



Beccles Wildlife Group

Formerly Beccles Bird Society

Formed in 1973

OFFICERS: Nina Roffey (Chair) 01502 393956
Charles Fortt (Secretary) 01502 471094
Mervyn Aldis (Treasurer) 01502 715615



Spring 2023

Introduction

Nina Roffey

Well I'm sure we're all pleased for the lengthening days and what we hope is getting closer and closer. It has been lovely to hear some blackbirds singing this week.

I've heard the green woodpecker who lives over the road yaffling and heard an answering echo a bit further down the road. This morning, I heard the song thrush which has made me more than happy.

Nature is stirring and we can all benefit from the joys of spring as daffodils join with the snowdrops and some irises shine out too. We await the spring birds and I hope you all find the pleasures ahead in our gardens and countryside.

Keep warm if the winter has a last bite before leaving us. Please join in with future outings and indoor evenings of the Beccles Wildlife Group.

Events Diary



April 13th
Indoor Meeting

**Katie Utting on new projects undertaken by the
River Waveney Trust on river restoration.**
The Friends' Meeting House, 7.30pm

Friday, May 12th
Carlton Marshes.

Meet at the reserve centre at 10am.

Thursday, June 15th
Waveney Forest for nightjars
Led by Tony & Daphne
Meet 8pm, location TBA

Monday July 31st
RSPB Boyton & Hollesley Marshes
Meet at 10am, location IP12 3LR

Wednesday, August 16th
RSPB Minsmere
Meet at the reserve centre at 6pm

September 22nd
Abbey Farm, Snape
Leader: Daphne Hayward
Meet 10am location TBA

For more details please ring Charles on 471094

Feedback required

Charles Fortt

AS YOUR secretary, it is my privilege to look after the records kept by Beccles Bird Society and now Beccles Wildlife Group. The newsletters seem to have started a year after the society was founded in 1973, and then they were a simple few paragraphs typed on half an A4 sheet. Compared with today's newsletter they look like a candlestick telephone next to the latest mobile phone!

Over the intervening 49 years, the newsletter has grown in content and style and reflects, I think, the confidence and ambition of the group, especially its officers and editors. But one thing stands out – the flow of information has only ever been one-way: from the leadership to the members.

Given that the size of the group hasn't changed much in 50 years (usually around 50 members), the number of contributors to the newsletter has been relatively small. The current editor, John Trew, has put a great deal of effort into encouraging news

and articles from the wider membership, but we notice there is no history of members giving feedback.

So, we are hoping to change the culture and introduce space for members to report anything of interest back to the editor. This could be comment on articles in the newsletter, sightings of birds and other wildlife, gleanings from other sources – in fact, anything that a reader thinks worthy of sharing.

We're not thinking of a social media style of communication – we're planning to keep the newsletter as the main forum of communication outside of meetings – but these days nothing could be easier than sending an email to the editor. If nobody likes the idea and doesn't respond, we'll get the message pretty quickly; but if you've ever thought of commenting or contributing, now's your chance!

Email the editor at johnktrew@btinternet.com.

Big Wasp Garden Survey

Garry Nicolaou

In November 2021 I wrote a short piece in the Newsletter entitled 'Pesky Wasps?' giving an account of the Big Wasp Survey (BWS) being run by the University of Gloucester to better understand the population and distribution of wasps in the UK.



In 2021 the numbers of wasps in my garden, at least, were very low. In 2022 I put out the wasp traps as directed by BWS for seven days in early August and for seven days in late August. One trap was simply baited with an ale and the other with a lager. The results are shown below.

As a reminder, wasps are divided into two different Genera: *Vespula* and *Dolichovespula* and each of these has three different sub-species. Each genus can be identified by the shape of the face; *Vespula* having round faces and *Dolichovespula* having elongated faces.

The sub-species can be identified by the characteristic markings to be found on the wasp's face, eye and thorax. Hornets are of separate Genera (*Vespa* and *Provespa*) with one European species, *Vespa crabro* and the increasingly invasive Asian species, *Vespa velutina*. Conclusions: *Vespula vulgaris* was the most prevalent species at this time (no *Vespula* species were trapped during the same time period in 2021).

No wasps of the genus *Dolichovespula* were present, at this time (only three were trapped in 2021). Hornets were present in 2022 as compared to none trapped at the same time in 2021. Of the species trapped, a higher proportion preferred lager to ale!

