



## Welcome to eNews 05

We need your help, could we ask that you take just a few minutes and write something, anything bird related, short or long, about birds, trips, events, news, so we can use it in the next newsletter. We have put up a simple form so your article or news can be included

(<https://lincsbirdclub.co.uk/site/index.php/information/write-for-the-newsletter>)

## LBR 2017 write-up

The biggest task the LBC takes on each year is writing the Lincs Bird Report which includes getting all the records in, entering the data into the database and getting that data to those who write up the species reports.

The roll-out of species data for the species account writing began at the end of August and to date we have had 61 accounts in with a further 120 in the pipeline. Many thanks to those who are contributing, keep it up and please let me know when you need more.

**Also, if there are any other members who would like to take part in the write-up please let me know as soon as possible, you do get full instructions, each lot is just a few species and its not that difficult, so please get involved**

### Deadlines

At the most recent LBC Committee meeting (Oct 9th) it was agreed to set deadlines for both record submissions (for 2018 and each year after) and for species accounts (from now onwards). These are as follows:

**Submission of sightings records by 1st June (so for 2018 records that 1st June 2019)**

**Submission of species accounts 1st November** (includes the 2017 species accounts)

We hope this will promote a speedier report write-up from now on.

Phil Hyde ([philhyde55@gmail.com](mailto:philhyde55@gmail.com))

## Lincs Bird Club Website

Just a quick note about the Lincs Bird Club Website (<https://www.lincsbirdclub.co.uk>)

We have installed a security certificate to comply with the new GDPR rules so as from the start of August you will notice that the http has changed to https.

## Lincs latest birds



Above: Long-billed Dowitcher (Frampton Marsh RSPB) by Paul Sullivan, Bellow: Spotted Crake Gibraltar Point Mere

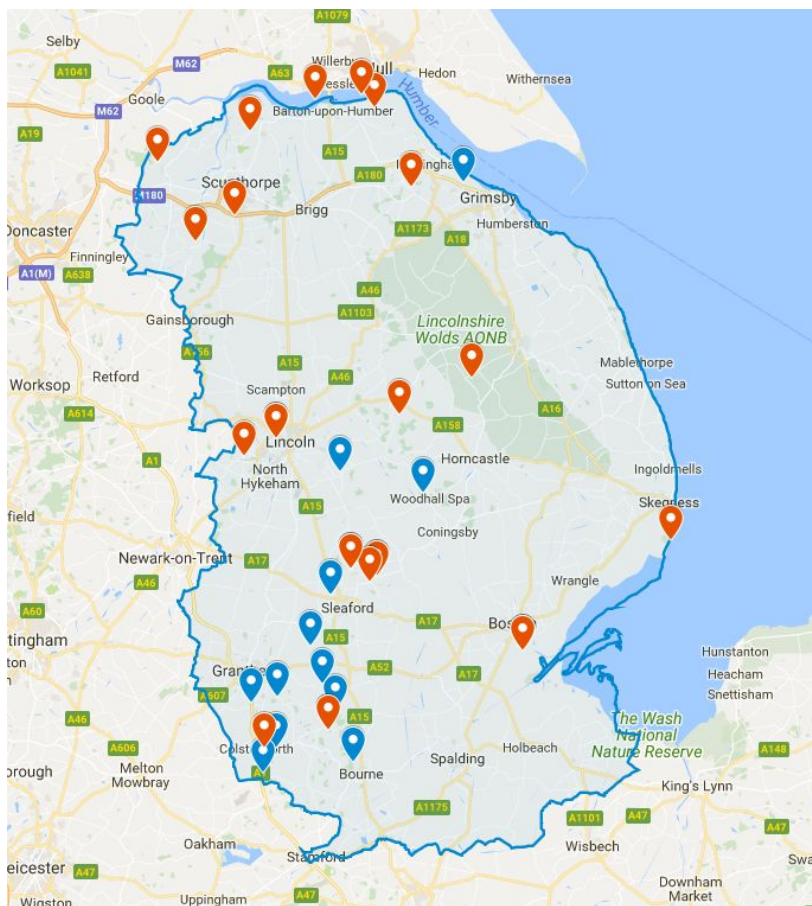




# Plans for a national Willow Tit survey 2019/20

Simon Wotton, Senior Conservation Scientist at the RSPB has circulated all county bird clubs with news of a proposed national survey of Willow Tits in 2019/20 to be jointly organised by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) and RSPB. It is hoped that county-level surveys can be conducted across the known range by Willow Tit study groups, county bird clubs and other organisations. So far, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales have agreed to help fund the survey and the Lincolnshire Bird Club will take part.

