



THE HOBBY

Website: www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk

Issue 140: Published July 2015

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the July edition of The Hobby. As this is compiled the first movements of autumn are already underway with returning gulls, Green Sandpipers and a few Black-tailed Godwit while overhead a movement of Siskins and Crossbills from the near continent has trickled into Bedfordshire after larger numbers have been noted on the coast. Good birding to all...

Andy Grimsey

MAY – JUNE 2015 BIRD NEWS

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

May 2015

Common Quail - One was calling near Beeston on 17th.

White Stork - One was seen flying over Henlow on 27th (JF)

Marsh Harrier - One flew over the Lodge on 23rd.

Osprey - One flew over Galley Hill on 9th. One flew over Clifton then Broom GP on 12th.

Merlin - A very unseasonable bird was seen chasing a Startling over Flitwick on 30th (JF)

Sanderling - One was at Broom GP on 9th, and two were at Meadow Lane GP on 18th, and another was at Broom GP on 28th, with a further bird there on 29th. Three were at Stewartby Lake on 31st.

Little Stint - One was at Broom GP on 24th-26th

Temminck's Stint - One was at Meadow Lane GP on 9th (KRO), another was at Broom GP on 13th-15th (MJS), with a further two found on 22nd-25th (DF, DJO). A fantastic run of records!

Whimbrel - Two were at Broom GP on 18th.

Red-necked Phalarope - A male was present at Broom GP on 19th-20th (SW et al). It was only the fourth county record and well watched. More about this bird and its context later in this edition of *The Hobby*

Mediterranean Gull - A first-summer was at Broom GP on 11th.

Sandwich Tern - Two were on Stewartby Lake on 7th (DH*i*)

Arctic Tern - Six were at Stewartby Lake on 6th and one there on 7th. 14 were present at Priory CP on 12th, and one was at Meadow Lane GP on 18th. The last were singles at Broom GP and Roxton Lakes on 31st.

Common Redstart - A female was present at Sandy Smith NR on 25th

Whinchat - One on Blows Downs on 1st, two at Brogborough Tip on 4th, one at Blows Downs on 6th and another was at Sandy Heath Quarry on 14th.

June 2015

Gadwall - Two broods were noted at Broom GP.

Common Pochard - Five broods were noted at MVCP during the month.

Goosander - The first breeding record for Bedfordshire was confirmed from Harrold where a female appeared with eight ducklings (DHo)



Little Egret - Five nests were successfully at Blunham Lake producing 13 young.

Osprey - One flew over Willington GP On 21st.

Avocet - One was at Brogborough Tip pools on 16th.

Little Stint - One was at Broom GP on 14th.

Spotted Redshank - A summer plumaged bird was at Broom GP on 13th.

Black Tern - One was at Broom GP on 15th.

Common Crossbill - A modest arrival happened during the month with records from Potton, The Lodge, and Biggleswade.

Hybrid Chiloe Wigeon x Eurasian Wigeon - A pair of this apparent hybrid were at Derek Whites Eggs pit on 2nd and at Broom a week later. What appeared to be the same birds were subsequently seen in Gloucestershire at the end of the month.

Observers:

David Howes – DHo; Keith Owen – KRO; Martin Stevens – MJS; Stuart Warren - SW
Duncan Hilliard – DHi; David Fisher – DF; Dave Odell – DJO; John Francis - JF

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

Compiled by Steve Blain
recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk

PROGRAMME MATTERS

Not wishing the summer away but I need to give details of the first indoor meeting of the winter season in case we don't give sufficient notice when the published programme becomes available in September, along with the next issue of *The Hobby*. Please make a note as follows:

Date: **Tuesday 29th September 2015** starting at 8.00pm

Venue: **Maulden Village Hall** (MK45 2DN)