If you want any further details, then feel free to call me on 07899 890044.

Results for August 2022				
Wasp Survey Results – My Garden August 2022				
GENUS	SPECIES	Trap baited with Ale	Trap baited with Lager	Total
	<i>germanica</i>	0	2	2
	<i>vulgaris</i>	45	26	71
	<i>rufa</i>	0	0	0
	<i>media</i>	0	0	0
	<i>sylvestris</i>	0	0	0
	<i>saxonica</i>	0	0	0
<i>Vespa</i>	<i>crabo</i>	1	3	4

Christmas meeting

John Trew

A SMALLER number than usual attended our first Christmas indoor meeting since Lockdown.

With Peter Norfolk's slides from his summer trip to the western states, a more than ample supply of Christmas goodies and a taxing quiz, it proved a most enjoyable evening. It was certainly worth braving the cold weather for.

Despite a previous dry run, Peter's slide show wouldn't play ball with the big screen so we gathered around his laptop for his usual top quality photos along with informative dialog from himself. On this occasion we were grateful for the lesser numbers. Thank-you Peter for your efforts – it was nice to see photos of birds I shall never see. (Subsequently, Peter has sussed it all out, so we shall be ok for future slide shows).

We then tucked into the various festive treats that attendees brought along – it was an impressive display and we made a hefty dent in it all.

Our thanks to Janet and Joyce who organised the teas and coffees and, in doing so, missed a few of Peter's photos. A sincere thank-you to them and to those who helped clear up afterwards.

Members then had to do battle with my quiz and whilst I was conscious of centering on wildlife, I feel on reflection it should have been more varied, but hey, it was my first effort.

I did manage to successfully "deflect over the bar", a query as to the accuracy of one answer checked on Google, so no own goal for me then!

Invasive?

A TINY but loud songbird from Asia could be a new invasive species for the UK. The UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology has warned that the red-billed Leiothrix could become as familiar in gardens, parks and woodlands as parakeets.

The brightly coloured bird from subtropical Asia has already become established in several parts of Europe and there is a cluster in Wiltshire and Somerset, suggesting they could become established in the wild.

As with parakeets, they are kept as caged birds and have either escaped or been released.

The bird has a bright red bill, yellow-orange throat and an olive green and grey head and its song is comparable to a blackbird.

If the bird becomes established in Britain, they could soon be a familiar sight in our gardens, parks and woodlands with their rich song altering the dawn chorus as we know it.

Whilst, evidently, the potential for the bird to become established is very low, the cluster of records in southern England

suggest we need to take it seriously as a potentially new invasive species.

Milder winter could make it easier for it to establish and spread while the prevalence of birdfeeders would give it a reliable food source throughout the colder months.

They are already well established in France, Spain, Portugal and Italy and the concern is that they may compete with native birds for habitat, living space and food.



Source: *The Countryman* magazine.

Wheatfen

John Trew

WILL FITCH, warden at Wheatfen, began by explaining that Ted Ellis's interest in wildlife started in Guernsey when, aged just six, he began rock pooling.

His parents returned later returned to Gt Yarmouth in 1920 and Ted eventually became Keeper of Natural History at the Castle Museum in Norwich, from 1928-1956. He didn't, however, just display items of wildlife, he created whole environments and these displays are still there for visitors to view today.

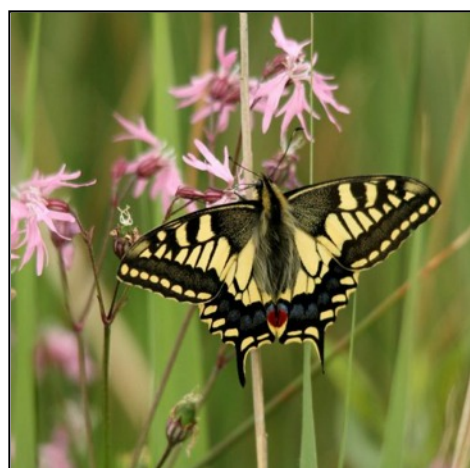
He became interested in Wheatfen and some years later was asked by owner Colonel Cockle if he'd take it on, something that was to last the rest of his life. His house on the reserve is still owned by the family.

