



Marsh Harrier by Ann Biggs

specifically breeding Hobbies and Common Buzzards. Hobbies have been recorded since 1999 and are known to have used trees to nest in which are perilously close to the proposed wind farm site. Since 2011 the buzzards have used trees similarly close by. The surveyors did not record finding these nests in 2011/2, although they have shown flight patterns for Hobby that do not seem to show any directions to where we know the birds bred. After catching such prey as dragonflies, there would have been a concentration of flight lines to particular points, but according to the maps produced there is no indication of this. The researchers completely ignore flights of Common Buzzards. Perhaps this is because this species is far from being at risk on a breeding basis, but it is greatly at risk of flying into revolving turbines!

Watches for Red Kite (not yet a breeding bird in our parish but they have been seen regularly for the last 5–6 years), Little Egrets (an occasional visitor, seen mainly in the larger drains) are noted but neither of these are a problem as yet. Another species recorded was Kingfisher but when was one of those seen flying so high?

A blue streak close to water is what most people ever see. Of passing interest is a record of Quail, which was more likely heard than seen? Which year is not stated.

Duck flight lines were noted, mainly for nesting Mallards in the nearby drains, and for a few Gadwalls and even fewer Tufted Ducks. Their records for Bewick's and Whooper Swans were abysmal and seemed to rely on HCS members' records, which were given to them before they announced they were doing any surveys. Lastly, the section on Golden Plovers and Lapwings is certainly understated. We know that in winter from early October through to March they are present in flocks of about 3000–4000 jointly. They are quite easy to find when present as they will periodically fly around collectively, especially if disturbed, mostly towards evening. Perhaps the surveyors were not still there at those times?

So, to sum up, the most importantly vulnerable species were under recorded, for whatever reason, but the breeding bird surveys in the 500-metre zones were good and make an additional record for the parish.



New Homes – New Habitats

Contributed by Gill Smith

In spite of many objections from the local population, planning consent was given to the developers, after an appeal, to build 22 dwellings on land at the bottom of Station Road with access from Northumbria Close. The developer is Sanctuary Housing, one of the main housing associations in this area. From early last year Paul Mason has been in touch with Sanctuary and the Conservation Committee has been following developments.

As a condition of the planning application a Newt and Lizard Survey had to be undertaken. Paul followed this and, although he has not received a copy of the report, he was told that very few common newts and no great crested newts were found and so no action had to be taken following the survey. Jake Allsop and the Swift Group are giving advice regarding provision and suitable sites for swift boxes and it is understood that the local bat group has also had input in a similar manner regarding bat boxes.

In the autumn Chris Prescott noticed that the detailed landscaping plan had been made available and we have been looking at it with interest. The plan shows there will be 16 varied specimen trees spread around the site and several small areas of shrubs and ground cover plants. A hedge of native species will be planted along the end boundary of four of the houses and there are four small areas marked as wild flower seeded areas. Also on the plan the sites for six sparrow terraces, three swift blocks and three bat blocks are marked!

Wildlife Diary – Summer to December 2014

This issue we are reporting wildlife events in chronological order from notes based on the website (www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk) as reported by local observers.

8 September As usual several Marsh Harriers passed through on migration with three seen in the air together by Claytons Bridge. The first of two Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillars was found in Aldreth with another in a Duck Lane garden.

14 September Out in North Fen five Common Buzzards were mewing over where there was a flock of 30 or so Linnets and 200 Lapwings flighting. Later there were 400 Lapwings at North Fen and at Adventurers' Drove a juvenile Marsh Harrier cavorted with a juvenile Hobby and four young Kestrels, no doubt testing each other out. Six adult Yellowlegged Gulls with two Lesser Blackbacks were along Long Drove.

26 September 1000 Lapwings in each of Ewell Fen and Long Drove, plus five Kestrels. The only Wheatears of this autumn appeared on Long Drove but were gone by next morning. During the Boating Day on Guppy's Pond two Kingfishers delighted those rowing around the lake.

27 September found 300 Lapwings in Ewell Fen and 75 Golden Plovers in Long Drove.

30 September 1500 Golden Plovers had just come in and were all sleeping after a long flight from their probable high Scandinavian breeding grounds. Then, while the Golden Plovers were still in North Fen, they were joined by a Sanderling, which was a great surprise and a first for Haddenham parish. This much smaller bird stood out from the Plovers, being much more creamy white and feeding in a very different way.