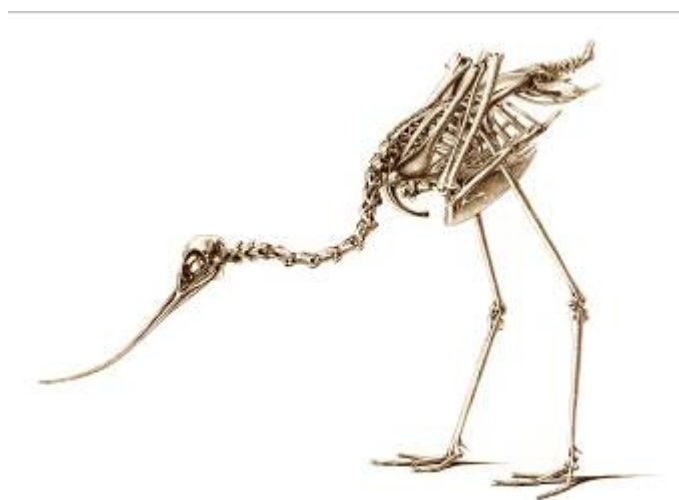
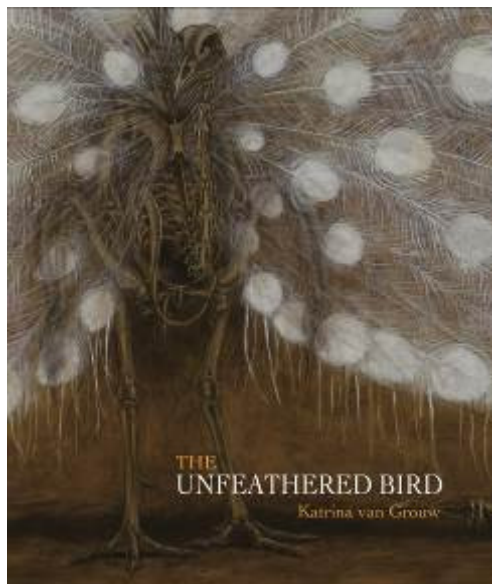
Subject: **'A Very Fine Swan Indeed: Art, Science and the *Unfeathered Bird*'** by **Katrina van Grouw**.

Katrina van Grouw inhabits that no-man's land, slap bang between art and science. A graduate of the Royal College of Art, her formal education was in Printmaking and Natural History Illustration, but she's also a dedicated ornithologist, a former Natural History Museum curator, a qualified bird ringer, and an experienced preparator of natural history specimens.

The book, *The Unfeathered Bird*, is a magnum opus twenty five years in the making, and was originally intended as a manual for bird artists. It was only much later that it blossomed into something far more ambitious. A world away from textbooks and diagrams, this is a work equally intended for scientists and artists, indeed anyone with an appreciation of birds or an interest in their adaptations and behavior. It includes no fewer than 385 illustrations of 200 species, all made from actual specimens, many of which are shown in lifelike positions. Virtually all the complete skeletons were prepared and reconstructed at home from specimens donated from zoos, wildlife hospitals and conservation charities.

Join Katrina as she explains her aims and inspirations, shares her insights about birds beneath their feathers, and relates how her home was turned upside down as more and more specimens joined the queue.

This is a light-hearted, non-technical presentation and guaranteed to make you smile. I'm sure you will enjoy it. First timers are especially welcome.



Don Green

BIRD CLUB TRIP TO MINSMERE 2015 – A 45 YEAR ANNIVERSARY REVISIT

By Stuart Winter.

Sunday, May 17th, 1970. Sir Alf Ramsey's England boys were Number One in the charts with Back Home and preparing to defend the Jules Rimet Trophy in Mexico. Harold Wilson and Ted Heath were having their own Mexican stand-off.

The Labour leader was planning to visit Buckingham Palace the following morning to ask the Queen to dissolve Parliament for a hastily called general election, fearing the arrival of decimal coinage the following spring would be a vote loser. A pint of beer with lunch that day cost less than two shillings.

As a hormonal schoolboy with a skin complexion to match my attitude, the date meant only one thing: a first visit to Minsmere, the RSPB's flagship reserve where the delectable plates from the Observer's Book of Birds, crafted from the palette of Archibald Thorburn, came to life in all their vivid glory. The countdown to my adventure had begun the previous autumn when the Bedfordshire Natural History Society had published its annual programme. Tales of trips to Minsmere became compulsive bedtime reading. Stories of lucky members of the Young Ornithologists' Club spending their school holidays on the Suffolk coast produced feelings of envy and admiration in equal measure. Listening to a few BNHS stalwarts recalling tales of their own visits only increased the anticipation. All that was needed was parental agreement (hence, a lot of bedroom tidying) and a lift. Step forward, Don Green.