For years he kept diaries of the wildlife of the fen explaining the finest detail along with coloured drawings. He also wrote hundreds of articles for the local press.

Not content with browsing, Ted came to know every detail of the fen, even discovering new species, not only to the reserve, but to the UK list. There are now some 10,000 records for Wheatfen which is one of the top recorded reserves in the country.

Ted passed away in 1986, leaving not only a legacy of natural records and fascinating articles, but living proof that being inspired by nature is one of the most wonderful things we can experience.

Such a man deserves to be remembered, and so the Ted Ellis



Trust was founded to do just that by preserving Wheatfen, the nature reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest that Ted spent so much time in throughout his life.

Management of the fen, as Will explained, was at

times a challenge with ever more frequent flooding of the Yare into the fen, holding up work and with flood water threatening the natural balance.

He further explained that scrub encroachment was a constant issue for the reserve and mowing was a regular job in the summer. New "plastic" boardwalks were replacing traditional wood and they, being made from recycled material, were better and longer-lasting than wooden planks.

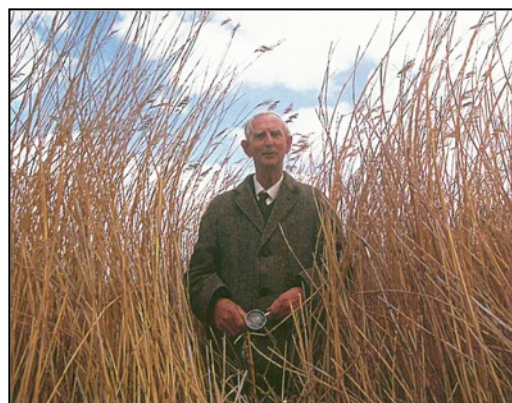
People from the University of London are currently carrying out surveys logging both the weather and water quality of the reserve with thoughts of how climate change will affect it.

Of course, Will showed photos and videos of the wildlife on the reserve with its iconic swallowtail butterflies. Surprisingly and disappointingly, he obtained video of pheasants eating the chrysalises which highlights one of the problems of releasing pheasants for shooting. Will also showed a video of a mother otter and two cubs which took temporary residence under the warden's hut.

Bird ringing is a regular and popular occupation adding to the reserve's listing, as did a visiting crane, no doubt popping over from the Horsey population.

Will's informal style made for a very enjoyable evening with many listening, earmarking another return to the reserve.

Thank you to those who attended, I hope you enjoyed the evening as much as I did and thanks also to Janet and Joyce for the tea and biscuits.



Ted Ellis.

Visitor Monitoring

Mark Sharman

I gather we never really know how many visitors we have to our North Cove reserve thus, over the winter, I have researched and made a small counter for the reserve so that we can check.

It relies on a passive infra red (PIR) cell to detect visitors, and a RP2040 chip to record the count. In order to increase the battery life, the chip can go to a dormant state and awake by the PIR. The chip is on a raspberry *pi pico* board that includes lots of easy in/out access, voltage regulation and debugging features.

The counter has been running since the beginning of February and has had two monitored test days. Readings were taken before and after two Wednesday work parties.

Both results were consistent, which is good, but, both days showed a count about 30% lower than actual traffic. The loss was most probably people passing in close proximity and only being counted as one. I am going to try to improve the accuracy by restricting the visible angle of the PIR with a tube, and moving the box closer to the path.

The results over the first 15 days showed 350 contacts, just over 20 a day, with the weekend showing higher numbers. Assuming everyone passes twice we are averaging 10 visitors a day. From our tests if anything this is an undercount. Obviously more testing is needed.



With David's help, Mark's visitor counter is now housed in a bird box at North Cove to narrow the angle of view.

Reserve Report

Chris Adams

The rhododendron and laurel controlled last year was cut and cleared into piles. Also, some willow and alder were coppiced and cut back to provide an open clearing to plant alders cut or dug out from the dyke banks.

The growth of the planted alders and re-growth of coppice should result in woodland carr in future years. The amount of material generated from the clearing was so considerable that it was decided to burn some. The remainder is being used to create habitat piles while some has been placed to act as barriers against deer grazing or browsing the plantation and coppice.

John and David have maintained and got ready the bird boxes for the coming season. Mickey and Anne have maintained the water vole feeding rafts. Their camera trap has captured unusual images (see below and the North Cove Nature Reserve Facebook page).