17 October 1200 Lapwings and one very pale Golden Plover in North Fen Back Drove. Many Starlings feeding among them with 20–30 Linnets and other finches. Approximately 30 Linnets in Long Drove.

23 October 800 Lapwings, 200 Linnets and a Merlin in Long Drove.

29/30 October 14/15 Whooper Swans flew over Station Road, heading towards Sutton or Sutton Gault.

3 November Two Jays, several Long-tailed Tits and one Coal Tit in an Aldreth Garden. Thirteen Collared Doves feeding in a back garden in Bury Lane. A Turtle Dove on a Station Road lawn. About 500 Lapwings and 500 Golden Plover in a field this side of Long Drove from Earith Road.

5 November Turtle Dove spotted again in Station Road.

6 November A white-winged blackbird spotted feeding on the hawthorn at the entrance to a cul de sac in Aldreth.

7 November Started with four Roe Deer at North Fen. Then 1500 Golden Plover, 300 Lapwings and a Sanderling. On to Long Drove where there was little but three Fieldfares in a wheat field among corvids. Finished with 15 Grey Partridges at Dambank.

21 November Good day out on Haddenham/Aldreth fens. Fieldfares in full force with 500 in two places. Then on to Long Drove where 30–40 Goldfinch and numerous Linnets were feeding on the roadway but in and out of sugar beet foliage. On returning via Dambank there were 800 newly arrived Lapwings in company with 100 Common Gulls and 50 Golden Plovers. Three Corn Buntings on wires.

23 November A Goldcrest was spotted in the Leylandii hedge at the end of a garden on the Rampart.

24/28 November Song Thrushes singing in Aldreth Road and Station Road. So is Spring coming or going!

28 November Up to 500 Fieldfares flew from the north over Station Road in a very wide loose flock.

8 December A Pied Wagtail in High Street outside Spar shop and 3–4 more at the local sewage plant, with a nice Grey Wagtail and 3–4 Meadow Pipits all dodging the rotating spray bars. Seemingly thousands of Fieldfares, plus occasional Redwing all over the place. Common Buzzard at Tinkers Lane.

15 December Ewell Fen 32 Mute Swan and one Buzzard, Dam Bank Drove one Buzzard (very pale), one Stonechat, and in Long Drove seven Corn Bunting.



Gold Plover flock with Sanderling by Ann Biggs

Strange Bird of the Sea Shore in a Black Fen Field

Contributed by Paul Mason

It was quite strange, really, to see such a bird out of its usual habitat, especially when that habitat is along the sea shore, going in and out with the waves behind them picking up minute crustaceans and invertebrates, so imagine the incredulity when a Sanderling was found feeding in a black newly ploughed fen field surrounded by a 1500 strong flock of wintering Golden Plovers!

Annually Golden Plovers arrive in large flocks to the Ouse Washes and surrounding fen fields to winter. They summer in sub-arctic moorland but move south when it gets too cold for them. Sometimes there is the odd representative of another species with them, most often a Dotterel, which is a very similar plover species. If it is very wet and the fields are sodden with puddles of water then Common Snipes sporting their long beaks can be found probing the wetter places, plus the occasional Ruff or Reeve decides the Ouse Washes are too full of water and moves out to shallower prospects.

This small member of the Sandpiper family is only about 18–21 centimetres long and also breeds in the high Arctic but normally winters along our sandy coastlines. Many people walking along the edge of the sea will have noticed a small creamy-white bird rushing about close to the waves. This is the proper winter resort for a Sanderling, not in Haddenham's fens, so you can imagine what a surprise it was to find it. So it goes in the records as Haddenham's only Sanderling tick.

Plovers Delight

Contributed by Paul Mason

One of the delights of watching the wildlife of Haddenham/Aldreth fens usually occurs around the last few days of September or the first few of October, when the plovers arrive 'en masse'.

Lapwings are members of the Plover family and of course can breed on our farmland in summer. Their success varies from year to year and if the Ouse Washes have a year without serious flooding then few Lapwings attempt to nest among our sugar beet, potato and late leek crops. If the Washes are flooded for long periods of time, then Lapwings try nesting in fields in greater numbers. Even then success is not assured at those nests (well, just a scrape in the ground) as they are more open to raptor and corvid predation. At the end of the breeding season groups of local nesters and what young have managed to survive gather in small flocks of around 30–40 and move around the fields feeding where the soil has been moved after harvesting of crops. These and the other newly arrived flocks join together until reaching about 1500 in number.

