



THE HOBBY

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the March 2014 edition of the Hobby. This month includes a selection of trip reports and write-ups of local birding observations and comments in a winter with no pronounced cold spell and a lot of the rain and flooding. Looking forward to Spring, included is an introduction to this summer's chosen survey on Corn Buntings, a request for involvement in a BTO survey on Peregrines and a look at the recent records of Pied Flycatcher in the county, a top prize for spring birding most likely to be found in the last ten days of April judging by the statistics. Good birding to all...

Andy Grimsey

JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2014 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.

January 2014

Whooper Swan - Four were at Stewartby Lake on 14th.

Pink-footed Goose - One roamed around the Ivel Valley during the middle of the month (BN). Another turned up at Wardown Park, Luton from 26th (AG).

Pintail - Small numbers were recorded from Harrold and Odell CP, Brogborough Lake, and Chimney Corner South Lake.

Greater Scaup - A female was at Blunham Lake on 14th.

Great Northern Diver - The juvenile stayed around Stewartby Lake all month.

Glossy Ibis - The second for Bedfordshire was found at Langford water meadows on 4th and stayed until 10th (SW). It was well twitched by birders far and wide!

Red-footed Falcon - A male was reported from Haynes on 28th

Merlin - The regular bird was seen around Broom GP all month, and another was at Blunham.

Black-winged Stilt - Two colour-ringed presumed escapes turned up at Blunham from 17th. At least one moved to Willington GP where it remained in to February.

Avocet - A presumed escape appeared at the same time in the same field as the Stilts. It remained in the area for a few days but disappeared after 27th. It did not appear to be ringed.

European Golden Plover - Several thousand were around Meadow Lane GP all month.
Jack Snipe - Birds were recorded from Broom GP, Derek Whites Eggs pit, Stratton Park Balancing Pond, Aspley Heath, Tetworth Hall Wetlands and on the River Lea in Luton.
Black-tailed Godwit - Around 100 were around The Pillinge, MVCPC on 14th.
Eurasian Curlew - One was at Broom GP on 31st.
Mediterranean Gull - A first-winter was at Priory CP on 12th and an adult at Stewartby Lake 30th.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - A female was regularly seen around Swiss Gardens for much of the month. Another was seen at Eversholt Lake.
Common Chiffchaff - Up to two Siberian Chiffchaffs were at Marston Moretaine Sewage Works, and another was at Broom GP.
Dartford Warbler - The male was still present on Aspley Heath all month.
Common Stonechat - Birds were reported from Biggleswade Common, Sandy Smith NR, and Sandy Heath.
Common Redpoll - One was seen around feeders in Southill for much of the month (SH)
Common Crossbill - Up to 20 were around The Lodge.

February 2014

Whooper Swan - One remained with the Mute Swan flock at Radwell Lakes until 19th at least.
Pink-footed Goose - The injured bird was still present at Harrold and Odell CP on 4th, and the Ivel Valley wanderer was seen at Henlow on the same day.
White-fronted Goose - Two first-winters were at Cainhoe Lakes on 24th (PS)
Pintail - One was at Derek Whites Eggs pit on 3rd, with two still present at Chimney Corner South Lake on 3rd.
Great Northern Diver - The juvenile became more erratic in its appearances at Stewartby Lake and was also seen at Chimney Corner South Lake.
Eurasian Bittern - Birds were recorded at MVCPC and Willington GP during the month.
Merlin - Birds were seen near Sandy, and Arlesey.
European Golden Plover - Just under 5000 were counted at Meadow Lane mid-month.
Jack Snipe - There were records from Tetworth Hall Wetlands, Cainhoe Lakes
Black-tailed Godwit - Eight were at MVCPC on 2nd, with 130 over Priory CP on 20th.
Mediterranean Gull - Up to two adult birds were seen at either Stewartby Lake or MVCPC, with another adult visiting Broom GP on 17th.
Glaucous Gull - One flew over Warren Villas on 26th.
Kittiwake - An adult was at Stewartby Lake on 9th (NW)
Short-eared Owl - At least one was at Thurleigh Airfield on 19th.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - Two were seen in Flitwick Moor.
Common Chiffchaff - At least one Siberian Chiffchaff remained at Marston Mortain Sewage Works in to February.
Common Stonechat - One at Sandy Smith NR on 6th, and another was at MVCPC on 26th.
Common Redpoll - Up to two were around Southill (SH) and another was found in Flitwick Moor on 16th (AG)