Mark has made an electronic people counter (see elsewhere in this newsletter) so that we can monitor visitor trends. Anne with the help of Jeff, Roy and Duncan have increased the size of the Helleborine deer enclosure. It is hoped that those Helleborine grazed off last year will re-grow this year.

The paths have been kept in good order. However we will have to restock hay piles, using wheel barrows to move bales around the paths to where it is most needed.



Ideal job for a cold winter's day.

For much of this period I have been away while others have kept all in order on the reserve. My thanks to all for turning out in the harsh weather while I basked in the tropics! My apologies if I've failed to report anything important.

Stealth Cam Sightings

MICKEY, one of the North Cove volunteers, bought himself a stealth cam which he has focused on one of two apple rafts. He has been successful in capturing water vole on one of the rafts but has recently had two more unusual sightings.

The first was a water rail who seemed interested in the apple and the second appears to be a winter-coated stoat. To my knowledge this is the second stoat recorded on the reserve in the last twelve months.



Birds in Trouble

CHAFFINCH numbers dropped by 29% in the UK between 2008 and 2018 while we lost 67% of our greenfinches over the same period, thus the latter has been placed on the UK Red List.

A study by the BTO and the Institute of Zoology at London Zoo, showed that both species declined in ways consistent with the impact of the disease *trichomonosis*, which was first detected in UK finches in 2005.

It found that survival rates of both species were lowest in human-associated habitats.

Disease transmission may be higher in these environments where birds congregate at garden feeders.

Other red and amber-listed species, including house sparrows and bullfinches, are also susceptible to *trichomonosis*.

To reduce the spread of the disease, members of the public are advised to regularly clean feeders and bird baths and, if possible, to rotate the position of feeders around the garden to avoid build-up of food waste in one area.

If sick birds are seen, temporarily suspending feeding will allow birds to disperse and may reduce the risk of transmission.

You can help by reporting sighting of sick or dead birds to the Garden Wildlife Health project at gardenwildlifehealth.org, where you can also find best practice advice on feeding garden birds.

Birding Round-up

Tony Butler

MY REPORT will cover the highlights seen for the three-monthly period December 2022 to the end of February.

As per normal, my main focus will be on the area comprising a five-mile radius of Beccles but will also conclude with a summary of the rarities and scarcities seen a bit further afield in Suffolk for the term covered.

With regard to December, Neville had 100+ siskin and a single redpoll at North Cove NR, two red kites at Mettingham, 100 golden plover at Ellough airfield and fieldfares, redwings and bullfinch in Church Lane, Weston. 100 golden plover were also reported in a field by the A145 at Brampton.

Two hawfinches were seen at Sotterley Park church, a red kite and redwings, Beccles marshes, two red kites, North Cove and Sotterley Park and Daphne reported ten greenfinch in her Gosford Road garden.

Into January where further flocks of redwing and fieldfares were reported from Toft Monks, Beccles marshes, south of Ellough church, Sotterley Park, Church Lane, Weston, SW of Mutford and Garry's Beccles garden.



Redpoll at North Cove. [Michael Baker]

Carl Buttle reported a single hawfinch just west of Sotterley Park church on the 6th (it was subsequently seen on and off the rest of the month by several birders) and Dick Waldren had two

woodcock and two ravens at the same location on the 9th.

Neville and I enjoyed a barn owl hunting by the A143 half a mile south of Toft Monks on the 13th and Neville, Peter Norfolk and Duncan Braidwood have enjoyed over-wintering blackcaps in their gardens.

Red kites feature again, with two seen over Beccles quay on the 23rd and two seen by myself and Neville over Cucumber Lane the following day. Paul and Helga reported ten bullfinches at Beccles cemetery cycle track and Ian Barthorpe reported a probably ring-necked parakeet over Hungate, Beccles.

Finally for January, Julian Coleman reported two nuthatch and four reed buntings in his Beccles St Mary's Road garden.

February was a pretty quiet month with the following highlights being seen: two ravens (again) Sotterley Park (interestingly, two were seen carrying nesting material in south Suffolk), two red kites south of Toft Monks and Shadingfield, several yellowhammers, Granary Farm, Ringsfield Road, male marsh harrier, Barsham marshes, goldcrest Barsham WTW.

