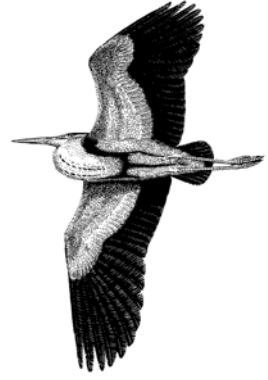


Beccles Bird Society

Formed in 1973

A wildlife appreciation society



AUTUMN 2020 NEWSLETTER

OFFICERS: Nina Roffey (Chairwoman) 01502 715118
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Introduction

Nina Roffey

Dear everyone, what a strange time we're all having this year and a sad time too recently. We are left with memories to cherish.

This last few weeks has seen more blue tits in my garden, certainly groups of 20 or more. They have been on the feeders but have entertained me grouping on the walls of my extension and feeding from the bricks and air vents, I imagine they are finding spiders and flies or cobwebs. They are so colourful and their antics hanging upside down has been wonderful to watch from my bedroom window.

I always find it a bit sad when the swifts leave us for another year but I hope the numbers were ok in town. Many of them were feeding up over the garden but few house martins and swallows though. A magpie has frequently come down to my pond in search of MY newts, it's been bad enough with the blackbirds and their two lots of offspring!

I left large areas of my lawn uncut this year and it was very evident that much wild life benefitted. There were more frogs and toads and the grass snakes liked it too. I'm not sure if the hedgehogs wintered in the house I provided for them but I've had two adults and one small one frequenting for several weeks coming for the food I've put out for them.

Various wild flowers showed themselves in the long grass like selfheal, clover, corn cockle, red campion, fritillary and more that I haven't identified yet.

I'm moving house soon and will have to create places for bird life as the new place looks devoid, no trees, shrubs or lawn. I hope I won't have to wait too long until they find me. I hope we all have an interesting autumn to look forward to and that we can perhaps have small group outings if everything is safe to do so. I think we all miss each other. Take care.

Albinism

John Morgan

This was John's last article for the bird club's newsletter.

An introduction to (and my aborted attempt at an understanding of) albinism.

ON starting bird-watching quite late in life, my understanding of albinism was limited to mammals; a rare condition of pure white skin/fur and pink eyes. It was genetically controlled (the white 'lab rat' was a product of selective breeding) and due to an absence of dark pigment (melanin) in the external tissues, with the pink eyes being a glimpse at the underlying flesh (like 'red eye' in photography).

Starting to look more closely at birds I soon noted something I had seen before but not given any attention, occasionally on blackbirds I saw patches of white feathers, and then one day saw them on a redshank (which illustrated what I later read about - that such aberration has been noted in most bird species, just that it is most noticeable in those with darker plumage). So my albinism knowledge was extended to what I saw as 'partial albinism'. Until one day.

Out on a trip with a group in North Kent amongst a flock of greylags, one bird stood out dramatically, it looked like it had been dipped in bleach. The normal dark brown bits of plumage were light brown, the light brown bits cream, and the cream bits white. All the plumage was lighter than normal. The group leader said the goose was 'leucistic', which books when I got home described as a dilution of pigmentation, and referred to the opposite, where there could be an excess of pigment creating a darker plumaged bird, 'melanistic'. This scuppered the tidy term of 'partial albinism' in my mind, here was another type, clearly different to the pure white bits amongst normally pigmented

plumage. My scientifically-bred inquisitiveness was fired, I started (note in early internet days) to read all I could find on the issue, even consulting papers in the leading journal 'British Birds' (BB).

My search to square my ideas of 'partial albinism' showed of course, as one might expect, that a simple enquiry in science soon turns out to have a much more complicated answer than you'd anticipated. Firstly there are more pigments involved than just melanin, and secondly environmental factors have a part to play as well as genetic mutations. Soon, finding myself with sufficient information to start a post-doctoral research fellowship, and beginning to wonder where I was going, I lost heart and tidied my file away.

Interest was awoken in 2013 reading in Suffolk Ornithologists' Group's quarterly 'The Harrier' a brief article referring to a BB paper by a person with more capacity than me, Hein Van Grouw. My term 'partial albinism' was history, and a new cause of aberrant white feathers was highlighted - 'progressive greying', an ageing process whereby in successive moults more white feathers can emerge in a bird.

