



Lincolnshire Bird Club eNewsletter



Lincs Bird Club eNewsletter 01 Winter 2017

Message from the Chairman

Welcome to our new style eNewsletter in which I'm pleased to announce that after a lot of hard work our new look website and forum will be launched in the next week.

Colin Casey and Andrew Chick have both mentioned on the forum the security risks our aged systems have exposed us to, chief of which is being locked out of our own forum by hackers. Shortly that concern will melt away and I'd like to thank Colin and Andrew for all their hard work and the way they've worked together to give us our new platform.



Sadly it's not been a bird intensive Autumn so they've had plenty of time to get things sorted. Hopefully they've both managed to catch up with a Hawfinch in this unparalleled invasion we've experienced over the last few weeks. Happy to say that I had a couple on my local patch at Hubbard's Hills in Louth, a patch first for me and I've been covering it on and off for 43 years! We're all looking forward to seeing all the Lincolnshire Hawfinch records come in, so hopefully you've been successful and will submit your records (see below) and help to provide a full picture of this once in a lifetime event, which we'll cover in detail in our next newsletter.

Image of Hawfinch at Normanby Park by Clare Gillatt

The new website gives us better opportunities to provide members with more resources including exclusive information together with an up to date payment and membership system. The new resources include an online Lincolnshire list with details of all records for rarities and much more detail on scarce migrants. We are building this now and it's work in progress and I'd like to thank Andrew Henderson and Phil Hyde for the work they are putting into making all our records more accessible to members.

Another benefit the new website provides is a fully automatic membership control system. New members will be able to sign up online and pay their membership dues

via Paypal using a credit or debit card. For existing members who are on direct debit, payment by cash or cheque will be able to continue their current payment method or switch to Paypal should they choose to do so. One important aspect of this is that members will be responsible for maintaining their own contact details. We have a real problem where we are not advised when contact details are changed.

For that reason if you don't pay your membership when it falls due, you'll be sent reminders and then locked out of the system until you sign up with your contact details and pay. This will mean that if your existing direct debit fails to reach us for any reason you'll be on a credit/debit card basis from thereon in.

So how is this all going to happen? Well a small subset of 20 members already have access and we've been trialing the new login system with them. Hopefully most of the glitches have been ironed out but when a further 230 people come on board it's possible further issues will arise.

You will soon receive an email containing your new username, which may well be your old user name, and a system generated password. When you successfully access the system you can change your password to whatever you want. If you have any problems logging on please contact Colin Casey on 01205 280850 or colin@lincsbirdclub.co.uk. If we get more problems than we expect, Colin may get overwhelmed in which case please be patient or if you feel the need, email me on chairman@lincolnshirebirdclub.co.uk.

I am posting this message on the forum as well as here because if you don't get an email with your login details it is almost certainly because we do not have a current valid email address for you. If that happens and you are a paid up member please email Colin with your up to date email address and he will send you login details.

Where we have an out of date email address and you do not get in touch we will contact you personally, either directly or by phone and if needed, by letter.

If you are a lapsed member whose subscription has not been paid, please sign up as a new member using your credit/debit card.

Hopefully everything will go smoothly and in any event I look forward to receiving your feedback about the new website and forum. That can be by email if you wish or in person out in the field or at the next AGM at The Admiral Rodney on 20th March 2018. We have the privilege of hearing our speaker, former local Willoughby birder and current British Birds Editor, Roger Riddington, now residing in Shetland, talking to us about his experiences.

Finally I'd like to wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy birding new year.

Follow me on Twitter @philespin



2017 Records

Records submission – the importance of being earnest!

The write-up of the 2016 Bird Report is well underway, but we need birders to start to submit their 2017 records now as well, please. Delayed submissions = delayed LBR report, so please submit in your usual format, although we prefer submissions via BirdTrack, eBird or Excel spreadsheet.

Correct and timely submission of records is vital to enable an accurately validated annual bird report to be written. Data from the report is used by various external agencies in environmental assessments as well as providing year-on-year population data for long-running national surveys.

Each year, there are a very large number of unattributed records that we have to chase up. These inevitably come from the national information services – Rare Bird Alert and Bird Guides. Neither of these provides us with the full data set for any one record that we need to check the validity of a sighting.