Garry enjoyed a common buzzard and a reed bunting in his Beccles garden. Beccles Marsh trail produced a pair of stonechats, redwing and 30 fieldfare and four song thrush were enjoyed at Rigbourne Hill and Foxglove Close and two on Beccles marshes.

John T recently spotted two oystercatchers down Copland Way and, the day after, they or another two were along Benacre Road.

The following scarcities and rarities have been reported a bit further afield in Suffolk this winter:

Two red-necked grebes, Thorpness and Dunwich; 75 snow buntings, Kessingland, Dunwich and

Pakefield; Slavonian grebe, Aldeburgh, five whooper swans, Minsmere and Dunwich; glossy ibis, Slaughden; 85 waxwings, various locations; several ravens, various locations; black brant, Felixstowe; black guillemot, Lowestoft; two cattle egret, Palgrave and Carlton; two green-winged teal, Boyton and Stunmer; eastern yellow wagtail, Carlton.

Two smew, Minsmere and Aldeburgh, two glaucous gulls, Minsmere and Languard; eight tundra bean geese, Corton, Hollesley and Lakenheath; ring-necked parakeet, Felixstowe; seven velvet scoter, Dunwich; six Bewick's swans, Minsmere and Orford; Siberian chiffchaff, Snape; black-necked grebe, Felixstowe; Caspian gull, various locations; five spoonbill, North Warren; curlew sandpiper, Melton; several water pipites, various locations.

Generally speaking, it has been a little bare from a birding perspective for long periods this winter. So many of the seasonal arrivals have been missing in action or at least well down in numbers and distribution. Josh Jones, writing in Birdwatch magazine commented "I can't recall such a birdless winter locally for some time (if ever)."

For example, rough-legged buzzards, great grey shrikes and redpolls have been almost completely absent this season. Others in short supply (or again, absent in some areas) included Tundra bean geese, Bewick's swans, smew, white-winged gulls, goldeneye, ring-billed gull, shorelarks, twite and Lapland bunting.

I know that last winter, shorelarks, twite and Lapland bunting numbers were extremely thin on the ground in Suffolk. Once familiar winter staples seem to be becoming that bit harder to find. Scarcities are becoming rarities.

Please report sightings to me on Beccles 712649 or mobile 0776 2300 053.



Siskin at North Cove. [Michael Baker]



Garry Nicolaou captured this photo of one of Reyden's waxwings.

Harleston Swifts

Garry Nicolaou

At the Group meeting held on March 9th we were treated to a most interesting and informative presentation by Peter Metcalf, of Swift Action Harleston, about the way the local community in Harleston has become engaged and involved with the annual swift migration.

'Harleston's Future' was established by Harleston and District Business Forum in 2013 to help the town respond to change and draw in visitors to support the local shops and businesses. The group is active in the development and regeneration of the town aiming to make it a more friendly place, ie pedestrian-friendly, free car parking and effect low impact renovations to the towns buildings.

A sub-group of enthusiasts have formed Swift Action Harleston and they are passionate about the conservation of nesting sites in Harleston to help stem the decline in swift numbers.

The swift population is in serious decline and they are now Red listed. Up to 50% of the UK breeding population has been lost since 1995 as an endangered species.

Swifts arrive in the UK from Africa in early May, returning to the same nesting sites each year. After a 3-month nesting period, they return to Africa in August via Spain. They fly to West Africa and the Congo then go on to over-winter in Mozambique. They return to the UK via Spain each year - a round trip of some 14,000 miles !

Peter Metcalf talked us through the design and construction of nest boxes. The preferred design is the 'Zeist-Style' box which is 5-sided and has a 28x65mm entrance slot cut into it (with rounded 'corners' to avoid wing damage). The group of enthusiasts and volunteers had a production line operation set up in the former Earsham Otter Trust buildings, aiming to make 150 boxes. They used 8'x4' sheets of 12mm plywood, making 8 nest boxes per sheet. All 150 boxes have been erected throughout the town.

Swifts will nest in a small depression of feathers at the far end of the box. To encourage nesting in new boxes, a structure is added to the box with a shallow depression. The structures can be made of wood, clay or even the compressed card linkers used for fruit packaging. A few feathers are glued to the depression to provide a welcoming start for prospecting Swifts.