Every moment of that day remains indelibly imprinted on my mind's eye, courtesy of a much-loved pair Prinz 10x50s (RRP £20): opening the shutters of the old public hide to see my first Avocets; four fly-over Bitterns; pinging Bearded Tits and a military-type with a howitzer of a voice bellowing "Marsh Harrier" whenever one of these majestic reed bed hunters took flight. At the time, these were the only pair in the whole of the country. No wonder the old gent was shouting!



The past 45 years has seen many changes. Marsh harriers have become a conservation success story. A pint of beer now sets you back the equivalent of a day's pay in 1970 day. You could have bought a house back then for the price of today's optics. Other things have stood the test of time. England football songs still sound awful. The drive from Stowmarket to Westleton still takes an hour. Minsmere has lost none of its magnetism. Don is still a stalwart of the BNHS and latterly the Bedfordshire Bird Club.

By quirk of some mathematical law far beyond my comprehension, May 17th, 2015 - the 45th anniversary of that first Minsmere visit - happened to fall on a Sunday and proved too much of a coincidence for Don when he was planning the Club's spring outdoor programme.

Our visit all those decades before was one of the first topics of conversation when members' vehicles convened in the reserve car park and tales about that auspicious occasion all those years before whetted appetites for the day ahead. And what a day!

In total, we recorded 93 species as a group, either seen or heard. Our walk around the reserve covered Minsmere's patchwork quilt of habitats, with stops in the numerous hides overlooking the famous Scrape, a ramble through the lupin and gorse covered dunes, careful scrutiny of Island Mere's reedbed habitat, a schlep through the oak woods and a final check from the hide overlooking the northern section of the Scrape. There were highlights, aplenty. A welcoming Nightingale marked our entry to the reserve. There was the usual smorgasbord of Arctic bound waders, including Bar-tailed Godwits, Grey Plovers, Dunlin and a Curlew Sandpiper still in winter dress. Minsmere's old faithful, Avocets, Bitterns, Marsh Harriers and Bearded Tits, were present in the kind of numbers to justify RSPB membership fees. The sight of the BBC team adding the finishing touches to Springwatch studio for another year's outside broadcasting provided further evidence that this special place really is a national gem.



For me, however, it was contrasting what I had seen on my first visit as a wide-eyed teenager compared to a day out as a grey-haired grandfather that emphasised how nature is never dormant. The image of a pure white little egret contrasting with the leaden grey skies of that first visit will always be emblazoned on my memory bank. It was a prized sighting for a many a year, a splash of Mediterranean exotica on the Suffolk coast. There was hardly a moment during this year's visit when their ghostly whiteness was not visible. Five, ten, twenty birds? We lost count...

Back in 1970, the only Kittiwake we spotted was a long dead bird on one of the Scrape islands, its ink-dipped wing tip fluttering morosely in the breeze. Decades on, these delicate gulls are firmly

established breeding birds on the Suffolk coast, possible victims, perhaps beneficiaries, of the same climatic factors that have made Little Egrets so common? Changes in the North Sea's temperature appear to be pushing the Kittiwake's feeding grounds ever southwards. Can they survive such powerful natural forces? One bird that has failed the survival race over the intervening years appeared at twilight's last gleaming that glorious spring evening. It proved to be the undoubted highlight of the day, not only because of its legendary status but also because the person who pointed us in its direction. As we made our way back to the cars that May evening, there was time to buy a memento from what constituted the reserve shop. Think shed. I was with my school friend John Lynch and having both bought an RSPB keepsakes, we asked a distinguished looking gent if he knew whether there were Red-backed Shrikes on the reserve. With a smile, he pointed to a nearby hawthorn. There, radiating in the late afternoon sunshine, were a male and female in all their glorious hues. Wow! Sadly, the reserve's Red-backed Shrikes are no more. Indeed, the British subspecies *L.c.collurio* became extinct in the late 1980s. But Minsmere's reputation prevails. As does the legend of that of the kindly gent who pointed out the shrikes: none other than the legendary Bert Axell.

* Stuart Winter is one of the founders of the Bedfordshire Bird Club. He writes a weekly nature and pets column for the Sunday Express and edits the Express digital pages. He has won several awards for nature writing and animal welfare journalism, including the British Trust for Ornithology's Dilys Breese Medal.