Our endemic race of Willow Tit is the second-fastest declining species in the UK, after Turtle Dove, and is Red-listed. RSPB and others have conducted research into causes of decline, and are trialling woodland management solutions for Willow Tit. However, due to the declining numbers, monitoring the species is becoming increasingly difficult. Whilst the BBS is still able to produce an annual trend, the sample had fallen to just 46 squares by 2017. Although collation of records by the RBBP is useful for the design of future surveys, it is currently insufficient to enable robust population estimates, measures of change or maps of current distribution to be produced: thus a national survey is needed if our conservation work is going to be properly underpinned by evidence.



The decline in Lincs was highlighted in our 2016 LBR published in March this year. We have just finished compiling our dataset for the 2017 LBR and the immediate news is that the number of data points submitted for Willow Tit has dropped from 99 in 2016 to 68 in 2017. Here is a heads up of where our Willow Tit records came from in 2017 compared to those of its close cousin Marsh Tit. Willow Tit records are indicated by red markers and Marsh Tit by blue ones.

Clearly submitting any and all records in 2018 is of the utmost importance. If you have any you've not submitted please get them in. As Willow Tit gets rarer, familiarity with them gets poorer. If you'd like a refresher on separating Willow from Marsh try this excellent link:

<https://www.bto.org/about-birds/bird-id/telling-apart-marsh-and-willow-tits>

Across the UK range, a random stratified survey design will be used, at a tetrad level, of 1) non-random, self-selected squares in core areas, mostly around existing monitoring/intervention efforts, 2) high intensity sampling within core areas, and 3) lower intensity areas through the rest of the known recent range. Data from the 1988-91 and 2007-11 bird atlases, recent county atlases and from the RBBP are being used to identify the relevant strata.

Based on trial work on Willow Tit responsiveness to playback and detectability, the survey period will be from **mid February to mid April**, with two visits per tetrad during this period. Surveys will be conducted on all suitable habitat within tetrads, using a standardised playback method (transects at 200m intervals, stops every 200m, playback for 2 minutes then a 2 minute wait). The recording to be used for the survey is a combination of Willow Tit alarm call and song.

The organisers have asked the Lincolnshire Bird Club be involved in this national survey and recruit volunteers for survey coverage within Lincolnshire. We will get fully involved. Please contact me at [pmjespin@gmail.com](mailto:pmjespin@gmail.com) if you can help and want to take part or have information about Willow Tits in Lincs. This is going to be a really essential survey to be involved with and we hope to find out much more about the county Willow Tit population.

Phil Espin

Follow me on twitter @philespin

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### Willow Tit Nest Boxes



In January 2018 I built 10 Willow Tit nest boxes and installed them at Whisby Nature Park. This design of nestbox has been shown to work in some study areas. Nest success from nests in boxes that reach the egg stage is very high, probably much higher than those in natural cavities. Unfortunately, none of them were taken up during the 2018 season.... The boxes cost £20 each, if anyone would like some please get in touch!

Andrew Chick - Follow me on twitter @APCbirding

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# Joint LBC/BTO Conference

## Whisby Nature Park on 26th January 2019

I'm pleased to report that after a great deal of work, Chris Gunn, BTO's Regional Representative for Lincolnshire North has put together a must see programme for our next joint conference. Entitled "Water and Farmland". This is just a nudger to save the date. More details on the conference and how to book on to it will be released by BTO in early November. Nicholas Watt, a founder member of LBC in 1978 will be talking about 40 years of LBC which is sure to be of interest across the range from recent joiners to old stagers who have been members throughout the life of the club which will be in its 40th year in January. Nicholas is of course famous for his development of Vine House Bird Foods and boosting the Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting populations of the Lincolnshire Fens.