Thankfully in the autumn 2018 edition of 'Bird Table' (the quarterly magazine of the BTO Garden Birdwatcher program) there is a lovely summary of a BB paper the previous May by Van Grouw in which (s)he pulls together research on the issue including evidence from the BTO's Abnormal Plumage Survey.

If I've whet your appetite to get a glimpse of the various types and causes of albinism, leucism and progressive greying, you can chase the article in Bird Table yourself, but don't be surprised to find there are still yet more causes to be investigated - illness and dietary imbalance.

Long-eared Owls

John Trew

FOUR out of our five native owls are relatively easy to see (recently I read that there are now six, though I think escaped eagle owls are stretching a point).

In this neck of the woods, barn owls probably being the easiest to spot. Most dry and windless evenings, just before dusk; early mornings especially if it's rained overnight and you're in with a good chance.

Short-eared during the winter, again, are reasonably easy – in the right habitat: Carlton and Oulton Marshes or Haddiscoe Island are the obvious spots where you can see four or five of them at the same time.

Little owls, slightly tricky, but once you know where to see them, you can pretty well rely on them being very loyal to their chosen site (if only I knew it!). There used to be a pair down by the pub at North Cove, but they were always competing with the jackdaws who seem to have now won.



Pegsden Hills from the bar!

Similarly with tawnies, once you find their roost site – and that's sometimes not too difficult as blackbirds can make quite a commotion if they find them. Also, of course, you have the owl boxes at North Cove where you might catch them snoozing at the openings.

As for long-eared owls, well that's an entirely different matter. They are very much birds of conifer woods unless you're lucky enough to catch them on winter migration from the continent as I did one morning, many moons ago with one, remarkably, sitting on Cley beach.

In my early days along the river wall, I thought I did note one, very briefly, quartering the marsh but have since "unticked" it as the last twelve years have indicated that this was most probably a short-eared owl (not that they appear there very often).

If one is very lucky, you can come across them as we did one day at Lackford Lakes but only because we had it pointed out to us and even then, it was still very difficult to see roosting in the overgrown hedge.

The best sightings I've ever had were back in Bedfordshire. Doris and I used to park Luton-side of the Pegsden Hills, walk across to the Live and Let Live pub on the Hitchin road and after a pint and bag of crisps, stroll back up again. We often found one or two owls snoozing only a few feet up in the bushes at the side of the footpath.

A friend of mine and I in late June, would do a similar route (including the pub!) but on walking back would stop and sit on top of the hill overlooking the valley, watching and waiting. Eventually, the young owls would come out and fly around calling for "mum" to provide the evening meal. Magical evenings.

Far Ings

Paul and Helga Leman

BOTH Helga and I are keen bird watchers and all things in the natural world. Visiting nature reserves all over the country also enables us to explore area's new to us.

During 2019 we twice visited a very good friend of mine who was in a Humberside hospital. Whilst in the area we took the opportunity to visit the following places: Far Ings, Barton Waterside, Flamborough Head and Bempion Cliffs.

This is a brief summary of our stay at Far Ings when we stayed for two nights in the Humber Bridge Country Hotel. The most fantastic thing about the hotel, is that its situated right in the middle of the reserve.

When we checked in we were asked if we would like a room with views of the river and bridge, or a room overlooking the hotel lake. We chose a first floor room overlooking a lake named 'Hotel Lake'.

The reserve is situated on the south bank about a ten minute walk to the visitor centre and the Humber Bridge. You can walk beneath the bridge to Barton Waterside. A tile and cement factory existed on the site in the mid 1800's.

It was a large industrial concern with a quay and loading facilities on the river. Remains can still be seen. The reserve is diverse, made up of reedbeds, meadow, freshwater lakes and saltwater.

Large areas of mudflats are visible when the river is at low tide. It's a stop-off point for many migrant birds. The mixed habitat supports a huge variety of birds.



Bitterns began breeding there in 2000. We saw good numbers of waders, raptors and small birds. From one of several hides we watched big numbers of pinkfoot geese flying over.

As many as 35 yellow-browed warblers have been present. A couple of highlights for us was a kingfisher perched on a tree just outside our hotel room window, a bit later a sparrowhawk sat in the same tree.