Observers:

Andy Grimsey – AG; Barry Nightingale (BN); Neil Wright – NW; Peter Soper – PS; Steve Heath – SH; Stuart Warren - SW

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

A BIT OF AN ESCAPE



One of the colour-ringed Black-winged Stilts first seen near Blunham is still hanging around Meadow Lane GP at the time of writing. Something that may remind us of warmer climes and birding with no wind and rain. The current locations of the second bird and the Avocet seen with them at Blunham are unknown, as are locations of where they originated from...

PROGRAMME MATTERS

Our final indoor meeting of this winter session will be a talk about the '**Great Crane Project**' by Roger Lucken from Bridgewater. Roger has been very much involved with the reintroduction programme on the Somerset Levels and provided he hasn't been swept away in the floods you can hear his talk in Maulden Village Hall on **Tuesday, 25th March** at 8.00pm.

You will receive details of our summer field events with this Hobby. If you've not been on a club outing before I can assure you of a warm and friendly welcome if you can be tempted to join us. The first three meetings on the programme are all very local and have become popular events which especially cater for all levels of experience.

Thanks to all those members who have supported the winter programme and especially those who have helped in many practical ways with the smooth running of our meetings. Work has already started on the arrangements for next winter.

Don Green

DUNSTABLE SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS RESERVE

We are sorry to announce the resignation of Brian Horne as Warden and wish to thank him for his most valued service over the past eight years.

Bird Club/BNHS committees have appointed Rob Dazley as the new Warden. We wish Rob every success with his new task. He has already engaged the permit holders in some hard labour and has received an encouraging level of support!

Please note that open mornings at the works will continue through the summer months on the first Sunday morning of each month from 8.00am to noon. All members are welcome to attend

Don Green

TRIP REPORT – HENLOW LAKES 8TH DECEMBER 2013

Since moving to Henlow my local patch has been an area 2km x 1km around Henlow Grange, stretching from the A507 in the south to Langford in the north, lying to the west of the East Coast main line and either side of the River Ivel. The patch comprises a variety of habitats including worked-out gravel, now fishing lakes, alongside the River Ivel and its tributary the River Hiz; some woodland and parkland around the Grange plus farmland, mainly arable, between the rivers and the railway but including some paddocks for horse, sheep and cattle. This mix of habitats attracts a wide range of species and in eleven years I have noted about 120 species. In 2013, I participated in the Patchwork Challenge (<http://patchworkchallenge.blogspot.co.uk/>) and recorded 111 species for my patch.



On 8 December 2013, the Bedfordshire Bird Club (BBC) came visiting. Starting from Henlow Bridge Fishing Lakes, where we had been given permission to park, my plan was to walk round the Lakes, then north past Henlow Grange following the footpath over the River Ivel towards Langford, checking out the Poppy Hill gravel pits before doing a circuit of the fields to the east and then heading back the way we had come (just about all in tetrad TL13Z for atlasers).

Shortly after 08:30 thirteen BBC members had gathered.

The walk got off to a good start with a Sparrowhawk flying fast and low through the car park scattering a small flock of Goldfinches. The fishing lakes were sadly devoid of waterfowl save for a few Mallards and Moorhens but a male Great Spotted Woodpecker landed in a lakeside tree and posed in full view. Those at the back of the party added a female Bullfinch as we approached the Grange while those at the front saw a Black Squirrel (probably one-in-three of the local squirrel population are this black form).

The bridge over the River Ivel has been a reliable site for Kingfisher and we were not disappointed, one landing just downstream and sitting long enough for a scope to be set up and good views had by all. A new footpath/cycle track, replacing the previous narrow footpath, has only recently been completed along the east side of Poppy Hill fishing lakes. From the track we viewed the pits, the duck flock was much reduced from the numbers in the autumn, but included 32 Tufted Duck, two Pochards and a female Gadwall and still represented a good haul for these lakes. A Mute Swan family of two adults and two immatures were on the northernmost pit.