THE BIRDS OF BEDFORDSHIRE – TRODD & KRAMER – TWO COPIES LEFT

The Bird Club has been able to purchase some outstanding copies of this 1991 Avifauna from a London bookseller who obtained last copies from the publisher. The fascinating 350-page, partly illustrated hardback book gives full details about the birds of Bedfordshire covering records up to the end of 1989.

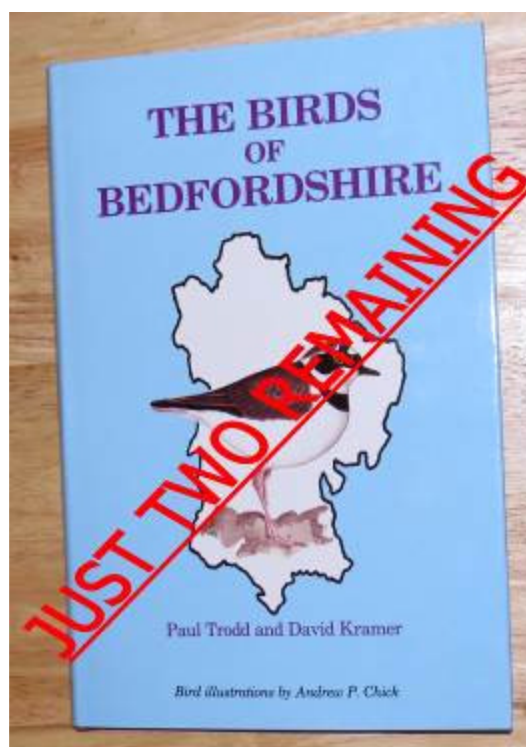
Alongside the species accounts covering all records can be found a chapter dealing with the Bedfordshire environment, habitat, climate and geology and appendices, maps of distribution and full bibliography.

For anyone with an interest in the history of birds and their occurrence in the county, this is a valuable resource and a reminder of the ever changing status of our local avifauna.

To obtain a copy, please let myself or any other member of the committee know and we will get one to you for the bargain price of £12, (+postage if required) with funds going to the bird club.

If the last two have not been claimed, I will bring them along to the first winter indoor bird club meeting for anyone that wishes to browse.

Andy Grimsey



BEDFORDSHIRE STARLING PROJECTS: SIGHTINGS REQUIRED

Across the UK there are a small number of British Trust for Ornithology projects investigating the survival of adult starlings; two of these are based in Bedfordshire with one in Biggleswade and another in Potton.

As part of the project adult birds are caught by licensed bird ringers during the breeding season (April to September) and fitted with coloured rings engraved with an individual 3-letter/number code. Biggleswade birds have red rings with white codes, whilst Potton birds have dark blue rings with white codes.

We are making an appeal to the Bedfordshire birding community for any sightings of these birds which can be submitted to the email address bedfordshiestarlings@gmail.com or on the website www.bedfordshiestarlings.co.uk (available from July 2015).

All the information we would need for any sighting would be:

- Ring colour and complete code if possible.
- Location (can be a street name, town/village, post code or grid ref).
- Date (and time if possible).
- Optional email address if the finder would like details about their bird.

These codes are easily visible through optics/digital cameras and enables re-sighting of the birds without the need to recapture them. This also gives the chance for birders and members of the public to contribute vital information to the project.



photos ©Derek Guar, Katie Fuller.

The background for these projects is that despite still being a widespread and familiar bird, the humble starling is in trouble. Populations in the UK have declined by 81% since 1970 (State of the UK's Birds).

The reasons for such declines are complex and not fully understood. Potential causes may include changes in grassland management, lack of soil invertebrate food (leatherjackets in particular), new buildings reducing access for nesting and agricultural intensification.

Nest record data from the British Trust for Ornithology shows that nesting success has not changed and doesn't appear to be a factor in the decline. The focus of investigation is now on the survival of both adults and fledged birds as it appears that it is this part of their life-cycle where starlings are struggling, it is this question we hope our projects may help answer

Derek Guar

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE AT BROOM GP

A summer-plumage male Red-necked Phalarope found at Gypsy Lane East pits near Broom by Stuart Warren on the evening of 19th May was the first for the site and only the fourth for the County. The bird remained around the same area of the pit for the whole of the next day, 20th May, allowing a steady passage of birders to pass through the site

The previous records are of three birds at three locations, two of which were at the same season at the end of May, the time of peak passage of birds northwards to their arctic breeding grounds, and are noted here:

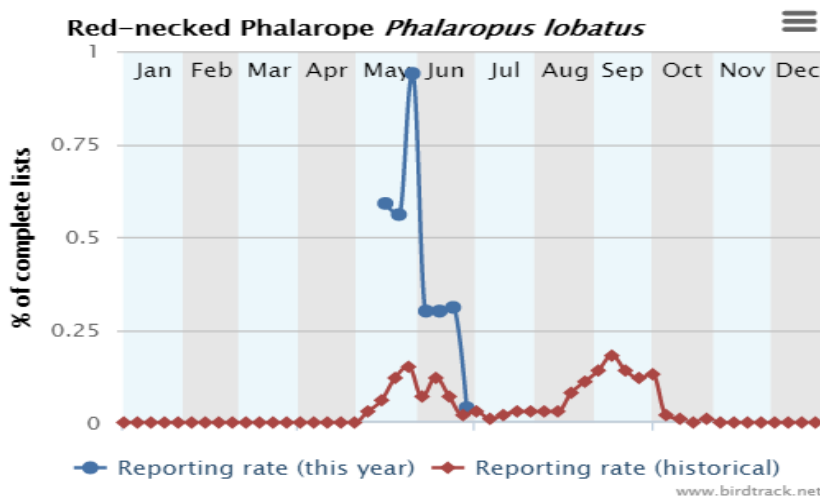
Priory CP - 30th May 1991

Dunstable STW - 31st August 1995

Rookery South CIP - 30th May 2011



This species occurs annually in the south east in spring and autumn but most regularly at coastal marshes and most local birders experience of this species is no doubt from birds at key north Norfolk sites in autumn when they can be quite tame and approachable. The spring of 2015 has seen a higher than average number of Red-necked Phalaropes recorded on passage in the south and east of England. A graph is attached here from Birdtrack that gives an insight into the reporting rate.



In our local region, other inland birds were reported in the same period this year from Welney/Ouse Washes, Staines Reservoir, Theale GP, Berkshire and Bicester, Oxfordshire

Andy Grimsey

NEW MEMBERS

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

Wendy Copley, Dunstable
Terry Murfitt, Sandy
Andrew Noel, Great Missenden

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

Mary Sheridan

GYPSY LANE EAST, BROOM RESTORATION

The restoration plan was agreed back in the 1990s and final restoration work is planned to begin in September 2015, so expect a lot of disturbance at the site. The key components of the restoration are as follows:

1. Water levels: these are expected to be lower than they are currently, governed by precipitation, evaporation and ground-water levels. . This should result in more open ground for waders
2. A new weir will be fitted at the north-east corner of the site. The height of the weir has been set by the Environment Agency.
3. A 'thrust bore-hole' will be installed through the bund that crosses the site and this will link the north and south parts of the site. Water-flows and drainage will be in a south-to-north direction.
4. Landscaping and ground levels: the east side of the bank will be graded to match the west bank and seed will be sown around the edge of the pit to create floristic rich grassland.
5. Ponds and stream: these will be dug when ground levels have been completed; maximum depths should be 1.5 - 2.0m, with seasonal variation.
6. Marshy Grassland: the base of the pit will be sown with an appropriate seed mix. Ground work will create an undulating surface with shallow channels. It is hoped that these will hold water during the winter and early spring and that this habitat will support breeding waders such as Redshank.
7. Bare gravel areas will be created to support breeding Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers.
8. Management: Lafarge-Tarmac will manage the site for 20 years. It will then be managed by the Shuttleworth Trust.

Graham Goodall
Ecologist
Hon. Research Officer. Records & Research Committee
Bedfordshire Bird Club; BNHS.

NON-BIRD RELATED SIGHTINGS THIS SUMMER

Please remember while you are out birding this summer, or while in the countryside lamenting the apparent lack of birds that accompanies the quiet activity of nesting and rearing young through June to August, that there are other county recorders desperate to collect records on other taxa which abound in our county through these hotter summer months. For most of us, dragonfly, damselfly, butterflies and moths are the most recorded but there are other groups of species where the level of data is very low.

On line recording forms for many species groups are available at <http://www.bnhs.co.uk>
Also listed there are the recorder details and plenty of other links. If you are not a full member of BNHS, I would invite you to take the opportunity to get involved.

THURLEIGH AIRFIELD.

