spring and summer. There have also been several sightings of turtle doves and several have been heard calling around the reserve ranging from Middle Fen to Moore Lake. This is very good news because, as you’ll be aware, their numbers have been in sharp decline for many years. Cuckoos continue to have a good presence this year with many heard and at least one rufous female has been seen. Avocets have returned with two pairs breeding on Moore Lake. A booming bittern was heard during the mating season and we have had a couple of sightings in the last few weeks. Ouse Fen has several breeding pairs so they are around locally. A great white egret has also put in appearance recently which is a great sight to see. There has been some marsh harrier activity earlier in the season but nothing seemed to have come of it with no breeding pairs known on site. Common terns have done well on the rafts this year and we are looking forward to more when we get six new rafts as part of the Heritage Lottery Funding next year. Cetti’s warbler has equalled its previous record with 12 singing males although hobbies seem to be down in numbers. One of the most exciting developments was a pair of breeding stilts which laid an egg, again on Moore Lake, but these were disappointingly predated on the islands. The warm weather that we have been enjoying since June has meant that the reserve is buzzing with wildlife at the moment; the display of dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies has been really impressive and my own identification skills have come on leaps and bounds (with a little help from some of the volunteers!) As a newcomer to the delights of Fen Drayton...
Lakes I have been pleasantly surprised at the variety of wild flowers around, especially on the early successional grassland around Holywell lake, in fact one afternoon when manning the events trailer I counted around twenty species just on the bank by the car park. The warm weather has also brought the visitors out and numbers have been increasing since we have had a presence on the reserve at weekends with a pleasing number of family visits, I’m sure you know how important it is to get the youngsters involved with nature, they are the future conservationists and decision makers.

We have put on walks every week during the summer period with some themed as family friendly and ‘giving nature a home’ as well as some longer walks taking in much more of the reserve. They have gone down very well and it is a good way of introducing people to Fen Drayton Lakes. We will keep the monthly Wednesday Wander going throughout the year; it’s a great way of tracking the seasonal changes on the reserve and to make sure you catch all of the passing migrants in the autumn and spring. The car park changes are now all complete and the portaloo has been clad with willow screens which were made from material harvested from the reserve and constructed by the volunteer work party. It gives a sense of being at a place rather than the old unwelcoming area that was originally there.

Next year we can look forward to the investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership Scheme which includes:

1. Moore Lake shore and island re-profiling to improve bird breeding and feeding habitat and to increase flood resilience;
2. Creation of viewpoint on Elney Lake - new and more diverse wetland features with easy public access;
3. Creation of Heron Island, wet grassland creation and restoration on Ferry Lagoon, and improving people’s access in the heart of the nature reserve;
4. Infrastructure and signage for visitor approach and ‘welcome zone’;
5. Live interpretation of the natural, historic and landscape heritage by means of a seasonal engagement officer;

These changes will help to continue the good work being carried out at Fen Drayton Lakes to provide excellent habitats for all kinds of wildlife and to create a better place for people to enjoy and discover nature. We look forward to seeing you soon.

Pete Stroud
Visitor Officer

Field Meetings September to November 2014

Sunday October 5 Extra event not on current programme.
Guided walk with the Warden at Ouse Fen at 10.00am Booking is essential for this trip, please let Brenda and Melvyn know if you would like to come. Details for the meeting place will be emailed to those who are booked on the trip near the time. A small donation will be collected for the RSPB Ouse Fen reserve.
**Saturday October 11**  
RSPB Strumpshaw Fen. Meet at reserve car park at approx. 9:45am  
Bring packed lunch a hot drink and boots as paths can be muddy in places particularly after rain.  
Expect to see duck species, waders, members of the tit family, winter thrushes, golden plovers, marsh harrier and maybe pink-footed geese to name a few.

**Saturday 8 November Extra event not on current programme.**  
NT Wicken Fen. Meet in car park at 9am – parking free for members or a ticket from the machine, so bring your membership card with you! Boots will be needed here as well as packed lunch and drink.  
Interest here will be wintering thrushes, finches, short-eared owl, waders duck species and at dusk possible hen harrier.

**Friday 21st to Sunday 23 November Please note rearranged date for this event.**  
Weekend to Forest of Dean and WWT Slimbridge.  
Provisional plan is to visit various sites in the Forest of Dean on Friday afternoon and again on Saturday including RSPB Nagshead reserve. On Sunday we will travel to WWT Slimbridge.  
Woodland birds including lesser spotted woodpecker and hawfinch occur as well as wintering thrushes and finches; if we are extremely lucky we may see wild boar.  
At the moment there are two places left, if you are interested then please get in touch ASAP

Andrew Camps  
Field Meetings Organiser, tel. 01638 741018

**Indoor Meetings**

These are held at St John’s Church Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8RN. Meetings start at 7.30 pm.

**Wednesday 15 October**

Birding Down Under  
Richard Pople

**Wednesday 7 November**

The Jewel Hunter  
Chris Gooddie

**Wednesday 10 December, please note that this second Wednesday in the month**

Christmas Social
Cambridgeshire Bird Club indoor meetings (Doors open at 7.30pm for a 8.00pm start, there is a £2-£3 charge for non members)

CBC/BTO Conference

Saturday Sept 27

Birds and Woodland
Full details to be announced on the website

Friday 10 October at Cottenham Village College
Northumberland through the Seasons
Martin Kitching

Friday 14 November at St John’s Community Hall
Birdwatching in the Caucasus
Paul French

Friday 12 December at St John’s Community Hall
Christmas Social