Up until this point we had been largely sheltered from the south-westerly wind, somewhat abated from the gale force winds of the previous week but still quite brisk. Heading east across the fields we were more exposed to the wind and this probably contributed to the small numbers of bird noted. We did find a small flock of Linnets and Meadow Pipits plus, the highlight for many, a couple of Corn Buntings sang from the overhead wires.

We recorded 44 species (full list below) on our walk which is about average for this time of year.

Special thanks to Dave Curson of Henlow Bridge Fishing Lakes for allowing us to use their car park.

Species List:

Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Mallard, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Coot, Moorhen, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Starling, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Rook, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Bullfinch, Corn Bunting.

Roger Hicks

TRIP REPORT – OUSE FEN 12TH JANUARY 2014

Needingworth Quarry (TL 349 728), now known as Ouse Fen, a couple of miles north east of St. Ives, is in the Cambridgeshire Fens where the RSPB is working with Hanson on an ambitious scheme to transform a working sand and gravel quarry into a vast nature reserve with open water & grassland which when complete, will be the biggest reed bed in the UK.

The reserve has been designed from the outset to create wildlife rich habitats and ten years into the 30-year project, is already attracting a wealth of wetland wildlife including Bitterns, Marsh Harriers and Bearded Tits. Ducks, grebes, swans, wading birds, birds of prey and farmland species have been reported throughout the year. <http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/o/ousefen/about.aspx>

On a bright, sunny but cold crisp morning 17 clubs members were met by the group leader, Pete Soper and after a brief chat to explain the plan based on a recce earlier in the week, with Mike Bird and myself, we set off on the Barleycroft Trail. Conditions underfoot were slightly better than our previous visit but considering the vast amounts of rain we had had recently and the resulting floods seen on our journey we were fortunate to be able to get on to the reserve.

Fieldfares, Redwings & numerous finches we seen in the hedgerows alongside the footpath with Tufted Ducks, Herons, Teal, and Coot visible on the wetland to the left of our path. A Common Buzzard sat in the top of a distant tree. A large group of Lapwing along with good numbers of Golden Plover were seen flying over the area (they too probably having seen the Buzzard) and around forty-five Common Redshank were spotted feeding and preening, along with numerous Wigeon, in the shelter of a waterside embankment. The Smew seen earlier in the week were conspicuous by their absence but our view of the location they were seen in was made difficult by having to look into the rising sun. A slight detour from the Barleycroft Trail took us to the viewpoint where Gadwall, Mallard, Pochard, Teal, Wigeon and a single Common Snipe were added to our list. Small numbers of Goldfinches and Long-tailed Tits were feeding in the adjacent Alder trees. After quite a long walk, part of it along the Quarry access road, we reached Barleycroft Lake where we watched Goldeneye and had a superb view of a hunting Sparrowhawk skimming across the adjacent field. As time was getting on and as we had planned to move on to another location, we decided to retrace our steps and return to the cars. On reaching the Quarry access road it was agreed (with one exception) to take the easier route back and follow the tarmac road but gradually the group was dissuaded, especially once we had met other birders who had seen up to nineteen Smew at the point we looked for them earlier. What a great decision that turned out to be as we all had good views of at least two males and numerous redheads, surely contenders for “The Bird of the Day”. As we returned alongside the hedgerows good numbers of Reed Buntings were seen along with a single Yellowhammer.

John Tomlin

BEDFORDSHIRE CORN BUNTING SURVEY 2014

This years major survey for the club is to calculate a population estimate for Corn Buntings. This will be a survey everyone can take part in as our Corn Buntings are still fairly widely distributed across our county.

Part of this survey will be a collaborative one with our neighbours the Cambs Bird Club and Herts Bird Club. We will be comparing a sample set of tetrads across all three counties with a view to calculating a three-county wide population estimate.

Method: This will involve two visits to each tetrad counting and mapping all the singing male Corn Buntings you find. The survey period is between 24th May and 7th July 2014, with visits ideally done in the mornings.