### Final Programme

**Sat January 26th 2019**

#### **Water and Farmland**

9.30           Arrival and coffee

Chair **Phil Espin Chair LBC and BTO Regional Representative Lincolnshire East**

9.55           Welcome

10.00          40 years of LBC                               Nicholas Watts

10.20          Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers           Andy Sims

10.40          Birds of Covenham                             John Clarkson

11.00          Protecting and Enhancing Wildlife for Eastern England   Mike Drew

11.30          WeBS BTO           Teresa Frost

12.00          Lunch

Chair **Mike Daly BTO RR Lincs West**

1.30          Planting Woodlands and Hedges for Birds           Hugh Dorrington

2.00          Lincs Grey Partridges                         David Bird

2.30          Nest Record Scheme                           Carl Barimore

3.00          Farmland Bird Recovery                       Kirsty Brannan

3.30          Raffle and close

## Lincs Bird Club 2017 Report - request for photographs

The Lincolnshire Bird Club is making very good progress with the 2017 bird report. At the time of writing we have completed approximately 60% of the species accounts. We are now looking for photographs for use in the report. All images must be taken in Lincolnshire during 2017. Please supply species name, date and location with all images. Unfortunately, we can't use all images supplied but we will attempt to include as many as possible,

Please email ALL images to [info@lincsbirdclub.co.uk](mailto:info@lincsbirdclub.co.uk) in as high resolution as possible – all images gratefully received!

## Project owl

We ask members to take part in the currently running Tawny Owl survey.

You can help us to increase our understanding of their calling behaviour and distribution, particularly focusing on the impact of urbanisation and artificial lighting. It's easy to take part. All you need to do is listen for Tawny Owls for 20 minutes each week, from 30 September to 31 March, from your garden, local park or woodland. You can even listen whilst lying in bed with the window open. The more weeks that you can listen the better - but you can do as many or as few weeks as you are able.

All details can be found using the following link. <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl>

## Caspian Quest

If you've got or ever had a bogey bird you'll know how good it is to eventually catch up with it. Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* has been my bogey bird since May 22nd 1988 when I had the misfortune to dip on the first one to occur in Britain since 1890. It was a fine "approachable" male in full breeding plumage which turned up on Wingletang, St Agnes on the afternoon of May 21st. I'd never been to Scilly and this was my first visit of what turned out to be many trips there. It goes without saying that after an overnight drive to Penzance and a boat trip on Scillonian III to St Marys followed by an inter island boat to St Agnes, the bird had flown, probably the night before, not a sniff was had. I also dipped on a Subalpine Warbler and had rubbishy flight views of a Hoopoe. I try and take dips in my stride and look for the silver lining. In this case I was blown away with the spring beauty of St Agnes. I now know its the nearest you'll get to the Caribbean in the British Isles. If you haven't been, go!

I thought there would be another British twitchable Caspian but it was not to be. This enigmatic plover breeds on the steppes of Central Asia around the north end and east of the Caspian Sea. It winters on the dry plains of eastern and southern Africa, migrating through the Middle East to get to and from its breeding grounds. I know this because in 1999 I went to Eilat, Israel, first week of April and dipped. In March 2003 I tried the Serengeti, in Tanzania, and dipped. In May 2003 I tried central Kazakhstan "we've never failed to get breeding Caspian Plover in the last 10 years" said Steve Rooke of Sunbird; until 2003 that is! Tried again in Kenya November 2006, dipped again and worse still the Long-billed Murrelet turned up in Devon, I was well gripped off.

So 29 years having elapsed and still no twitchable Caspian Plover in Britain, despite there being several on the near continent, when Rob Carr told me he had seen two Caspian Plovers on a Birdfinders trip to the Western Palaearctic side of the Ural river in Kazakhstan close to its delta at Atyrau on the Caspian Sea in early June 2017, I decided it was time to lay the bogey to rest and booked on this year's trip, 30 years is long enough for any bogey bird!