Then, in early October, the great arrival of Golden Plovers occurs. Mainly first in North Fen, in a rough triangle between Hillrow, Sutton and the banks of the Ouse Washes by the Earith to Sutton road. Sometimes it is near impossible to count how many because they move around the fields, which are now usually bare ploughed soil, stubble or newly sown oilseed rape. An intelligent estimate is that they can number around 4000 at times. Every now and then, in very long wet periods, the flocks can contain a few Ruff/Reeves and Snipes. On one occasion a very rare American Golden Plover was seen among them for about 10 days. On another occasion, in a different year, one of that species was also found among flocks of Golden Plover in fields in Holme Fen, south of Haddenham and east of Aldreth. However that site is less regularly used.

Like all the plover family Lapwings have a particular behavioural habit of standing still while looking around or maybe listening for movement of their prey in the soil. Any invertebrates will normally do and if they don't find anything the birds will move another three or four steps to stop, look and listen. When they do find something and swallow it they continue the whole process again and again. It can be intriguing to watch. Golden Plovers seem to run that movement but not too fast. Lapwings do it at a more leisurely pace.

Renew your subs!

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1 January.

If you haven't done so already,
please pay promptly as
it really does help.

Thank you.

The birds are on the lookout for raptor predators all the time and are constantly on the move going from field to field and back again. If a threat comes from the likes of a Marsh Harrier or a Peregrine then up they all go and form large flocks of both species flying this way and that in order to confuse the hunters and when the threat moves on they return to feed on the fen fields once more.

Plover plumage



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By the time they return to breeding sites they have attained their beautiful gold tinged black-breasted summer plumage.

This is our normal Eurasian Golden Plover in winter plumage. Perhaps rather drab but can have a slightly golden sheen. Sometimes with a very young bird it can be very pale.



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This is the American Golden Plover again in winter plumage because that is all we are likely to see in the UK. Note the more upright stance and white stripe across the brow (called a supercillium.)

Where have all our birds come from?

In summer the Eurasian Golden Plover, the full name for our breeding species, breeds from Greenland across the Arctic Circle to about halfway across Siberia. In the UK it inhabits moorland of the Pennines and through the Grampians and other similar habitat through to the top of Scotland. Many of those would winter near the coastal areas of northern England. It is thought that those that winter with us in the fens come from northern Scandinavia and north-western Russia.

Icelandic based Eurasian Golden Plovers winter more in the west (especially Ireland and south-west UK) and some extend elsewhere in the UK but it is also likely that few would have come from the west, all the evidence points to predominately a north-eastern origin. Presumably vagrant American Golden Plovers arrive over a large area and then join in flocks wherever they are. So the few Americans that get pushed east in autumn, probably by depressions in the Atlantic, join up with any flocks of Eurasians they happen to come across and spend the winter here. Whether they manage to return to the Americas is unknown.

I thank the prominent wader expert Tony Prater for his considerable help with writing this essay.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Not an awful lot has happened on Guppy's Pond since the last Newsletter. The odd Swan has arrived, stayed for a few days and then left again. This has happened several times and it might well be a regular visitor because it



swims up to the balconies when someone is on them, in the hope that it will be fed. We shall see in the spring whether it comes back with a mate – or whether a new pair sets up residence.

The Kingfishers have been a delight. We often watch them fishing from the willow trees, or

from the perches we have provided for them along the banks. So far, the weather has been relatively mild with only the odd few days below freezing, so they haven't been affected and have been able to fish in open water. As long as there are no prolonged spells of hard frost to come, they should have a good breeding season ahead.

There have been plenty of garden birds on the feeders: Blackbirds, Robins, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Blue, Great and Long-tailed tits, Dunnocks, Wrens and Green woodpeckers, but we haven't yet heard any woodpeckers drumming.

On the water, apart from the Swan, the Coots and Moorhens seem to be thriving, but numbers of ducks have dwindled to very few over the past three to four years. If anybody has an explanation as to why that has happened, I should love to hear it.

We released in our garden a very plump hedgehog from a rescue centre. He was getting ready to hibernate and only spent one night in the shelter we provided for him, coming back the next couple of nights only for the food we put out. He must have wandered off into the wooded areas by the Pond and made his own

nest in the leaf litter among the tree roots, just as nature intended.