We have almost 160 tetrads to cover so there is plenty to do! If you would like to get involved please get in touch with Graham Goodall, Beds Bird Club Research Officer, at g.goodall052@btinternet.com or 01767 312419. Please let Graham know which tetrad(s) you would like to survey along with your name and contact details. Tetrads will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis. Graham will be away from 16th-28th May, so please contact him before the end of April.

Further updates will be placed on the Beds Bird Club website, along with a list of all the tetrads which need to be surveyed.

Steve Blain

BTO PEREGRINE SURVEY

This year the BTO are running a Peregrine survey. All known breeding sites will be visited. In addition, volunteers are required to survey randomly selected 5km x 5km squares checking for suitable Peregrine breeding habitat and potential nest sites. Ten of the randomly selected squares lie within Bedfordshire. Volunteers for two squares have already been found. Further details, including location of the survey squares can be found on the Bird Club web site and BedsBirds blog. If you would like to take on a square please let me know and I will forward the full instructions for the survey plus recording forms.

Roger Hicks

BirdTrack – WHERE WERE YOU?

At this time of year many local bird recorders begin accessing BirdTrack records to incorporate into their bird reports. You can help by making sure your sites are informatively named.

Avoid names like 'home', 'garden', 'Scotland' or 'M25' (i.e. road numbers without a place name). If you have a BirdTrack site for your home address, please use the format 'Thetford Nunnery Drive' (not '123 Nunnery Drive' because this will reveal your actual address on the public outputs and does not give local recorders / report writers any indication of the nearest village or town).

To edit a site name:

- Login via the button at the top left of this page;
- Click 'Manage my sites' in the options panel on the left;
- Click the notepad and pencil icon in the 'Edit name' column;
- Edit the name then press the 'Update site name' to save the change
- .

If you use the BirdTrack App for iPhone and Android smartphones, please login online and check if any 'Mobile-' sites have been inadvertently created. If they have, please either merge these into existing sites or give the 'Mobile-' sites a meaningful name, using the same process described above.

The problem with sites named in the automated format 'Mobile-TL1234' is that occasionally the smartphone's GPS does not pick up an accurate grid reference. Without a place name against which

to cross-check, the people using your records have no way of confirming that the grid references of 'Mobile-' sites are accurate.

If you need to check the actual location of any site, 'Mobile-' or otherwise, go to 'Manage my sites' and click on the site name. A map of the site will then be displayed.

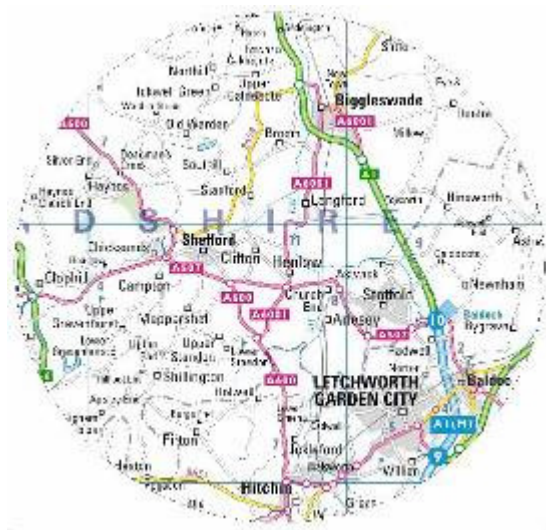
More information on the BirdTrack website: www.birdtrack.net

Steve Blain

NEW YEAR'S DAY: SHEPHERD'S WARNING

*Red sky at night, shepherd's delight,
Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning*

This was not my most enjoyable new year's day (NYD) bird watch. December 2013 had been wet and windy, with parts of southern Britain recording nearly twice the average rainfall and one of the stormiest months on record. Early in the month strong winds and high tides resulted in a storm surge causing extensive damage along the east coast. Further storms hit in the run up to Christmas and again between Christmas and new year leading to widespread flooding in many parts of the country with the south and south-west being particularly badly affected. Fortunately, Bedfordshire escaped the worst of the weather, although rivers were running high, the ground was saturated and there was a lot of standing water in the fields. More than anything else the inclement weather probably accounted for the all time low score of only 102 species in the Bedfordshire Bird Club's Christmas Bird Hunt. The weather forecast for NYD was for more of the same. This did not bode well.