The flight left Heathrow at 13.25 on Saturday 2nd June and our party of 15 arrived in Atyrau at 05.40 the next day, via a 5 hour stop over in Moscow. No messing about, straight out onto the steppe birding, west from Atyrau on the Astrakhan road in a fleet of 4 suvs. The road surface was appalling. The local guide joked the road was left in that state to discourage the Russians from visiting. We'd stopped to have breakfast in the middle of nowhere and saw a pair of Demoiselle Cranes in the distance. They flew off as small specks but we could see where they landed and we took off after them to get better views. Approaching to some 200m we stopped to scope them up displaying.

They flew round us in a semi-circle and landed less than 100m away. These were a western pal tick for me, but I still think the Spurn 1993 bird was genuine. After filling our boots for 20 minutes we turned around and started to scan the semi- desert steppe where the light was better and a flock of 20 Calandra Larks was giving excellent views with the frisson of a difficult to see White-winged Lark among them.





While watching the larks a plover flew past in the background too far off to identify with bins but I marked where it landed. I set off in that direction but then there was a shout and I looked to where someone was pointing and realised I was looking at a fine male Caspian Plover, only about 100m away. It was joined by another and then another. Think of that feeling you get when you see a female Dotterel in full breeding plumage and then square it. I ogled these three fine males through eyes, bins and scope from 50m to 200m and scanning around revealed a loose flock of 6 males and 2 females. Most uncharacteristic behaviour at this time of the year according to Svetlana Ashby our Russian born guide. Possibly a flock of failed breeders.

We watched them for about an hour. Anyone who knows me, knows I am not a photographer, don't want to waste time messing about with equipment when I can imprint fantastic views of such a long desired bird on my retina. But I had made an exception in this case investing in a digiscoping adapter for my iPhone 6 and Swarovski scope which I had tested as little as possible before I came out. I attempted to do the deed for 5 precious minutes a result of which I am very proud, and Andy Sims will attest is better than my Little Stint shot from Frampton. But not good enough for readers of the LBC newsletter. Fortunately Svetlana Ashby is an ace photographer and has kindly allowed me to exhibit her photo so you can see what the males and females were actually like. I could describe the birds from images burnt into my retina but I feel you will enjoy the photo more!





I went on to enjoy an excellent week of relaxed birding. Displaying Black Larks in the steppes west of Inderbor and crippling views of 8 Little Bustards were particular highlights. Taxonomic conundrums re separating Eurasian Penduline-tit and Black-headed Penduline-tit took some time and there is no answer. The same with differences between the Sykes' Warblers of the Ural River delta and purportedly the same birds 100 miles north on the steppes looking more like Booted Warblers. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters brought back happy memories of Cowden 1989 and hundreds of White-winged Larks made me question why there hasn't been one in Britain since the suppressed bird in Norfolk in 1981.

A morning spent watching and counting 323 Black-bellied Sandgrouse coming into drink was memorable but disappointing for those praying for a Pallas's. Flocks of stately Dalmatian Pelicans overhead were savoured much more than the lonely individual at Restronguet in Cornwall a couple of years back. Adult Pallas's Gulls in full breeding plumage were awesome, and now we are into Shore Lark races the *albigula* steppe race was good to see.

The endangered steppe race of Eurasian Oystercatcher, *longipes* also put in an appearance.



Kazakhstan is a unique place, the steppes rolling on to the horizon, the distinctive pungent aroma of Wormwood, larks, wheatears, horses and camels all in abundance. The food and hotels were excellent, the cities and towns uninspiring, there were little or no buildings pre-dating the 1920s.

Theoretically you could twitch Caspian Plover in a long weekend on a direct flight to Atyrau with KLM from Schipol. We were blessed with fine weather but if it rains the steppe tracks are undriveable for a couple of days after. A twitch is risky, so take a week and lap up the birds.

This was my first trip with Birdfinders and I have to say they were determined to see the birds but the pace was relaxed and flexible for participants who were less able than others. The leaders Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby were excellent and set the tone for a friendly and inclusive experience for the lone traveller. I'll be travelling with them again. And thanks to Birdfinders for allowing me to share a small selection of their excellent photos in this article.





Phil Espin

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RBA also give detail of the last weeks sightings which is great reading, here is one.

[https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/weeklyRoundup2018-41.aspx?s\\_id=738440112](https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/weeklyRoundup2018-41.aspx?s_id=738440112)



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