Last, but not least, a very cheeky squirrel has been amusing us with its attempts to reach bird food in squirrel-proof feeders. It has also amazed us by how close it allows us to get to it before bounding away with a twitch of its tail.



Old Burial Ground Update and Prospects

Contributed by Mike Smith



First of all, a huge thank you to the volunteers who turned out on 19 October last, to rake up the hay *again*, such was the regrowth late summer and autumn. Most of you will remember that the grass in your lawns never stopped growing and you needed to mow right into November/December. Well, the Old Burial Ground was the same, with huge growth which needed to be removed before winter to give the windflowers a decent chance to prosper in the coming spring.

Thankfully we had a record 15 volunteers on the day, so the main task was easy and finished by 3pm, allowing plenty of time to do other jobs in the butterfly area and much of the winter pruning, sowing more wild flower seeds and finishing in good spirits by 4pm. It was particularly rewarding to see a couple of youngsters again in the group; they were a little young to make a major contribution but they seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves and Mum was not too harassed.

So, the OBG goes into 2015 in good shape. The wild flower leaves are already evident so we are hopeful of a good show. We will need to be vigilant to avoid them being swamped by the grasses if we have a warm and wet spring. This experience just confirms the need to treat every year individually and to try our best to manage the maintenance cutting according to that season.

It has also been rewarding to see the health of the new trees, the crab apple and the 'Pink Pagoda' Sorbus, which are now looking established, both bearing a good crop of fruits considering their young age.

The entrance gateway became very muddy before Christmas but we were able to put some wood chippings down, thanks to a supply left us after the last lime tree pollarding. The paths are still very wet and getting a bit muddy due to rainy weather and the popularity of the area, but these will dry out quickly given a spell of dryer weather.

Regrettably we still have probably just one anti-social dog owner who allows his or her dog to leave its trademark dark brown poo. The dog warden is alerted and perhaps one day will succeed in catching the culprit. Meanwhile will all visitors please have a quiet word with anyone seen not doing the right thing. A little friendly advice and guidance is probably all that is needed.

If any of our readers has any suggestions to improve the area, please do let us know. It is *your* facility for you to enjoy – please do feel you can make suggestions, as well as help in the voluntary work, to keep this area as *you* would like it.

Owls and Kestrels

Contributed by Pat Dittner

We bought our field, just under 20 acres at the bottom of Lode Way, in 1988 and have used it primarily for stabling and grazing horses and taking hay. We've tried to encourage wild life, keeping a tall hedge, adding more trees, leaving a wide rough border and, when possible, cutting the hay late to allow the seeds to fall for the ground nesting birds. We took advice from the RSPB who told us we were basically doing the right things, but made a few more suggestions, so that we now have a wider range of nest boxes.

About 10 years ago we installed a Barn Owl box in an open barn where we store machinery, hay and straw. Nothing happened until 2011 when we thought we saw a glimpse of something late one evening, so we checked it out with a night scope and saw an adult Barn Owl in the entrance. We set up a camera opposite the box during the day when all was quiet and were rewarded with hundreds of photographs. The owls did not seem concerned about the presence of the camera or our going in and out of the barn to shift machinery.

We also had daily sightings of them hunting in a systematic way back and forth across the field, and perching on a fence post or gate, waiting until we had gone to fly back to the box.



At first it was difficult to tell how many chicks there were, but as they grew and became bolder, we regularly saw two sitting in the entrance, either alone or with one of the adult birds.



As they started to fledge they flew to and from the various ledges in the barn, often sitting on top of the box, until they were ready to leave.

Sadly the next year, the box was empty. By then we had put another box in a tree at the far end of the field, and there has been another in the barn next door for many years, but the owls did not appear to be using them. We did not see them again until last year, when we had daily sightings of them hunting, but again they did not appear to be using any of the boxes.

But meantime the Kestrels had come. A pair had been nesting in the tall hedge, but two years ago they took over the box.



That year, they raised three chicks which all fledged successfully.

They came back last year and we were able to watch them rather more. They were very active feeding and sometimes seeing off a pair of wood pigeons investigating the box themselves. Again there were three chicks.



One of the differences with the owls was that we often saw all the parents and chicks together, both at night and in the daytime. They would often sit on or around the box whilst we were quite close, only going in when we went in to retrieve machinery.



Then about three weeks before the kestrels left the nest, we saw a barn owl, appearing to eye up the box.