The BTO's BirdTrack database, from which we obtain the majority of records, does have a facility to input a description for scarce/ rare county records, so please continue to do so.

In 2016, incomplete records resulted in a spreadsheet with more than 1700 rows of data to check, thanks to Andrew Henderson's meticulous attention to detail. So, to re-iterate, what we need from observers (and as soon as possible after the sighting(s)) are the following:

Species
Date of sighting
Site
Observer name

This applies to both "routine" sightings as well as to LBRC description species. *Please do not leave it until the end of the calendar year.* Try to be as timely as your own circumstances allow. The time taken in checking sightings from unknown sources delays publication of the report year after year.

On the new website, please use the on-line facility for records submission for scarce/ rare species (there is a full list of LBRC species we need descriptions for). In the current digital age, many people have a camera or phone that can provide invaluable information. Please submit photographs with descriptions whenever possible *however poor you think they are*. So-called "record shots" nearly always have value.

Phil Hyde



Dates for your diary

Lincolnshire Rooks

Living in the shadow of Ash dieback

By Andrew Chick



A joint LBC / LNU Meeting

2:00pm 20th January 2018, Whisby Nature Park, Lincoln

A joint LBC/LNU Meeting 20th January 2018 will be;

Lincolnshire Rooks; Living in the shadow of Ash dieback by Andrew Chick

The talk will look at 70 years of rook studies in Lincolnshire, starting with the 1947 LNU Transaction paper and compare the results of the 2017 Lincolnshire Bird Club survey which inspected over 250 rookeries and counted 5959 nests. During the 1980's a detailed survey of the trees utilised by nesting rooks was undertaken to assess the likely impact of Dutch Elm Disease on Lincolnshire birds, some 30 years later we are now assessing the potential impact that *Chalara* dieback will have on Lincolnshire wildlife.

The joint Lincolnshire Bird Club/Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union indoor meetings are held in Lincoln at the Whisby Education Centre at [Whisby Nature Park](#). Indoor meetings start at **2pm**, with both members and non-members welcome to attend.

Lincolnshire Bird Club AGM - 20th March 2018

Come and hear BB Editor Roger Riddington talk
about his birding adventures at the
Lincolnshire Bird Club AGM

From Skegness to Shetland



Diary date:
Lincs Bird Club AGM,
Admiral Rodney,
Horncastle. 7.30pm, March 20th, 2018

Sightings from around our County

The Scunthorpe White-crowned Wheatear Dec 1st-2nd

On Friday Dec 1st I was contacted by Nick Moran of the BTO regarding a report he'd received of a White-crowned Wheatear in Scunthorpe. He doubted it was an elaborate hoax as the photographer was a church minister, Sean Andrews. By the time I'd contacted him Sean had published his pictures on FB and Twitter and although he'd wanted to keep his find quiet the twitching fraternity had tracked him down. The photos showed a bird not in the best condition and many thought, given its state and the time of year, that it must be an escape and so it proved to be. Indeed, it seems that the bird had been seen here and there in the vicinity for at least a week and possibly more. Lee Evans' comments below sum up the situation regarding captive birds very well:



“Steve Gantlett enticed today's White-crowned Black Wheatear with mealworms and managed to throw a hat over it and recapture it and give it back to its grateful owner. The bird, a female, had set him back all of £155. The man, in his 80's, has been in the bird trade for over 50 years and had some appalling tales to tell of what he was owning, swapping and selling and what was still available on the open market. It was frightening and he exclaimed that Blue Rock Thrushes were not that difficult to get hold of. Johnny Mac (Birdline north-east) asked him about the Stow bird of last winter and he commented '100% an escape!' Siberian Rubythroats are particularly common too, and Siberian Blue Robins are highly sought after, while White's Thrushes are an increasingly popular show bird and event winner. Even Desert Wheatears are popular with aviculturists. I really

believe we need to seriously review how we treat some of our 'considered' vagrants and treat each case as it comes along. Dutch birders need to be even more clued in, being so close to the markets where such birds are traded, with this autumn's colour-ringed Black-eared Wheatear just proving how difficult it is.” (Image by Rich Bonser)

John Clarkson



Pectoral Sandpiper

RSPB Frampton Marsh

One of the two present for several days in September 2017

Image by Colin Casey



Yellow-browed Warbler

Gibraltar Point NNR

One of several at the reserve in early October.

