

KOS News

The Newsletter of the Kent Ornithological Society

Number 517 November 2018



Lapwings by Terry Laws

- News & Announcements ●
- Obituary: Tony Holcombe● A Seawatching Big Day
 - From the Archives●
- Book Review: Birds in Medieval Poetry ●
- Bird Sightings -September and October ●
 - Fifty Years Ago●

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Editorial

It has been a rather odd autumn so far. A reasonable scatter of the expected seasonal rarities such as Yellow-browed Warbler, but rather fewer of others that we might expect. In particular we have seen only a few of that autumn gem of a bird, the Pallas' Warbler. We have not been totally deprived, however. A Radde's warbler near Dover, a couple of that autumn ghost the Ortolan Bunting, including one photographed near Worth, a Pallid Swift which now is almost the default setting for November Apodidae and to crown it all a fine White-billed Diver in possibly the most incongruous location imaginable. We should not complain, not too many of these charismatic birds appear in Summer Plumage and seeing it fulfilled a lifetimes desire. What a bird!!

Unfortunately, it decided to put in an appearance on the day of the KOS conference and it is a reflection on the quality of that event that most people stayed and enjoyed some good talks and excellent food. Thankfully the Diver was still present the following day and for a little while thereafter.

What really strikes me about the autumn so far is the mild weather conditions and general shortage of commoner winter visitors, such as Redwing and fieldfare. My garden has produced an epic crop of Beech mast, the best in more than twenty years and it appears there might be a few Bramblings about to Hoover them up, if the Jays and Great tits do not get there first! The same has been true for wildfowl, my autumn WeBs counts being well below par for recent years.

This issue contains a report on an epic seawatching day earlier in the autumn written on an infectious style by Barry Wright. We also have a new episodic feature 'From the Archives', which I hope many of you will feel able to provide material for inclusion. The book review is one which might challenge some whose interest in birds does not extend beyond field work, but the author is a local KOS member, with an interesting and informative blog linked from our website, well worth a look. I recently had an odd experience in a bird hide 'somewhere in Kent'. As is usual these days there was a potent array of photographic equipment on display, but rather few binoculars or telescopes. Conversation tended to bias towards taking pictures and as it was a quiet day

with variable light conditions, I gathered it was not up to some people's expectations. Even so, I was surprised to see that a man next to me, sans scope, sans bins, but with an impressive telephoto lens, had laid it down on the shelf and was engrossed in playing a game on his mobile phone! It seemed to me that for this individual at least, no photo opportunity meant nothing of interest. I left soon after, puzzled and a little disappointed. There is so much more to birds, birding and ornithology than getting hung up on ID or amassing a portfolio of epic photographs, I would encourage everyone to widen their horizons in some way this winter.

Good Birding
Norman



News and announcements

English Winter Bird Survey (EWBS) – A new BTO Survey



By Norman McCanch

A new survey is being launched this winter which aims to evaluate how food resources in winter affect birds in lowland farmland, organised in partnership with Natural England and Defra. The structure and methodology of the survey closely follows that of the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and is to be conducted in the same squares. The survey differs from the BBS in that it includes Brown Hare as well as birds and requires habitat details to be recorded on each visit.

A maximum of four visits are required, one per month, from December 2018 – March 2019. It is possible to do just two visits which should be between January and March. Although the main focus of the survey is lowland farmland in England, the BTO welcome volunteers to take up squares that contain all other habitats.

Full details of the survey including links to survey instructions, recording forms etc. can be found on the BTO website at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/english-winter-bird-survey>

Please note that those who do the BBS survey can go online now at BBS online and “self-allocate” (request to survey) their square by simply ticking the box next to it. From mid-November it will be possible for others to select those squares for the EWBS, but this will not replace the nominate volunteer as the BBS surveyor.

For Kent this survey will be administered directly by the BTO and further details or subsequent problems will be dealt with by the EWBS survey organisers: David Norfolk and Greg Conway - email: winterbirds@bto.org

Murray Orchard

BTO Tawny Owl Point and Calling Surveys



By Norman McCanch

The above surveys form part of the BTO Project Owl (see <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl>) and are on-line surveys, although paper recording forms can be downloaded or requested.