At first it sat on the ledge watching, but after a while, it went to look in the box, and eventually went into it. There appeared to be a flurry of activity in the box, and in the end, the owl was inside and the kestrels outside. This happened several times over the course of three weeks. But each time the owl flew away again, and did not always come back the next night. From the pellets, we thought it might be using the box next door as well.



Despite this the kestrels fledged successfully, and although we kept the camera there for a while, the owl left too. I contacted the Barn Owl Trust who thought it was just investigating a space, but as it kept coming back despite the box being occupied, I found this unusual behaviour and would be interested if anyone has seen this before. We are now waiting with interest to see what happens this spring.



There be Monsters...by Nine Acre Wood!

Contributed by Simon & Oliver Stirrup

Monsters live within walking distance of Aldreth or so we were told when we moved here about eight years ago. Look for them down by Nine Acre Wood in late summer they said. We looked and looked, but never saw one. These monsters are insects, but they are no minibeast. They are Great Green Bush-crickets. Occasionally, we have seen Dark and Speckled Bush-crickets in the house and found them fascinating, which increased our wish to see their big relative.

After a number of failures in previous years, Rob Partridge, the county recorder for Orthoptera, kindly offered to help us. So, on 30 August, in the late afternoon, we headed to the drove alongside Nine Acre Wood where Rob had found 30 calling males a couple of weeks earlier. The ability to hear the high frequency stridulations of some grasshoppers and crickets declines with age, more so with men than women. However, we were armed with a bat detector and had Oliver's six-year-old ears to assist us. Within a minute or so the bat detector had picked up the calls of a Long-winged Conehead grasshopper and a Great Green Bush-cricket. Transformed by the detector, the Great Green Bush-cricket sounded like a heavy

machine gun, but without it, to my middle-aged ears, the sound was weak and tinny. Rob quickly spotted the male bush-cricket sat amongst a tangle of convolvulus where its colour provided excellent camouflage. Despite our expectations it really was surprisingly large and seemed out of place in a Cambridgeshire verge. As we crept closer, it became silent and shuffled behind the stem of a prickly lettuce, rather like a woodpecker hiding behind a tree trunk. At close quarters the bush-cricket looked like a creation from Dr Who, with its outrageously long antennae and strange collection of mouthparts.

This colony, and one near Sutton Gault, are the only ones known from the vice-county of Cambridgeshire. Here the Great Green Bush-cricket is reaching the northern edge of its British range. The habitats preferred by the species are overgrown hedges, bramble and bracken. It is omnivorous and eats a variety of plants and insects. The young bush-crickets (nymphs) emerge in May and June. The adults are present from late July until early winter. The species over-winters as an egg laid in the ground.

We were delighted to see this exciting insect thanks to Rob's assistance and to be able to confirm that there really are monsters living close to Aldreth.



Great Green Bush-cricket

WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham, on the second Tuesday of each month from October to May, but NOT in January, at 8:00 pm.

*Members free. Non-members welcome for a nominal fee.
All welcome to stay for a (free) drink and a chat after each talk.*

10 February

BRITAIN'S HIDDEN MARINE LIFE

We often hear about the sealife in faraway oceans, but what about closer to home?

Frances Dipper shows us what we have around our own shores.

10 March

DRAGONFLIES

Henry Curry (British Dragonfly Society) has photographed dragonflies all over UK and beyond.

The world's most historic and magnificent insect family is truly wonderful.

14 April

EXPLORING ICELAND

Steve Magennis loves the landscape and wildlife of this magical island of fire and ice. Join him.

Preceded by a short AGM.

12 May

FOR THE LOVE OF BUTTERFLIES

Artist and Stamp Designer **Ian Loe** absolutely loves butterflies from all over the world as he will show us tonight. The evening will include some of his artwork and photographs from around his world.

Really not one to be missed, especially if you too are a budding artist.

OTHER EVENTS

Beginning of May (Look out for posters)

CAKE AND PLANT SALE

The annual Haddenham Conservation Society fundraising 'bring and buy' stall – just in time for you to stock up with plants for house and garden, vegetables included. Don't throw away any surplus offshoots from your own garden: bring them to the stall instead; they are sure to make someone happy. Then reward yourselves with one (or several) of our delicious cakes. All proceeds will go towards speakers' fees at the winter talks.

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We shall act on any information provided by readers to rectify the situation.