



Welcome to the LBC eNewsletter 08

Hi everyone, Ian Newton's talk on 5 Jan was a great success, see Jim Wright's report within. The joint BTO/LBC conference at Whisby is just over a week away now and there are still a few spaces available (see details below on how to book). The committee hopes to see as many of you there as possible for what should be a stimulating day.

Richard Doan had a great start to the year finding a wintering Dusky Warbler near Huttoft Bank and shares his experience within, have you seen it? Just a vagrant or harbinger of a wintering range shift for another eastern warbler species? It's still there on 15th January.

Phil Espin follow me on twitter @philespin

Joint BTO and Lincolnshire Bird Club Conference 2019

26 January 2019, 9.30am to 4pm
Whisby Education Centre, Whisby Nature Park

Come and join us for a day of fascinating talks at your local BTO Regional Conference. The conference will celebrate 40 years of Lincolnshire Bird Club with a focus on Water and Farmland Birds.

Everyone is welcome!

The programme includes talks from local speakers and staff from the BTO. Places cost £15 and include coffee, tea and buffet lunch. (Please note there is a £1 car parking fee). The full programme and location details are available [here](#). You can book your conference place now, either online, by post with a booking form or by phoning the Supporter Team on 01842 750050.



**Just eight tickets left -
...NO ENTRY ON DOOR...**

Swift Image Copyright Neil Smith 2016

AGM date correction: please note the date will be **9th April** at the **Golf Hotel Woodhall Spa** NOT the March date mentioned in eNewsletter 7.

Deadline for submission of 2018 records

2018 year is well behind us and now is a good time to submit your records in our standard spreadsheet format if you can. No need if you've already submitted through Bird Track, ebird etc. The draft 2017 Lincs Bird Club report is at the proof-reading stage but the treadmill continues.... Please note our advice concerning records submission which we circulated in Newsletter 06 - the LBC Committee agreed at the October 2018 meeting to set a deadline for record submission for preparation of the 2018 report as follows:

Submission of 2018 sightings records by 1st June 2019

Submission of rarity descriptions to LBRC BBRC: for those lucky enough to find a bird requiring a submission to either LBRC or to BBRC, please do this as soon as possible after the find. On-line submission is easy and quickly completed.

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

Phil Hyde (recorder south@lincsbirdclub.co.uk) and John Clarkson (recorder north@lincsbirdclub.co.uk)

Joint RBBP and RSPB Survey of Willow Tits 2019 and 2020

RBBP and RSPB are organising a survey of Willow Tits across their current and recently occupied range in England, Wales and south-west Scotland. Willow Tit is the second fastest declining species of bird in Britain (after the Turtle Dove) and in order to provide suitable conservation action we need to know more about their current status and habitat choice. The survey will take place from mid February to mid-April when Willow Tits are more vocal and easier to find. You can read more about this and how to take part on RBBP's [Willow Tit survey page](#).

In 2017, the latest year for which we have information for Lincolnshire the picture is truly dire and a sneak preview of the bird report text reveals

“After last years shocking evidence that two thirds of our breeding Willow Tits had gone in the last five years, down from 41 pairs in 2011 to an optimistic 16 in 2016, this year the picture has become even worse. There were two singing males and a probable female at Barton Pits, two singing males Laughton Forest, a male re-trapped at Donington-on-Bain and single singing birds at Haverholme, near Sleaford, and at New Holland – a maximum of six possible breeding pairs. No singing from former LWT strongholds at Whisby Pits and Messingham SQ and only 6 sites with more than 2 birds recorded in the year... The world really does seem to be standing on its head when Peregrine Falcon is much commoner in Lincolnshire than Willow Tit”

It is felt that Willow Tits may be in slighter better shape than this picture paints but we have no evidence to support that. If you are interested In Willow Tits and especially if you live in an area that has held Willow Tits in the last 10 years please read the linked information and try out the survey technique yourself. All reports gratefully received from this year, if possible through Bird Track or ebird, and we plan to have a systematic survey of known sites in place for 2020.