Thurleigh Airfield is located to the north of Bedford (central grid reference TL045065) on a flat plateau at an altitude of 80 metres; soils are predominantly Boulder Clay (Dazley and Trodd, 1994). The site consists of large areas of concrete runway (World War II) and various racing tracks within a very large area of permanent grassland. The grass is cut, some parts regularly; others are cut for hay, once a year in July. Parts of the site are grazed by sheep.

In a county that is dominated by arable agriculture, Thurleigh airfield is recognised as being very important for ground-nesting birds:

- Curlew is on the national Amber List; it is categorised as a Species of European Conservation Concern because its population has declined by more than 25%.
- Ringed Plover is on the national Amber List; its population has declined by more than 25%.

(Eaton, *et. al.* 2009).

As a result of their national designations, both species are identified as being important in county terms:

- Curlew. Bedfordshire Red List of Breeding Birds (Goodall *et. al.* 2014a), and Rare Breeding Birds in Bedfordshire (Goodall *et. al.* 2014b). Thurleigh Airfield is the only known breeding site for the species in Bedfordshire.
- Ringed Plover. Rare Breeding Birds in Bedfordshire (Goodall *et. al.* 2014b).

Other notable species recorded at the site are:

- Barn Owl; national Amber List, declined by more than 25%.
- Little Owl.
- Yellow Wagtail; national Red List, declined by more than 50%.
- Linnet; national Red List, declined by more than 50%.
- Corn Bunting; national Red List, declined by more than 50%.

A large part of the site (Thurleigh Autodrome) is owned by Motor Sport Vision Ltd (MSV) and is run as a commercial racing circuit. It is proposed to remove sections of the original concrete runway to improve the circuit. The owners are aware that ground-nesting birds breed on, or in close proximity, to these areas and that the birds might be disturbed if the work is carried out at an inappropriate time of year; i.e. during the breeding season.

Graham Goodall (GRG) and Richard Bashford met the owners in September 2014 to advise on the breeding birds and the potential impacts of planned works. GRG subsequently produced an ecological report on these issues, which was sent to the Director of the Autodrome.

However, it became very evident at a second site meeting in October, attended by GRG and Laura Downton (Wildlife Trust), that a much more comprehensive report was required by the Planning Authority, including addressing national legislation, wildlife law, planning regulations as well as ecology. Whilst GRG had dealt with all these issues during his working career, it was considered that the job should not be carried out in a voluntary capacity on behalf of the Bird Club. Therefore, the job of producing a report was given to an ecological consultancy.

GRG has worked closely with the consultants and the following ecological advice was included in the report:

- Late hay cut (late July or August) to protect breeding Curlew.
- Retain an area of concrete; 90m long by 30m wide (0.27ha) as a nesting site for Ringed Plover.

- Use large stones or pieces of concrete to help camouflage brooding adults and protect the eggs and chicks from predators.
- Create a pond within the area of retained concrete; 20m long by 10m wide by 1m deep. The profile of the pond should be very shallow, with gently sloping sides leading down to a deeper basin so that it retains water as long as possible. The margins of the pond should provide varying shallow water depths throughout the year as water levels fluctuate seasonally. Rushes (*Juncus spp.*) should be planted around the margins of the pond. This will enhance the habitat for invertebrates – food for waders – and provide cover for the chicks from predators.
- Nest boxes should be erected around the site to benefit breeding Barn Owl and Little Owl. The Bird Club should advise on the type of boxes and where they should be located.
- The avifauna of Thurleigh airfield should continue to be monitored annually by BBC members.

It is anticipated that a planning application will be submitted in 2015 and the Wildlife Trust will monitor the weekly planning lists to make sure that the planning authority are aware of the ecological implications. This should ensure that all the issues are fully considered in the planning process and that our advice on ecological mitigation is conditioned if permission is granted.

References.

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Eaton, M A, Noble D G, Musgrove, A J, Hearn, R, Aebisher, N J, Gibbons, D W, Evans, A, Gregory, R D. (2009). *Birds of Conservation Concern 3: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man*. British Birds 102, pp296-341.

Goodall, G. R., Hicks, R. K. and Blain, S.C. 2014a. *Bedfordshire Red List of Breeding Birds (unpub)*. Bedfordshire Bird Club, BNHS.