Each NYD I try to record as many species as possible. I limit myself to an area within 10km of home, currently the east Bedfordshire village of Henlow, to both reduce travelling time and maximise birding time. This area stretches from the chalk downland of the Chilterns, rising to 183 m at Telegraph Hill, in the south across the flood plain of the River Ivel and its tributary the Hiz to the greensand ridge in the north. The A6 trunk road between Luton and Bedford forms the western boundary while the eastern border is a line on the map passing through the village of Ashwell. Three Hertfordshire towns, Baldock, Letchworth and Hitchin, occupy the south-eastern quadrant while the smaller towns of Stotfold and Biggleswade lie on the route of the A1 which runs north-south across the area.

The larger towns of Luton and Bedford lie outside this area, to the SW and NW respectively.

It was still dark when I first ventured out at 05:45 on 1st January 2014, but mild with a cool southerly breeze. Stars twinkled between the clouds as a Robin singing under the village street lights became the first bird of the new year, as has been the case for each of the last three years. Away from the lights it was still too dark for much to be moving. A harsh croak revealed the presence of a Heron and a little later a Carrion Crow cawed. No owls were heard nor seen and nothing further was recorded until I approached Henlow Bridge fishing lakes when Moorhen, Coot and Mallard were heard calling. Arlesey railway station was brightly lit prompting Blackbird to sing as well as another Robin. Wood Pigeons crashed from lakeside trees while in the poplar plantation north of the River Hiz, Jackdaws and Carrion Crows were beginning to stir from their roost. Despite the proximity of the Poppy Hill rookery, no Rooks were heard. Canada Geese, heard honking were my tenth species of the day (at

06:39) and then, at last, a Tawny Owl hooted from the woods behind the Grange, the only owl I recorded all day. By 07:04 the sky was beginning to lighten in the east, the rising sun tinging the clouds with red. Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning.



More birds were becoming active, but despite the lightening sky, most were still being heard rather than seen. The flight calls of Redwing and Skylark were joined by the chuntering of Grey Partridges from the fields, raucous calls of Rooks from the rookery woods and the mewing calls of two Buzzards from the riverside trees. The whistled call of a Kingfisher came from beside the River Ivel, which after the recent storms and heavy rains, was running fast and deep and the churring call of Wren was heard nearby. The slowly improving light was accompanied by a brief shower of rain and two Blackbirds in silhouette were the first birds seen on NYD. The conifer plantation on the banks of the Ivel can be good for flocks of the smaller species but this early on NYD only a singing Goldcrest was found and I could not rustle up a Coal Tit. A pair of Stock Doves flying out of the woods were my 20th species (at 07:50), followed shortly after by the yaffle of a Green Woodpecker and flyover Meadow Pipits and Siskins. A winter feature of my regular walks round

my patch is the flight of Black-headed Gulls following the R.Ivel south; on NYD they were first noted at 08:00, accompanied by a lone Cormorant. In fields east of the Poppy Hill fishing lakes stood a gaggle of six Greylag Geese. The number of waterfowl on the lakes has been slowly dwindling since the highs of autumn (80+ Tufted Duck with a supporting cast of Garganey, Scaup and other water birds). On NYD the Tufted Duck flock remained (18 males and 14 females) accompanied by 1 female Gadwall, three Coots, two drake Mallards and a family Mute Swans. While counting the ducks, a Mistle Thrush sang from the trees beside the lake, both Great Tit and Chaffinch were also heard and several Common Gulls (30th species at 08:25) flew south among the Black-headed Gull flocks.