To encourage the birds to the nest box, Peter demonstrated the use of a sound system ('Tweeters') that is used to play a recording of the characteristic sound of Swifts 'screaming'. It is

played for one hour in the morning and again in the late afternoon to help attract interest in the nest box. This, and nest box cameras (with Infra-Red lighting to see the birds overnight) is technology that can be added to attract and to monitor the birds' activities.

Peter explained that young swifts do not nest in the first two years, but they do visit the boxes, brushing against or "banging" them with their wings as they prospect the sites for future years.

All activities, including mating, take place on the wing. Swifts normally lay two or three eggs at two or three-day intervals. Incubation starts with the first egg, and lasts for 19-20 days per egg. The adults share all the nesting duties equally. Hatching of the young is staggered, but with the abundance of food the youngster that hatched last will catch up with its siblings for size and development. The swifts will leave the nest after about 6 weeks of rearing.

Great effort has been made to engage with the local community to increase awareness of the plight of swifts during their migration and to get involvement in conservation learning and communication activities.

Harleston is the only town locally that has not been destroyed by fire in its history. The timber-framed buildings and pan tiled roofs have made for ideal nesting sites for hundreds of years, and this will be a driver for the community in taking care of 'its' swifts.

Harleston Junior and Senior Schools - Cut out swift shapes, coloured them, including the flags of the countries that the birds fly across during their migration, made swift-themed decorations for the local church

'Harleston's Flag Force' - a group that has created flags adorned with the shape of swifts which are put up throughout the town in April ('Welcome Back'), and in August ('Farewell').

The Swan Hotel has dedicated its Piano Bar to the swifts.

There has been a design for a man-made 'Swift Tower' created by an architect which has obtained planning permission for installation in the town. This has nesting cavities for swifts, bats and bees. It has yet to be purchased (c.£10k).

Peter closed by providing the following web address for our information and access: www.swift-conservation.org

The presentation provoked many questions and gave us a very good insight as to what can be achieved by the local community when driven by its passion for wildlife and conservation.

Daphne Notes

Daphne Hayward

We decided to have a different Christmas Day so drove to Horsey Gap with almost deserted roads. Not so the official car park which was crowded.

We paid £3.50 for two hours and for the first time, only had to walk a short way to reach the high dune area. The seals have taken over some of the dunes with their pups so you are barred from getting near them.

I did spot two sanderling rushing here and there, several gull types plus one adult gannet flying south.

Parked at Gorleston beach on the way home and watched skein after skein of cormorants flying inland, a total of around 100 in all. They will bring joy to fishermen's hearts!



I saw this new sculpture near Southwold water tower today, impressive.

I caught a bus at Norwich bus station a week ago and it was almost dark. I heard lots of twitters and could see dozens of birds in the three bare trees alongside. Turned out to be pied wagtails. I took some quick photos before the bus left.



Ringling

David Fox

I have continued ringing birds with the Kessingland Ringing Group during the second half of 2022. Yours truly is shown ringing my first adult female barn owl on June 15th. Julie is also shown holding the same bird in the "ice-cream cone grip".

This bird produced five young which were checked at over 40 days old, however the next time the nest was checked a week or so later, unfortunately they were all dead. Julie believes that this was due to the extreme temperatures we had in the heatwave in the summer, such a shame. An angry looking kestrel pulli (young bird) was one of four ringed on June 15th on the same farm.

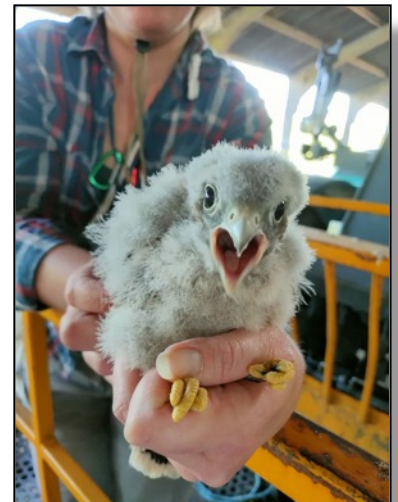
Back at our normal ringing site at Kessingland we have caught a few interesting birds, a juvenile black redstart on July 30th, a juvenile male sparrowhawk on August 7th, a juvenile male kingfisher on August 28th. What a privilege to be able to handle and ring such a colourful and lovely bird.