There are two free car parks and the first-floor visitor centre has lovely views of part of the reserve. The staff were friendly and informative. Snacks and hot and cold drinks are available.

We intend stopping off for a couple of nights in the hotel next year.

AFTER a rainless May there was little path clearing to do so we concentrated on other tasks like removing the tree guards from around some Alder Buckthorn. Not a straight forward task but a lot of pleasure was had looking for and finding Brimstone Butterfly larvae.

The duckweed exclosures were cleared of duckweed and also increasing amounts of filamentous algae (*Spirogyra sp*). Vegetation was cleared around the exclosures for access and to allow maintenance as well as observing damselflies and dragonflies.

The unseasonably dry conditions have resulted in the water level in the dykes and the Decoy dropping so much that there is now no open water above the deep mud.



Juv. great spotted woodpecker on North Cove feeder.
[Jimmy Woodrow]

Two students, Harvey and Beth (right) who had visited North Cove, approached us through our Facebook page and offered to volunteer during their summer break. They even suggested what they would do and now, thanks to them, we have a smart newly painted and preserved Woodland Hide. Also we have swelled our volunteer numbers by three which makes up for the losses to our group over the last year.



All three are keen and friendly and will be a great asset to the team. They came just as the work load increased with early cutting of the main meadow and Summerhouse Ride. They are already seasoned hay makers.

We have been fortunate to receive help from the Waveney Wildflower Meadow Group who have arranged for us to use an auto-scythe owned and stored at Falcon Meadow, Bungay. In exchange, we donate some of our hay which will be used to restore wildflower meadows further up the Waveney valley catchment.

The main hay cut commences August 31st just after we have had a vicious storm that has blown some trees across the paths. One of these is a large ash near to the railway hide and is too

big for the volunteers to handle without a chainsaw. The land owner has agreed to deal with it.

Species of note seen on the reserve were silver-washed fritillary (photo), and Brown Argus butterflies that are new records for North Cove. Also an otter spraint was found by the dyke to the south west of the main meadow.



Katie and co from the wildflower meadow group collecting hay.



I'D long thought our map of North Cove was misleading -- the thick black line looked more of a barrier than a dyke. Thus I came up with a plan to produce a larger version, re-drawn in colour with more information included and some superfluous info omitted.

After I had a fairly miserable attempt at producing the artwork myself, Charles thought he had a friend that might draw it (Charles, I've found recently, and to the benefit of North Cove, has lots of friends!). Thus we were presented with a new map, in colour and showing the footpaths.

My initial plan for displaying it was felt too expensive so we settled for simply having it printed, laminated and sited it on the Railway hide.

However, Charles, during his production of a back board, came up with a home-produced frame as well.

Thus we now have a professionally-produced colour map (total cost £5) which will hopefully guide the many new visitors to North Cove around the reserve without getting lost. [JT]



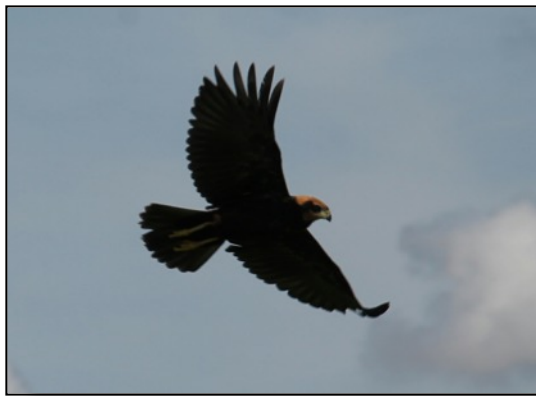
WALKING back to the staithe in late May, there was the most extraordinary warbling. At first I wondered “what an earth is that?” but then realised it was the female cuckoo calling. It really is a surprising sound, something I heard a few more times in the next few days.

June didn’t get off to a very good start. Once the first few days had passed when I did get a nice view of a hobby, the weather took a decided turn for the worse and thus the river wall was not the place to be.

It wasn’t until well into the second week that I ventured along there and it wasn’t particularly lively then. A garden warbler was singing well along the wall and cuckoos were still calling “cuckoo”.