The wind was picking up from the south and cloud cover increasing as I headed across the open fields where a flock of Magpies gathered in a remnant hedgerow and a Grey Partridge flushed, flying low over the fields on whirring wings. Smaller species, though, were proving harder to find in the deteriorating weather. Over the autumn, the market garden strips have hosted numerous birds feeding on the weedy edges including flocks of Linnet, Skylark and Meadow Pipit. On NYD, a Pied Wagtail flew over and a couple of Dunnock chased along the edge but I could only find a single Linnet although a Corn Bunting gave itself away by singing. The horse paddocks beside the railway attracted a mixed flock of c.300 Starlings, c.30 Fieldfare and a few Redwings while a Sparrowhawk circled over the woods in the Ivel Valley, but it was not until I arrived at the north end of the Poppy Hill sewage treatment works, protected from the southerly wind by the surrounding woods, that I started to pick up some of the smaller species. A charm of Goldfinches fed on some thistle heads, a couple of Song Thrushes flew from the field edge into the woods and a startled Rabbit, my first mammal of the day bolted for cover. In the lee of the woods a mixed tit-flock worked its way along a hedgerow and included Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest and at least one Chiffchaff while a male Bullfinch called from some scrub inside the works compound. A Pheasant called from the woods and as the rain began to fall (maybe I should have listened to that shepherd) a Great Spotted Woodpecker popped into a hole in the trunk of an oak. The sewage settling tanks and surrounding lawns were attracting a good numbers of birds including at least 50 Pied Wagtails, c.20 Meadow Pipits, several Reed Buntings (50th species at 10:01) and one Grey Wagtail. And then it began to rain in earnest. Heading home along the banks of the R.Ivel, I flushed a Woodcock for my last species of the morning. I had scored well on my local patch but had missed some, most notably Coal Tit and Yellow Hammer.

By 10:35 I was back home, warming up, drying out and tucking into a bacon and egg roll (thank you Mrs Hicks!). Collared Dove, Greenfinch and House Sparrow (55th species at 11:10) were seen in the garden.

If anything it was raining even heavier when I headed out (that shepherd knew what he was talking about). First stop was Stockbridge Farm, where a Little Egret was feeding in the muddy pool in the very muddy field. In the driving rain I forgot to check the rooves of the barns and so missed Feral Pigeon and did not note another all day. From there it was onto Langford Mill. The meadows immediately west of the mill were flooded and looked very promising. I quickly found Lapwing and Snipe among numerous ducks and geese and at one time had four species of thrush, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Redwing and Fieldfare in the same field of view, feeding at the base of a hedge. A walk through the flooded common produced more Snipe and a single Jack Snipe (it wasn't there when I had tried the same trick for the Christmas Bird Hunt). Returning to the car, I decided to have another look at the flooded meadows and there was a Water Rail (60th species at 12:09) feeding in the open, a nice bonus.



Next stop was Broom Gravel Pits. The Gypsy Lane East complex was mostly flooded and will become one lake should the rain continue. It was disappointingly almost devoid of birds with the only waterbirds being a few Mute Swans, Coot and a male Shoveler, but no gulls or waders. There were more birds on the deeper Gypsy Lane West lake including my first Pochard and Great Crested Grebes of the day. A very wet circumnavigation of Peacock's lake added Wigeon, Little Grebe and eventually a pair of Teal but again no gulls or waders. A screeching Jay was found in the Moat House woods and a small flock of Lesser Redpolls in the silver birches alongside Gypsy Lane rounded off my visit to Broom.

Nothing new was found at Swiss Gardens where they are dredging the lake, although a strange crow-like call attracted my attention. It turned out to be a Harris Hawk, perched in a lakeside tree and, presumably an escapee from the nearby Bird of Prey Centre. The dredgings from the lake are being spread over fields behind the cricket ground and in the wet conditions have the appearance of estuarine mud flats, although only attracting a flock of c.30 Lapwing on NYD. A potter along Old Rowney Lane was not productive, although my only Kestrel of the day was seen back near Old Warden. By now the light was beginning to fail, so a quick stop at Warden Warren got me the hoped for Coal Tit (70th species at 15:50) but neither Treecreeper nor Nuthatch. I did hear a call that was tantalisingly crossbill-like, but I only heard it the once and could not locate any birds.

I finished the day at Broom Quarry South where a covey of partridges included two Greys and six Red-legs (71st species at 16:04) but again there were no gulls, nor any Golden Plover. By the time I got home it was dark and raining even more heavily.