The Point Survey required volunteers to listen for Tawny Owls in a total of 81 priority tetrads within a selected number of 10km squares in Kent: TQ73, TQ76, TR03, TR06 and TR36. An excellent 94% of the priority tetrads were allocated to volunteers and it is hoped that data was submitted for most or all of these. Many thanks to those who volunteered.

It is hoped that the survey will be repeated next spring in February – March and that the same volunteers will again participate. Full details will appear on the BTO website at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-point-survey>.

The Calling Survey is ongoing and the BTO are hoping to enlist 10,000 volunteers. So far over 7,500 people have taken part. The survey requires volunteers to listen for Tawny Owls from their garden (or other easily accessed location) on one occasion each week from September 30th 2018 to March 31st 2019 for 20 minutes between sunset and midnight, or as many weeks as you are able to listen. Full details of the survey can be found on the BTO website at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-calling-survey>.

Murray Orchard



The North Kent Marshes regularly support more than one hundred thousand waterbirds, - ducks, geese and waders which breed in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Europe, Asia and North America and join our local breeding waders and ducks in the winter. Think of the Avocets at Cliffe, the Black-tailed Godwits at Oare, the Brent Geese on the Medway. We want your help to conserve these birds.

Each month around forty volunteer birders visit the North Kent estuaries to count these birds as part of the international Wetland Bird Survey, known as WeBS. These counts are the principle way in which the waterbirds are monitored and without them we cannot respond to threats to wildlife. The objectors to the solar park at Graveney were able to use WeBS counts to emphasise the importance of the farmland for internationally important numbers of Brent Geese. Counts of wader roosts at Coombe Bay and Yantlett Creek enabled Natural England to recommend diverting the coastal footpath from stretches of shoreline which would result in regular disturbance of important wader roosts.

We would like more counters to continue this work. Each of the estuaries is divided into discrete sectors and are counted once a month from September to March. The count dates are set by the national WeBS team. The Medway and Thames are counted on a Sunday, the Swale on a Monday. WeBS counts can be interesting and fun, the counts usually take between three and four hours around high tide and give you a chance to get to know a patch and see the changes through the seasons and across the years.

If you are interested, please contact the local organiser for the estuary which is most convenient for you. We want to know the numbers of the common waders and waterfowl and trends from year to year, so it does not matter if you cannot pick out the latest American wader. We work as a team so it is ok if you cannot commit to seven or nine counts a year, few of us can. If you are uncertain contact us anyway and we will arrange for you to join a regular volunteer for a taster count.

Please contact your local organiser:

Thames Estuary: Murray Orchard Murray.orchard@live.co.uk

The Medway Bob Knight.: Rjknight53@gmail.com

The Swale Brian Watmough: brianrwat@yahoo.co.uk

For more information on WeBS visit <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs> . If you drill down, you will find a lot of detailed information on waterbirds on our estuaries.

For tips on counting birds visit http://www.sibleybirds.com/w/index.php?title=Estimating_numbers

Murray Orchard, Bob Knight, Alan Fossey, Brian Watmough
November 2018

KOS Conference 3rd November University of Kent

This was an excellent day commendably organised by Chris Roome and Brian Watmough. A new venue far exceeded most expectations, with good facilities and excellent catering. A range of inspiring speakers, one to two hiccups with technology and plenty of opportunity to catch up with old friends made it a day to remember. Well done all involved!

Kent Breeding Bird Atlas

We still have a modest stock of this useful publication which was well received on its release a couple of years ago. If you do not yet own a copy there will shortly be an opportunity to purchase some of the remainder of the stock at a reduced price. Keep an eye on the KOS web site for further details

Editorial and Records sub-committee

The KOS Editorial & Records Committee would like to hear from any individuals within the membership that would like to join the county rarity panel. Contact Barry Wright or Alan Fossey, (details above)

We like to keep in touch with all our members, so if you change address, email address or phone numbers please remember to inform our membership secretary, Chris Roome. He can be contacted on:

Chris Roome, Rowland House, Station Rd., Staplehurst TN12 0PY

Tel: 01580 891686 e-mail: chrisroome105@icloud.com

Obituary

Anthony John (Tony) Holcombe



It is with some sadness that I report the passing of Tony Holcombe at the end of September at the age of eighty-three, after a period of illness. He was such a feature of birding in the South East, but particularly as a regular visitor to Dungeness and Rye harbour. Tony was a true gentleman, clever but modest, an accomplished linguist, he loved music and playing keyboard instruments, including the organ and, of course, was well known for his love of all wildlife. Tony was best known to most as a keen and knowledgeable birder, in fact a world birder and traveller. Of the 10,000 species in the world today, Tony has set eyes on over 5,000 of them. But he was also a naturalist. He loved plants, moths, butterflies, insects indeed everything under the sun. His botanical knowledge was exceptional and he kept lists of absolutely anything and everything he had ever seen, including the dates he first saw them.

I had known him since 1965, when I had the great good fortune to have him as my first Biology teacher at Purley Grammar school. He took my enthusiasm for nature and channelled it through the Natural History Society he ran and expanded my horizons from mostly birds to all of nature. Through trips organised by him I made my first ever visits to Stodmarsh, Cliffe, Northward hill and Sheppey. He was the most accessible and humorous of teachers and when I became a biology teacher thirty-three years later, I kept the memory of his teaching style as my model. Over the years we met up from time to time, but rarely often enough, sometimes in the field at Dunge, occasionally at one of the epic lectures he gave, illustrated with Brenda's excellent photographs. I recall her telling me how he was known as 'Hawkeye' among friends, but that she had re-christened him "The Spectacled Tyrant" after a particular avian denizen of South America. He bore that with typical humour.

I was astonished to find details of his earlier life which I had never known. A scholarship to Cambridge to study languages (hardly surprising for such a consummate linguist), followed by National Service in the Royal Navy, where as a Russian interpreter, he achieved the rank of Lieutenant Commander! He was later awarded a decoration for his services to the RNR. After a range of teaching posts in the South-east of England and Scotland he became a feature of Tonbridge School, when his skills as a promoter of Natural History were exploited to the full, producing a series of students who went on to work in conservation globally. Subsequently, he was able to mix his teaching career and his love of natural history when Lawrence Holloway set up one of the very first tour companies for naturalists called Ornitholidays. From then on, Tony taught part-time at Tonbridge School when not leading tours abroad.

Tony and Brenda were regular contributors of records to the KOS (and other societies) for many years. We extend our condolences to Brenda, but I was delighted to hear from her that she had made the trip to see the Margate

White-billed Diver in the days following his funeral, and she was pleased to have watched it through Tony's binoculars. I am sure that somewhere Tony was pleased, too!

Norman McCanch



Articles

A Seawatching Big Day

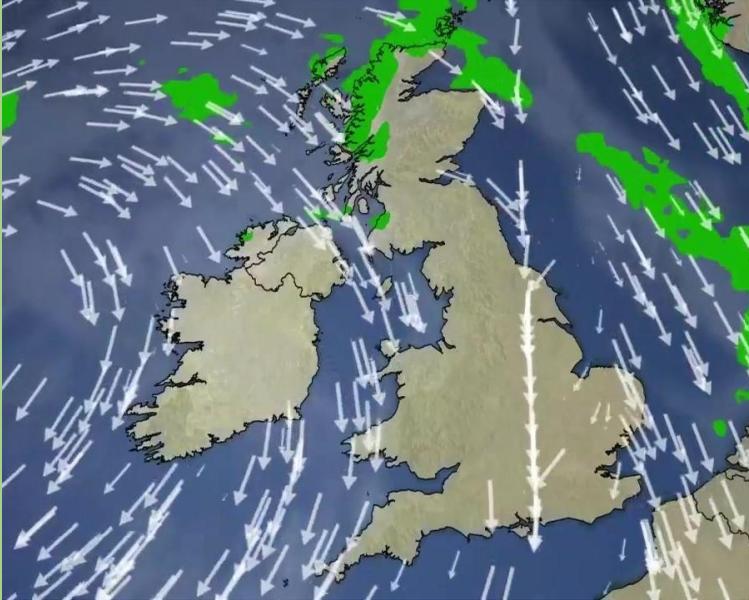
Predicting weather patterns is often fraught with danger and disappointment. Couple this with the hopes of seeing seabirds off the Kent coast on a weekend when most of us are actually not working is a real rarity in itself. Fortunately as the days passed early in the week the weather was still looking good for Sunday 23rd September 2018 and, sure enough, late on Saturday 22nd it was quite clear that many were poised and ready for operation North Kent coast.