Image by Russell Hayes



Cetti's Warbler

RSPB Frampton Marsh

It showed for two seconds and Steve Keightley managed this shot.



Red-necked Phalarope

Covenham Reservoir

Very late Juvenile Red-necked Phalarope at Covenham Reservoir in late November

Image by Andrew Chick

If you have an images we can use in the next eNewsletter please send them to colin@lincsbirdnews.co.uk. Even better write an article that we can use in a future edition.

Drones in Conservation

By Colin Casey

As some of you will be aware, Steve Keightley and I have been trialing using drones for conservation surveys in association with the RSPB over the past 2 years, and thought we would share some of the results.

I have been flying drones for at least 8 years and the advances made over that time have been amazing. Almost anyone can fly a modern drone as they almost fly themselves, however it's very easy to make expensive mistakes so it's much better to fly with an experienced pilot at the start. I have assisted several RSPB Reserve staff in their early stages of flying.

What is a Drone?

Well to some just mentioning the word drone makes them think of a Bomb dropping, air spying device used by the forces in war zones all over the world. A drone is a unmanned aerial vehicle or UAV for short. They range from a few pounds to many millions.

However in our case we are talking of very small electric powered Quadcopters that can carry a high resolution camera to take images of reserves so we do not have to wade into sensitive areas.

These are flown in a similar way to a radio controlled aircraft but have GPS and other sensors to control the aircraft.

We have surveyed with the DJI Mavic Pro costing between £1000 and £1500 and with the larger DJI Inspire which costs between £2000 and £3000. The DJI Mavic Pro is small and easy to lose from sight without a spotter, especially if you fly into the sun. Both the Mavic and Inspire are susceptible to high winds, in fact I have yet to find a drone that can easily survey in in high winds.

The DJi Mavic Pro Battery does about 25 minutes on a charge and the DJi Inspire about 15 minutes.



Disturbance!

This was the first thing we needed to test and the results were surprising. After making about 50 flights over RSPB Frampton Marsh, RSPB Freiston Shore and RSPB Haweswater, we found that the disturbance was minimal as long as certain rules were followed. In a test at Frampton we flew at 400ft slowly down to 50ft above a flock of birds and none moved, in fact a dog walker 500ft away disturbed the birds more than the drone. The only birds in all the flights that took the slightest notice were a single Grey Heron who flew round the drone having a look and Oystercatchers, who give out a distress call and moved off, yet they came back after a few minutes as the Drone moved off. However it must be said that we did not purposefully try to disturb anything.

There is no doubt that if someone flew straight at birds or was stupid they could cause a great deal of disturbance but if you are careful and do not “Wizz” about the disturbance is minimal. At the offset the RSPB and myself were clear that if there was any disturbance or danger, all flying would stop immediately.