Colour-ringing update

Following his article on colour-ringing in the last Newsletter, Nige Lound has continued to note marked individuals at various locations. One fascinating recent record concerns a Hooded Crow at the Kirkby-on-Bain landfill site. This bird was seen to have a white colour ring (picture, below) when it flew, but views were brief and the inscription could not be read. The best guess at the moment is that this bird is most likely to have been ringed in Finland, Poland or Norway. Nige is hoping to get closer views in coming visits but if anyone can get any detail on the ring please share it with us.



Corvids at Kirkby-on-Bain landfill site © Nigel Lound

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Spoon-billed Sandpiper!

“Well, that’s Bird of the Trip sorted!” I can’t remember which one of us said it, but all twelve of us probably thought it. We were on the first day of a Rockjumper Thailand Highlights tour and had just made our first stop at the renowned saltpans at Pak Thale. In front of us were probably a thousand waders, mainly Lesser and Greater

Sand Plovers with a scattering of Broad-billed, Marsh and Terek Sandpipers, Red-necked and Long-toed Stints. After a few moments, the flock parted and there it was – a solitary winter-plumaged Spoon-billed Sandpiper.



One in a thousand: Spoon-billed Sandpiper, courtesy of Benny Baeton

All our telescopes were focussed on the same bird, as we concentrated on one of the rarest waders on the planet. It was about the same size as the accompanying Red-necked Stints but displayed its unique spatulate bill.

In summer plumage it would have had a red-brown head, neck and breast with dark brown streaks with blackish upper parts fringed with buff and pale rufous. In November, the bird before us was clearly in non-breeding plumage and lacked the reddish coloration, appearing brownish-grey above and white below.



The site is well sign-posted on the approach road !

Breeding in the Russian Arctic, these tiny sandpipers, known affectionately as “Spoonies”, migrate along the East Asian Flyway to winter in small numbers in southern and Southeast Asia. Their population was thought to lie within the range of 2000 to 2,800 pairs in the 1970’s but this has dropped to less than 500 individuals, with Bird Life International now listing the bird as “critically endangered”.

This is based on the fact that Spoonies have an extremely small population that is undergoing a very rapid decline caused primarily by habitat loss in its breeding, passage and wintering grounds, compounded by disturbance, pollution, hunting and the effects of climate change. Juvenile recruitment has, until recently, been very low, leading to fears that this small population is ageing rapidly, making the threat of extinction very real.

A consortium of organisations in Europe and Asia is now involved in research and conservation activities, especially in Russia, where the main breeding areas are closely monitored each breeding season and many birds are individually marked, to permit identification on passage and in winter without re-trapping. Our bird did not appear to have been ringed and certainly did not carry a coloured leg-flag.

A captive rearing and breeding programme commenced in 2011, with eggs collected in the Russian Arctic sent to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust facilities in the UK for incubation. In addition, since 2012, a programme called “head-starting” has been implemented on the breeding grounds, which involves eggs being hatched and young raised in captivity close to the breeding sites, with the youngsters released to migrate south with wild-bred juveniles.

Later that evening, whilst reflecting on the day’s events in the bar, I thought back to my first trip to Southeast Asia in 2005.

I had been invited by my employers to attend a four-day training course in Hong Kong in September that year. I jumped at the chance and decided to stay on for a week after the course finished in the hope of catching up with some eastern waders at the famed Mai Po wetland reserve. At about this time, my wife, Susanne, and our daughter, Stefanie, decided that they were also due a week’s holiday, so they joined me for the second week and we thoroughly enjoyed a bit of sightseeing and shopping, coupled with birding visits to Kowloon Park in the centre of Hong Kong.

We hired a local guide to take us to Mai Po although he did warn us that the tides were not really high enough to deliver a great wader spectacle, whilst we were there. Nonetheless, we decided to go for it and despite almost constant heavy rain, had quite a reasonable day with a nice selection of egrets and herons, a few migrants but no concentrations of waders!