A hobby was hunting over the marsh on the 1st of the month, one of only a handful I’ve seen so far this summer. Two cuckoos were flying on the 14th and a kingfisher flew across the dyke.

Two Eastern Europeans along with one’s wife and daughter were fishing on the 15th, something that was to prove their undoing as I had to remind them that the season didn’t start until the day after. They said they had a licence (which I was doubtful



Marsh harrier flying over the river wall at Castle Marsh.[JT]

about, but in view of the fact I was a s turfing them off, I thought they’d had enough aggro). After warning them about a hefty fine if the BA guy came along, they packed up and went elsewhere. The following day (the right day this time!), they were back but un-fortunately didn’t have a “this year’s” ticket with them, so it cost them £40 to keep fishing - not the best two days they’d ever had!

It was a busy day the 16th, with 11 anglers’ cars parked up, some-thing that was usual, certainly the first week of the season. I guess the “lockdown” had something to do with it.

A small orange moth had me chasing with my camera but it never did settle so that was one missed. A single common tern flew upriver on the 21st. The following day, on my way down to the railway, a fox crossed in front of my car. Talking of foxes, I found a squashed cub on the Benacre Road near the Copland Way roundabout. I wondered if then, they’d bred in that rough corner near the roundabout and this may have been confirmed when, a week or so later, I found another just in Copland Way.

I digress, back to the river wall - I had really good views of another red kite on Castle, flying slowly right overhead (I really must take my camera with me!). The first of the great willowherb was coming into flower which brightened up the wall when it all came out. A barn owl flew across the river when I was fishing on the 24th and I spied another kingfisher flying up the dyke.

Thirty minutes after I left the river wall the day after, a guy reported an osprey flying across Castle towards Aldeby - how unfair is that?

Talking of unfair. At the end of the month it was windy (very), overcast (very) and chilly (very) - did I want to take Meg out? Not really. But being a good doggie owner I parked down at the

reserve car park and dutifully did my hour-plus walk. Deciding as it was very windy etc, I thought “no point in taking the camera” so left it in the car. Big mistake! Coming back along the wall, there sitting in the grass was a (very, very) young Chinese water deer, half the size of Meg. Amazingly she missed it but I’m thinking deer of that young age have no smell which would have attracted a predator. Anyway, I put Meg on the lead and squatted down to look and it just sat there oblivious, I could have stroked it. Had I had the camera with me I could have taken some nice photos. Doh!

I did have my camera with me in July. With birding a tad on the quiet side I thought, leave the bins at home, take the camera. Down by Castle Mill a marsh harrier flew up and overhead. After watching for a minute or so I suddenly remembered I had a camera and managed to fire off a few shots.

Meg followed what I think was a stoat running along the river wall, but with her in the way, I couldn’t see properly. I’d heard a couple of green woodpeckers recently but it wasn’t until I was on my way back to the car that I managed a photo, be it at some distance.

After a distinctly quiet walk, I was just on my way back when up in the sky I noticed a buzzard being mobbed by something smaller which turned out to be a hobby, one I haven’t seen many of this year. I did manage a few photos which was good.

On the 20th, on a later walk than usual, I heard the strangest noise - a sort of yowling. On getting closer it was obviously coming from the reeds so, although I never saw its source, I guess it was a Chinese water deer. Weird or what? Later on, our walk was shortened when I saw (most) of a grass snake just beyond Castle Mill. I say “most”, as it had its head down a hole. Despite me waiting, it stayed hidden so I had to make do with a three-quarters photo.

At the end of July, the undoubted highlight was my first otter for around 18 months. Fishing a few pegs downstream from the staithe in, I might add, a howling gale, there were plenty of boats about but despite this I glanced left and, only ten feet away in very



Privet hawkmoth caterpillar. [JT]

close to the reeds, there was an otter looking straight at me. He obviously didn’t like the look of me as he quickly disappeared never to be seen again in the very choppy water. It wasn’t the most successful day’s sport I’d had, but hey, you can’t have everything!

The highlight for early August was the number of wall browns about. I usually spot a couple or so but during the first week of the month, I regularly came across a dozen or so along the wall. A single and pristine painted lady on the 8th was a nice surprise. Three days later I came across an impressive green caterpillar which, on investigation, proved to be a privet hawkmoth.