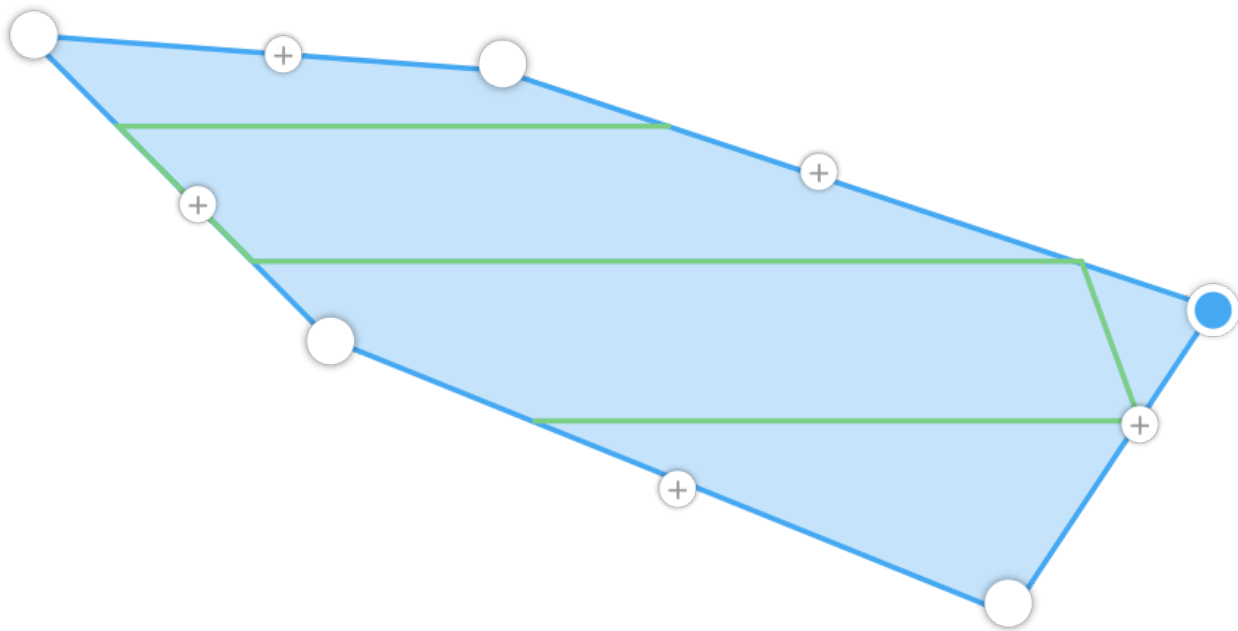
Surveying with a Drone.

There are several methods to survey an area. Basically we fly over an area with the camera pointing downwards taking pictures as we go, and then these images are stitched together using special software that matches points on one image to the same points on another.

These control points can be anything from the top of a post, a clump of grass or a rock, in fact anything that's a different colour and stands out. I think you can see the problem here in that flying over water, the only thing that stands out are the birds and they move. After a lot of trial and effort the results are very good.

Free flight: This is when you take off, point the camera down and set it taking images every 2 seconds and fly manually over an area. Results are slightly random and areas can easily be missed.

Planned Flight: This is when we pre-plan our route with special flight planning software, placing points around the area to be mapped using Google maps and the software then makes a series of lines that will be its flight path and places a series of waypoints along its route. We then upload the flight plan to the drone and it flies the mission on its own going from waypoint to waypoint even returning to its home point where it took off when the mission is complete. This can be disconcerting as you watch your rather expensive drone flying about on its own however it gives the best results.



Panorama: This is when you fly the drone to a certain point in the sky where it goes into hover controlled by GPS. It then starts taking a series of images all round with each image being at a certain angle from the previous one, and then moves the camera down slightly and takes another series of images and then finally it takes 2 looking straight down to make a 360 Panoramic view of the area that can then be used on a webpage as if the viewer is sitting where the drone was. Clever these Chinese!

The Results

It's difficult to show just how good the results are as the final stitched images can be massive. Each single image we take is 4000 x 3000 pixels and there can be 200 or more taken on each flight so the final stitched images can be several gigabytes.

The RSPB GIS Department have made some fantastic 3D images and a 3D Fly through of Swindale Beck near Haweswater using our images.

Mapping the side of a Crag that goes up 2000 feet is very challenging and even more so when you are flying in 20mph winds. The DJI Mavic Pro will go downwind at about 40mph but makes your heart pound when it runs out of steam halfway back.

Below are 2 images taken from our trip to Swindale Beck both taken with a DJI Mavic Pro.

The first image is a 3D side-on image showing the position where each of the 57 images were taken.

You see the route the drone took and the position the GPS said each image was taken from. This information is stored in the image.