Goodall, G. R., Hicks, R. K. and Blain, S.C. 2014b. *Rare Breeding Birds in Bedfordshire (unpub)*. Bedfordshire Bird Club, BNHS.

Graham R. Goodall, Research Officer.

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Spotted Flycatchers have again been in short supply this year, though a few reliable locations remain including one particular pair, attracting the photographers at a local churchyard



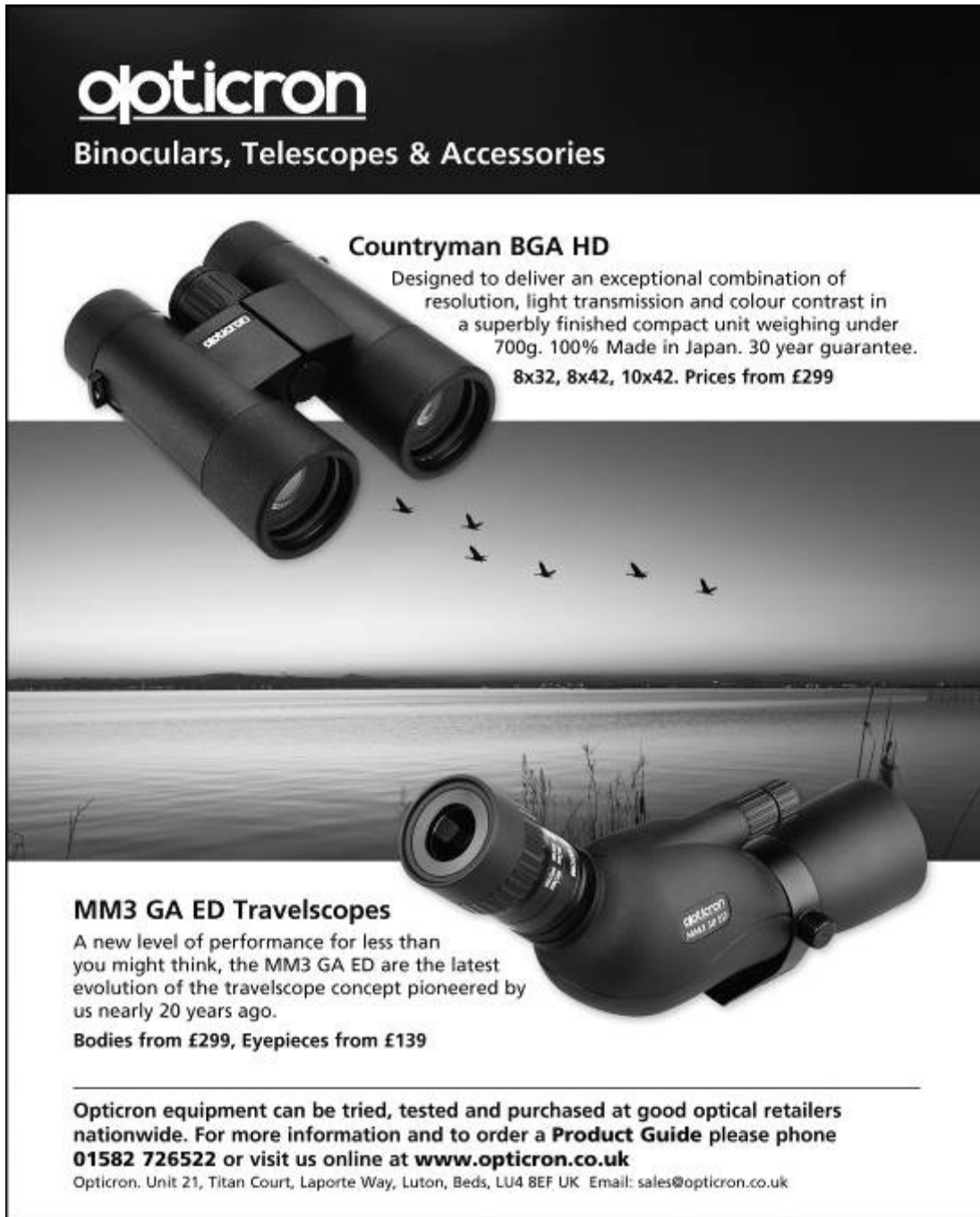
IMAGES BY:

David Howes:

Goosander

Sean D'Arcy:

Spotted Flycatcher, Avocet, Red-necked Phalarope, Bearded Tit



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