A few days on and I was lucky to add two new birds to my river wall listing: on a late afternoon walk I heard a single distinctive hoot of a tawny owl which was a great surprise and two days later, a pair of linnets sat in an old tree near Castle Mill.

MY REPORT will cover the highlights seen for the three-month period from June to the end of August. As per normal, my main focus will be on the area comprising a five mile radius of Beccles but will also include some of the scarcer birds seen a bit further afield in Suffolk.

With regard to June, the third of the month saw two hobbies and a cuckoo over Barnby marshes and two turtle doves at Sotterly chapel. On the ninth, Rob Lovejoy photographed a juvenile short-eared owl half a mile past the sailing club on Beccles marshes. This was followed on the eleventh by a red kite over Weston, two turtle doves at Ellough and two grey partridges and a red kite at Playter's Farm.



Paul Wray sent in his photo of a juvenile cuckoo.

On the twenty-first, Kenny Leggett received a report from his daughter of an eagle owl at Gillingham. I popped over to have a look but came away empty handed. The following day, Kenny reported four red kites over Gillingham marshes and Richard Drew enjoyed two spotted flycatchers at Sotterly chapel on the same date.

The twenty-third saw an osprey reported flying north over Castle Marshes and three turtle doves were reported in a private garden at Hulver Street. Finally for the month, Carl Buttle enjoyed three red kites drifting north towards Beccles and John Trew reported a group of 15 mistle thrushes along Hulver Road.

Into July now, with Nina savouring a red kite over her Worlingham garden on the first, plus Neville enjoyed one over Ellough Road. On the sixth and seventh, I had individual red kites over Black Boy Meadow and Rigbourne Hill, Beccles. I was fortunate, on the 10th, to have an osprey flying south over my garden in Rigbourne Hill.

Towards the end of the month, John Trew, Neville Loth and myself were fortunate enough to have a hobby over our gardens. John was also doing well with house sparrows, with some 25 in his garden at times. He also

had a regular pair of kestrel on the harvested field at the back of his garden, a few linnets strayed into his garden hedge and a song thrush put in several appearances.

August was a rather quiet month locally though four common cranes south-east over Black Boy Meadow, seven cattle egrets north over Mutford and an osprey over Ellough Road livened things up.



One of Castle's barn owl chicks.

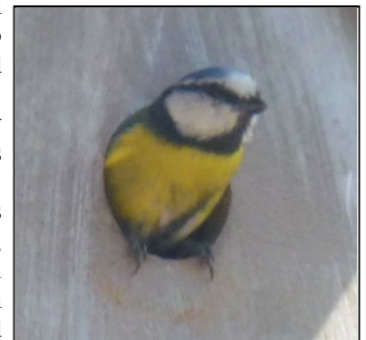
A bit further afield but still in Suffolk, highlights included five red-backed shrikes at Hollesley, Westleton, Southwold, Minsmere and Gunton. A grey-headed wagtail was at Easton Bavents, a great reed warbler at Carlton Marshes, nine cattle egrets at Snape, Carlton Marshes and Boyton.

Six marsh warblers were at Languard, Southwold, Minsmere and North Warren; glossy ibis, Snape; rosefinch, Languard; three rose-coloured starlings at Southwold, North Warren and Ipswich; two Blyth's reed warblers, North Warren and Southwold; Savi's warbler, North Warren; black-winged stilt, Dunwich; four roseate terns, Minsmere; crossbills at various locations; three raven at Pipp's Ford; two honey buzzard at Minsmere and Carlton SWT.

Two golden orioles, Hollesley and Minsmere; red-footed falcon, North Warren and Minsmere; Serin, Languard; Iberian

chiffchaff, Minsmere; night heron, Carlton Marshes, sooty tern, Minsmere and Sizewell;

Four wood warblers, Languard, Alderton, Gunton and Minsmere; gull-billed tern, Alton; Pacific golden plover, Wolsey Creek; greenish warbler, Languard; black-necked grebe, Trimley; spotted crane, Snape; very good numbers of pied flycatchers reported along the coastal belt.



One of Mervyn's blue tits leaving the box.