As he departed our guide said “Shame you’re not here on Saturday as the tides are much better!” After he had gone, I reminded my wife that our flight home on Saturday did not leave until nearly midnight, so we had time to witness the 2.4 metre tide at 09:00 and still get to the airport in good time. She had had her fill of Mai Po, but I did secure a pass out for the morning, on the understanding that I was back in time for a late lunch.

In my eagerness to be at the right spot in time for the tide, I actually arrived before the visitor centre opened and had to make the decision to enter the reserve without a permit as the permit office was also closed. This is not something I make a habit of doing, but as the saying goes “time and tide wait for no man” and the potential wader spectacle with a good number of life birds was drawing me on.

As I entered the reserve there were two choices – the Boardwalk overlooking the mudflats and the Chinese mainland or a hide within the reserve overlooking a pool, where the waders were likely to spend time over the high tide. There was a military style sign at the entrance to the Boardwalk, forbidding entrance to this sensitive site to those without permits and threatening all sorts of sanctions if this instruction was not obeyed. Bearing in mind the sensitivities between China and Hong Kong in 2005, I decided to opt for the wader pool and had a fabulous morning as different waders from the East Asian Flyway dropped in.

A couple of thousand waders appeared in front of the hide over the high tide and whilst these included a lot of species I was familiar with – Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Black and Bar-tailed Godwits, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers and Red Knot – there were others which

I had not seen before. These included Great Knot, Asian Dowitcher, Red-necked Stint, Grey-tailed Tattler and an immaculate Grey-headed Lapwing.

Other goodies included Black-faced Spoonbill, Yellow Bittern, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Black-naped Orioles, Black-capped Kingfisher and a nice selection of flycatchers. As I walked back to the visitor centre I was feeling quite chuffed with myself. I had managed to see a spectacular high tide roost, picked up a good number of life birds and was likely to get back to our hotel by the allotted time! I made a donation at the visitor centre to cover the cost of the permit I had failed to buy earlier in the morning and got ready to head out when I just glanced at the Bird Notice Board to see if I had missed anything and in large writing on the board were the immortal words "SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER ON THE BOARDWALK"

I was amazed how quickly euphoria could turn to despair and I spent a very uncomfortable journey on the Metro back to our hotel, where I was reunited with the family and had to share the pleasure of so many new birds with the disappointment of missing out on one of the rarest waders on the planet!

Thankfully, our latest trip delivered the goods and Spoonie is now firmly on my life list, along with Nordmann's or Spotted Greenshank, which we also saw towards the end of that first day in Thailand. At the end of the tour, our bird list was in excess of 350 and I had something in the region of 70 life birds, depending upon which list you use.

Thank you, Rockjumper, for a wonderful introduction to Thailand and for helping me to realise a long-held ambition to see Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

David Cohen

IAN NEWTON: FOCUS ON BIRD MIGRATION



Pictured at the meeting (from left): Phil Espin (LBC), Ian Newton, Andy Sims (LBC) and Nick Tribe (LNU)

THE mysteries of bird migration came under the spotlight during a fascinating presentation at the annual joint meeting of the Lincolnshire Bird Club and the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union.

Guest speaker at the Whisby education centre, near Lincoln, was one of the world's leading ornithologists, Prof Ian Newton, who has researched and written extensively on the subject.

In his authoritative and entertaining address, lasting just over an hour, Prof Newton showed that, even as some puzzles are being solved, other are emerging.

Depending on factors such as food abundance and climate change, migration patterns seem to be changing (at least partially) in many species - both big (such as lesser black-backed gulls) and small (such as chiffchaffs).

Prof Newton chronicled the progress of research - ranging from the early breakthrough with ringing to ongoing developments with satellite tracking.

He acknowledged the work of German scientist Peter Berthold who, by studying sample blackcaps in captivity, was able to identify and measure their restlessness during the migration season - the extent of relentlessness depending on whether the birds had been trapped in Sweden (high) or The Canaries (low).

Also intriguing was the speaker's account of the work done using modified radar (acquired from the disintegrating Soviet Union) to plot the enormous movements of many species of landbirds over Israel.