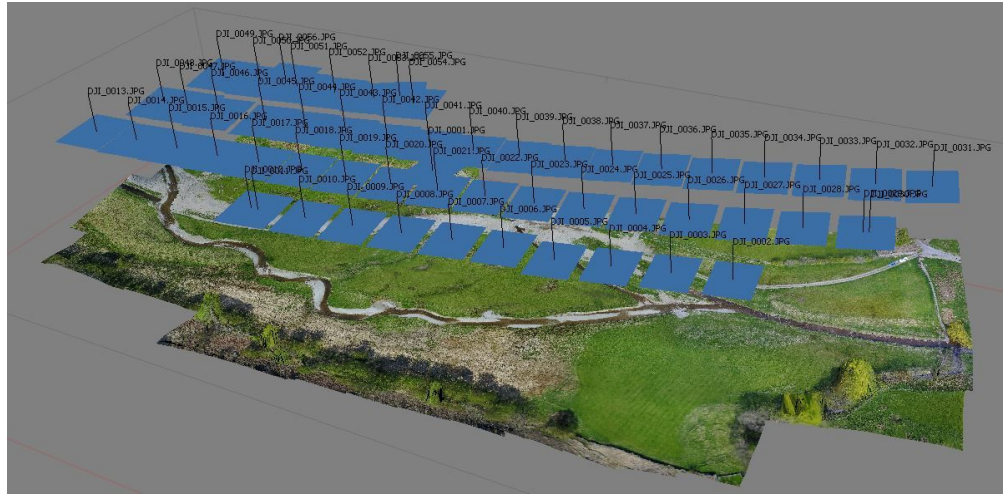
The RSPB have made improvements to Swindale Beck and these images show the new river path and the work done in this award winning scheme. Swindale Beck, which flows into the River Eden near Haweswater, was straightened 200 years ago to clear land for grazing.

However, the lack of natural bends and faster flowing water meant gravel was washed away, making it less easy for Atlantic Salmon and Trout to spawn. Within 6 months of this the fish were back spawning. There are also Dipper's and Grey Wagtails now breeding.

The second image is a very low resolution version of the final stitched image from directly above using the same 57 images.

The final image is huge and shows a very high level of detail which can be used to plan future work.

These images certainly show a small part of the potential of using drones.





There was also other great things to see around Haweswater, such as Red Squirrels seen around the reserve office and at the hotel we stayed at and it's well worth a visit.

Here is a small part of one image taken from a set of images taken above RSPB Frampton Marsh, showing East hide taken at 400ft in August 2017.



The next image is made up of 4 free flight's. It's stitched together from over 600 images taken from the bottom car park at RSPB Frampton Marsh in August 2017. You can see 2 sections missed during the flight and a loop out into the salt marsh. During the flight the sun came out directly where we were flying and we lost sight of the drone for a few seconds and so I flew using the screen on my controller.



This image is made up of well over 600 images and took 30 hours to stitch and render on a very fast computer.

Next is a small part of the single image of the bottom car park taken from the image above showing myself and Steve Keightley taking the images. Steve acts as a spotter during all the flights we have made. There he is leaning up the front wing of my car - you can tell it's him as his bald patch is clearly visible.



There are rules concerning the use of drones in the UK and we follow these at all times:-

- 1) You must have permission from the person who owns the land you are flying over.
- 2) You must always keep your drone in line of sight.
- 3) You must always stay below 400 ft (120 mtrs)
- 4) Every time you fly you must follow your drone manufacturer's instructions
- 5) Keep your distance from people and property. 150ft from the public and 500ft from any crowd or built up area
- 6) Legal responsibility is with the operator, failure to fly responsibly could result in a criminal prosecution.
- 7) Stay well away from Aircraft, Airports and Airfields. If you endanger an Aircraft you could go to prison for 5 years.

For more information on drones, drone safety and the drone code visit <http://dronesafe.uk/> This is a government website with all the information about your legal and common sense requirements.

The RSPB is writing its own set of rules for the use of drones over its reserves and what they will be used for and Steve and I have helped with this.

Below is a low resolution version of a more traditional image taken with the camera at an angle to get an overall view of RSPB Frampton Marsh, North Scrape. In the bottom center you can see East Hide taken from 400ft.



If anyone is interested in drones, needs more information or needs Aerial images taken, please contact me via email colin@lincsbirdclub.co.uk

I would like to thank Toby Collett and the RSPB for allowing me to help them discover drones and their use.

Colin R Casey.



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The Lincolnshire Bird Club, supporting the recording & conservation of wildlife in Lincolnshire