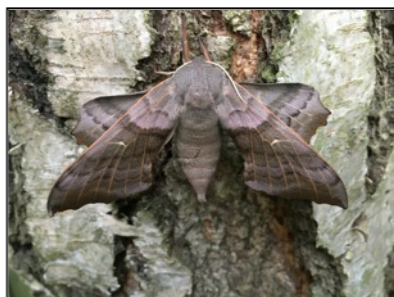
Peter Norfolk captured this photo of a short-eared owl at Carlton Marshes.

Lepidoptera (moths to you and me!)

MEMBER Gary, is a keen moth enthusiast and has provided some nice photos from his garden. There are also some from Antony Wren from his trapping at North Cove and one from George.



Buff tip.[GN]



Poplar Hawk.[GN]

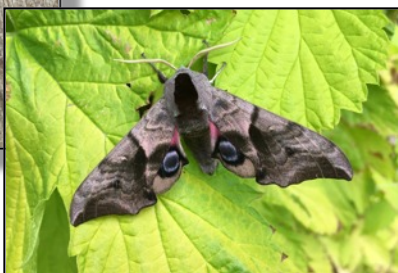
Light emerald.[GN]



Angle shades.[GB]



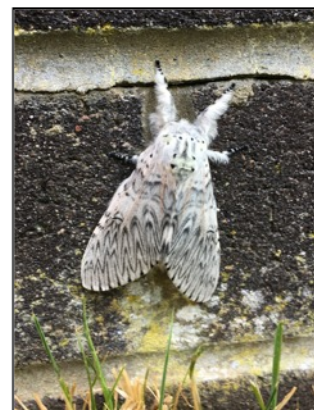
Muslin.[GN]



Eyed hawkmoth.[GN]



White barred clear-wing.[AW]



Puss moth.[GN]



Oak beauty.[GN]



Chinese character.[GN]



Lobster.[GN]



Sallow kitten.[GN]



Dotted chestnut.[GN]

Picture Page 1



*Brimstone egg
laying.*
[Peter Norfolk]



*Small skipper
on orchid.*
[JT]



*Drinker moth
caterpillar.*
[Chris Adams]



Scorpion fly. [JT]



Flower beetles.
[JT]



Two Minsmere photos from Peter Norfolk comparing the adder with grass snake.

Picture Page 2



Peter Norfolk captured this blue tit with a deformed bill.



Apologies, I can't recall who sent in, what I believe to be, a holly blue.

Derek Howe found this grass snake and slow worms on his North Cove reptile survey.

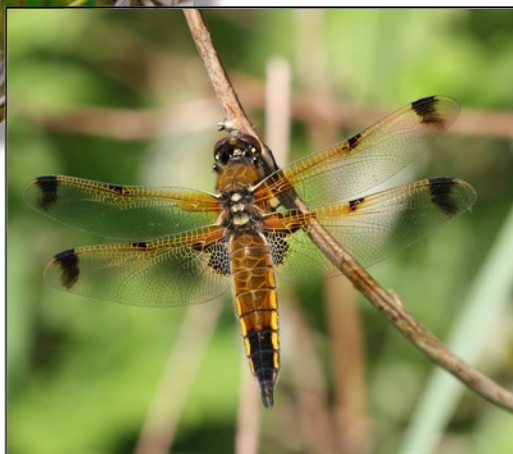


Paul Wray did well to capture this juvenile cuckoo.

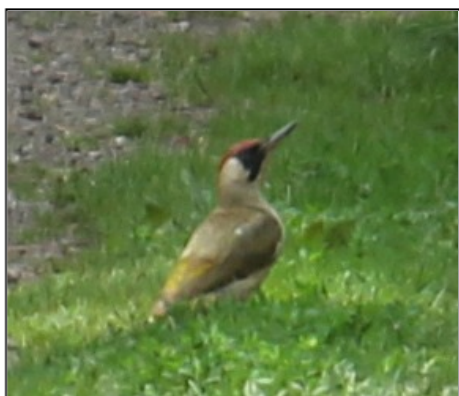


JT found this tortoiseshell captured by a southern hawker. Below: one of North Cove's many orchids.

Four-spotted chaser (form praenubila, with dark patches near wing ends). [Peter Norfolk]



Green woodpecker near the rail line at North Cove. [JT]



Tawny mining bee in Peter's garden. Lockdown meant spending more time noticing the local stuff!