My New Year's Day total was 71 species (five lower than last year), 52 of which had been recorded on my home patch. All were species that I have previously recorded on NYD birdwatches. I had visited 10 sites but driven only 24 miles. There were nine species that I had hoped to find but which had eluded me: Red Kite, Golden Plover, Green Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Little Owl, Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Yellow Hammer. It is the first time I have not recorded Yellow Hammer on NYD since moving to Henlow.

Despite the weather and the shepherd's warning, it had been a good day in the field.

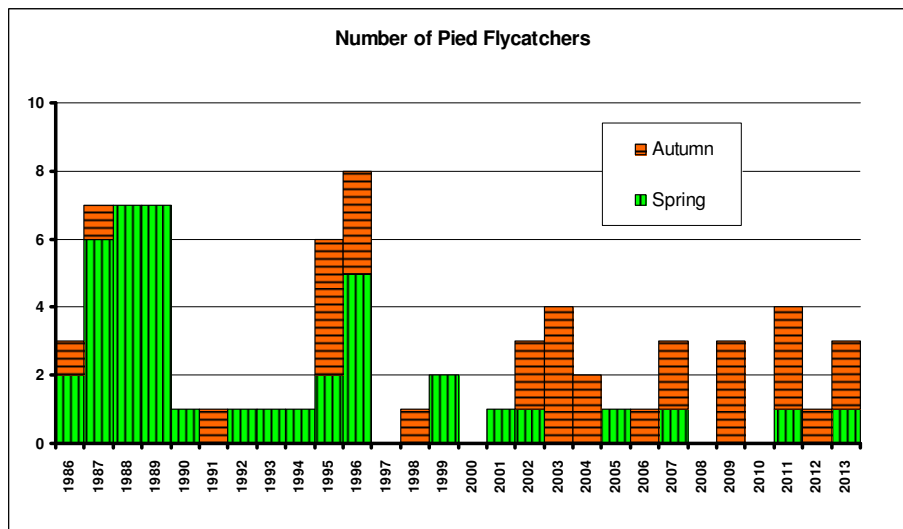
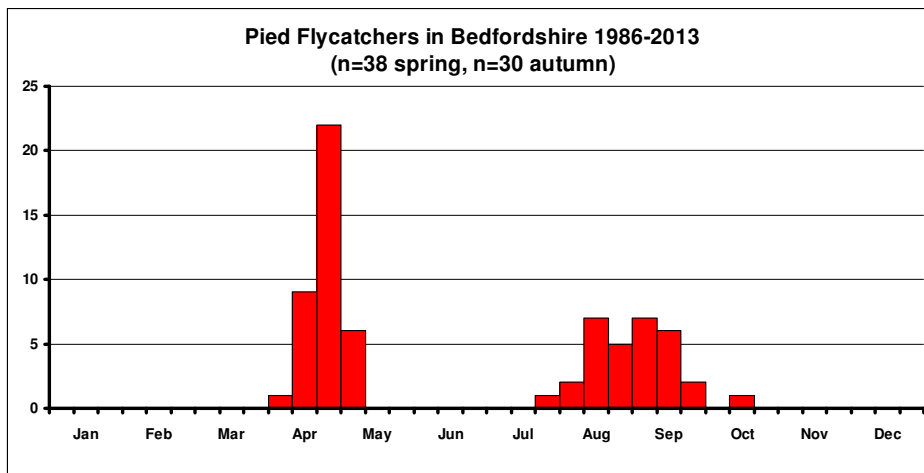
Roger Hicks

GRAPHS OF THE MONTH – PIED FLYCATCHERS IN BEDFORDSHIRE

The Pied Flycatcher is not an easy bird to catch up with in the county with only a handful of records each year and some years with none at all. The occurrence in previous twenty years was written up in the 2007 Bird Report but looking at the data with the last six years added starts to show a change in the balance of records



The clear peak of spring occurrence is in the last ten days of April with autumn records more spread through August and September. Recent years have shown a decrease in the number of spring records but an increase in the number of autumn records as shown in the new graphs. The decrease in spring records shows a correlation with the decrease in abundance of the species in the UK but the autumn story reflects a different situation maybe related to birder behaviour rather than the birds themselves?