These included as many as 36,000 lesser spotted eagles (pretty well the whole of the global population) within just six hours.

Radar initiatives were pioneered during the 1939-45 war by David Lack who, while serving with the RAF on Orkney, realised that tiny on-screen specks were birds, not "angels" as technicians had described them.

Later, Prof Newton's focus fell on the importance to migrating birds of exploiting a following wind as an aid to their journeys and how certain species, such as Manx shearwaters, will even extend their journey by hundreds of miles to take advantage of wind direction. Saving energy seems to be the prevailing requirement.

Selection of favourable wind direction may be a key factor, but birds also have to take into account risks such as thinner oxygen and loss of body heat in air than can become seven degrees cooler with each additional metre of altitude.

Prior to migration, most birds build up their fat levels - with sedge warblers, for instance, doubling in size. "When being ringed, they feel like little balls of soft fat," he said.

The same applies to migratory geese, and colour ringing experiments have shown that tubbier birds - denoted by drooping bellies - enjoy greater success than their slimmer counterparts when they reach their breeding grounds in the Arctic.

Other topics covered by Prof Newton included the heights at which birds migrate - many of them beyond the scope of human vision.

Prof Newton is an expert on raptors (he has written a whole book on the sparrowhawk) and had an interesting observation to make about ospreys, noting that migration casualties - usually over the sea and the Sahara - chiefly consisted of immature birds that had "not yet learned the ropes" of the likely hazards they would encounter.

The migration behaviour of gyrfalcons is also fascinating. It seems they follow iceflows south, sometimes perching on icebergs to track their seabird prey. But then in spring they fly north and, for six weeks, probably feed exclusively on the only prey available to them - rock ptarmigans.

Do birds ever sleep even as they migrate?

Possibly yes. How otherwise could a bar-tailed godwit fly, without pause, for no fewer than 228 hours? It seems they can operate, as it were, on just half a brain.

Prof Newton, who lives in the south of the county, is currently researching a new book on upland birds. He is also considering a request to update one of his earlier books on migration to take in the most relevant recent research. Following a question-and-answer session with the audience, which numbered about 60, he was thanked by LBC chairman Phil Espin for his most absorbing talk and for his "massive contribution" to ornithology.

Jim Wright

Dusky Warbler over-wintering at Huttoft Bank

New Year's Day saw me visiting the Lincolnshire Coastal Country Park my new birding patch for 2019. Having spent a decade bird watching around Gibraltar Point NNR I thought it was time to find a new patch this year. I arrived at Huttoft Car Terrace at dawn hoping for a few seabirds to start off the year list. The sea was unfortunately very quiet with only small numbers of divers logged so I decided to have a walk around the dunes by the car park hoping for some passerines. The quiet theme continued along the dune walk with hardly any birds noted whatsoever. Whilst walking along the dunes I noticed the swan herd was feeding closer to the coast road than normal on the adjacent farmland. I quickly headed off to get a closer look at the swans hoping for a nice Bewick's Swan to rescue the morning.

I arrived in a lay-by along Huttoft Bank at 11.00hr where I had a decent view of the swan herd. Having just opened the car door I immediately heard a bird making a distinctive 'tek tek'. The call was very loud coming from the hawthorn hedge not 10 metres from the car. Dusky Warbler came to mind but being January I thought it would be very unlikely. I then wondered if it was an odd sounding Cetti's Warbler which are fairly common in the area. A short wait of about 20 seconds was all that was needed for the bird to appear. I was completely shocked and gobsmacked when a DUSKY WARBLER popped out into full view on the side of the hawthorn hedge! WOW!!! I immediately broadcasted the news on Twitter. The Dusky Warbler continued to show incredibly well and remained vocal for the next two hours of viewing, often flying across the road spending time feeding in sparse vegetation on the seaward side of the road, as well as on small hawthorn bushes where the attached pictures were taken. Views of Dusky Warblers are usually very brief so it was a real treat to see an obliging individual like this. What a great start to 2019!!

Richard Doan





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