As you can see by the second photo these birds are quite happy to lay on their backs on the weighing scales without attempting to fly off. On the September 25th one of the birds captured was a yellow-browed warbler which is quite an unusual bird found in our area. Unfortunately for me, on September 30th, I had to leave the ringing session early, and only five minutes after I had left, a Raddes warbler (below centre) was caught and ringed. There have only been 13 previously ringed in Suffolk, so very disappointing that I missed that one.

On the October 22nd we visited a farmer's field at Hulver where he has left a field margin sown with a seed crop specifically for wild birds. We were lucky enough to capture ten yellowhammers with a further 29 birds of various species being captured. The photo (below centre) shows a nice example of a male yellowhammer.



Yellow-browed warbler.



Tales of the Riverbank

John Trew

THE MILD weather continued into December but it came to an abrupt halt the second week when we were plunged into sub zero temperatures for around ten days.

We were, however, blessed with multiple blue sky days and if one was prepared to face the cold, a walk along the river wall could be simply wonderful - once one got warmed up!

On the ninth, it was very cold, very frosty and simply wonderful with a hoare frost coating everything in white. Two goosanders on the river was a nice surprise but they flew off before I had a good look at them - females I think. A green woodpecker flew across and, surprise surprise, a redshank flew over.

A water rail scurried across the frozen dyke as I approached on the 15th and a snipe flew over. A pair of kestrels had their feeding disturbed by crows harassing them. There was another snipe the day after and a song thrush perched in a nearby tree. A shrew shot down its hole before I had chance to see it.

My last snipe of the year was flew over Castle on the 16th and a song thrush also flew over. Unusually, a kingfisher was perched very high in a riverside willow and the day after, it or another flew up the river. A green woodpecker flew across into Norfolk and a tree-creeper was in a willow down near Castle Mill.

Another green woodpecker flew over on the 27th and a little grebe put in its usual winter appearance on the river.

My first trip down the river wall of the New Year was pretty uneventful until I noticed the surface of the river over near the Norfolk bank acting differently to the general flow. To my joy, an otter appeared closely followed by another and the pair, I think it was a pair, were tumbling and playing under the reeds. I stood and watched for several minutes before they disappeared.

Two Egyptian geese flew over on the 6th Jan - the first I'd seen down there for some months. The usual green woodpecker put in an appearance. Due to injury, it was the 17th before I ventured to the river wall again. It was very cold and frosty but at least bright and sunny with no wind. The usual green 'pecker put in an appearance but a nice surprise was my first great white egret of the year on the marsh just before Castle.

My first snipe of the year flew up on the 18th and an orange tagged marsh harrier flew over. A sparrowhawk whizzed by as they do, on the 23rd and the day after some 60 lapwing were on Castle. A little grebe was on the river. Walking up the footpath from the reserve, a kingfisher flew up the dyke - the second time recently I'd seen one along there.

A barn owl came out of Castle Mill on the 10th and it or another came out the day after. The first Egyptian goose I'd seen for ages flew over.

The mild weather in February did little for my river wall sightings, it was remarkably quiet with the usual buzzards and marsh harriers and, on occasions, the odd snipe.

Beach Nesting Birds

Nina Roffey

At the AGM we met Paul Davis RSPB project officer in Suffolk who came to talk to us about beach nesting birds of East Anglia.

Having much experience in this job in Norfolk and Essex as well as Suffolk, he worked protecting, monitoring and learning about the best habitats for, firstly, little terns but now also ringed plovers, oyster catchers and avocets.

Beach nesters are at the mercy of so much: tides, climate change, humans, and hedgehogs, foxes, otters and badgers, not to mention other bird species, gulls and other birds of prey.

The coastline of East Anglia supports a large proportion of these beach nesters but protecting them is the biggest part of his

job. With the help of volunteers they put up fences and closely monitor where birds are beginning to nest.

They then help by deploying pipes providing cover, and half buried pots of sand so the birds nest higher up to protect the eggs and young. Often decoys are used to attract the birds to areas that are deemed the safest.

The talk was most educational and I will look at fenced off areas with more thought in future and be thankful there are people like Paul and volunteers to do all they can to keep these endangered birds safe.

Spot the difference



It's not often that one gets good views of redpolls and even harder to spot the difference. Thus it was good that David Fox managed to have two species in the hand at the same time.

The female, left, is a lesser redpoll (ie the common one); the one right is, just to confuse everyone, the rarer common redpoll.