Andy Grimsey

JANUARY 2014 – ALAN OUTEN SPOTS THE DIFFERENCE

As many of you know I always keep an annual record of all naturally occurring species of wildlife within the garden area (and also within the village). The annual totals to the end of January since 2007 show the marked contrast this year to those previously. The difference to last year (when it was very cold and with significant snow) is particularly acute. Bird diversity this year has been very poor and we are getting through a fraction of the bird food we normally would (at significantly less expense!). Last year we were filling feeders twice a day or even three times. This winter it has been once every three days!

So far this winter the only bird species noted in or over the garden have been Sparrowhawk, Black-headed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Dunnock, Blackcap, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Wren, Chaffinch, House Sparrow (far more common here than in recent years!), Starling and Jackdaw.

Even some of the above have been very scarce with bizarrely only a single sighting of five Long-tailed Tits, Great Tit and Coal Tit (even more strangely all on the same day!). Wren, Blackcap, Sparrowhawk were also only seen on single occasions with Song Thrush on only two days. Goldfinch, normally one of our commonest winter visitors to the garden, has not been seen here since 10 October 2013! Neither Green nor Great Spotted Woodpecker have been seen here this winter whilst Moorhens (normally up to three present Oct - Mar [last year May]) have also been absent. The only Pheasant this winter was 27 Dec whilst other winter visitors we normally expect here such as Goldcrest, Fieldfare, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Reed Bunting, Brambling, Greenfinch, Tree Sparrow, Jay, Magpie, Carrion Crow and Rook. In addition we normally get something less expected such as Yellowhammer, Redpoll, Bullfinch, Waxwings, Pied Wagtail and the Firecrest last year. Siskins normally arrive here in early Spring. It remains to be seen whether we will get any this year.

On the other hand the numbers of invertebrates recorded in January this year is unprecedented. This supports my view that birds here are managing to find plenty to eat locally and in the wider countryside without the need to depend on food we supply. Our situation here is also complicated by the building development going on in the (former) field next to us!

Annual Totals to end of January

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
BIRDS	28	31	32	37	28	27	31	19
INVERTEBRATES	9	9	10	11	13	19	16	31

Alan Outen

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome Terence Flynn from Luton to the Beds Bird Club. We hope you will enjoy many years of membership with us.

Mary Sheridan

IMAGES:

Andy Whitney: Pied Flycatcher
Steve Blain: Corn Bunting



Binoculars, Telescopes & Accessories



Binoculars

Verano BGA HD

With a brand new optical system the Verano BGA HD delivers a vivid 'true to life' viewing experience essential for accurate wildlife observation. 100% made in Japan, the models incorporate high quality phase corrected & Oasis coated prisms with lenses finished in our F-type multi-coating to optimise light transmission and colour contrast.

Other features include class leading 8' (8x32), 7' (8x42) and 6.5' (10x42) fields of view with or without glasses, 4-stage twist type eyecups, close focus to 2m and a comprehensive 30 year guarantee.

8x32 £429, 8x42 £439, 10x42 £449



Telescopes

HR ED Fieldscopes

Designed and engineered without compromise, HR ED fieldscopes offer the enthusiast exceptional optical performance combined with sublime handling and total reliability. Featuring a twin ED 5 element APO lens system and the very highest grade glass components throughout, both 66 and 80mm models offer class leading resolution and light transmission and are compatible with the full range of HDF and SDL eyepieces. 30 year guarantee.

Bodies (Str or 45°):
HR 66 GA ED £749
HR 80 GA ED 899

Recommended Eyepieces:
SDLv2 18-54x/24-72x £259
HDF T 20xWW/27xWW £139
HDF T 28xWW/38xWW £159
Range of telephoto options available



Opticron equipment can be tried, tested and purchased at good optical retailers nationwide. To find your nearest stockist or for product information please phone us on 01582 726522. Alternatively visit us online at www.opticron.co.uk

Opticron, Unit 21, Titan Court, Laporte Way, Luton, Beds, LU4 8EF UK. Fax: 01582 723559. Email: sales@opticron.co.uk

*The Bedfordshire Bird Club is the ornithological section of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society
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