Bonxie by Simon Mitchell

I woke up a little late on the 23rd but an early tweet from Dominic Mitchell forwarded on by Howard Vaughan indicated that Oare at dawn there were Great Skuas or Bonxies as I'll now refer to them as, the Shetland term. Knowing that others would be already in situ at various localities from North Foreland to the Thames Estuary I thought I'd better get my act together and don my waterproofs. Just before I left the house looking outside it was dead calm so I phoned Mark Chidwick to ask him if it was windy outside as I knew he'd be out. The reply was pretty blunt and indicated it was indeed very windy and raining heavily the predictions were coming true and I needed to be on the coast soon.

I opted to drive straight to Shellness on Sheppey as I knew it would potentially be a good place to position myself and there was the added advantage that I might find shelter.



Weather pattern for the weekend

Once on Sheppey I was able to witness the wind being actually very strong and it was raining heavily. The roads were deserted, the drive down the road past Muswell manor and onto the horrendous potholed Shellness track was certainly memorable. Every time I drove through a big pothole the water would be whipped up by the wind and over the bonnet of the car, more akin to a boat and bough waves. Once at the car park or should I say, 'temporary lake' I quickly got out of the car and jogged down to the shelter of the hamlet wall. The weather was truly horrible but at the same time just what we all wanted in autumn, you can forget your Indian summers, many birders pray for storms, heavy rain and seabirds.

In position out of the wind and rain glued firmly to the hamlet wall I scanned out into the Swale and sure enough, not a single bird anywhere to be seen, here we go again I thought, same old story, the seabirds have missed Kent and me again. My initial disappointment was lifted when I scanned across in the murk to the south shore of the Swale and just about see some vague distant dark shapes that I believed most likely Bonxies.

Messages coming through from Oare and Grenham Bay, indicated seabirds were moving but mainly Bonxies and Gannets, both in good numbers. Another

scan from across the Swale and I saw Manx Shearwaters then shortly after Sooty Shearwaters but other distant shapes were much closer to the south shore. New tactics were in order so I decamped and literally ran in the rain to the blockhouse where I spent the remainder of the day till mid-afternoon.



The Blockhouse, Shellness by Barry Wright

Once in position comfort levels were restored as I could now stand up, drink copious amounts of tea relaxed in the knowledge that I would remain dry, warm, sheltered from the wind and see birds if they passed. Messages constantly updated by other people along the coast indicated most birds were moving westwards hugging the coast and in turn 'should' enter the Swale. One of the advantages of watching from Shellness is that birds often fly close by and secondly you often get two bites at the cherry as birds enter the Swale then exit again later. A major disadvantage is that ideally one needs an all-terrain vehicle at times to drive down the track as well as getting in position requires braving the elements and an often flooded path.

Oare has the advantage of a Hide to overlook the Swale thereby staying warm, dry and as more observers try to squeeze in, veritably tuna tin like... equally birds often fly in and out of the Swale and with the wind the views obtained were spectacular as birds cut in very close to the Hide. Other localities favoured on the day (and other days) for sea watching are Seasalter yacht club, Warden point, Grain foreshore, Lower Hope point at Cliffe, a series of often well used, old and salubrious shelters at Tankerton, Grenham Bay and Palm Bay on Thanet complete with empty beer cans and cigarette butts. The places chosen often reflect geographically where birders live or historical they've had good luck before, in fact one birder, Andy Taylor has the advantage of being able to wash the dishes and watch seabirds from the comfort of his home at Tankerton. The other site I've yet to mention is of

course the towers at Reculver a well-used location that has the advantage of some shelter from the wind and rain, plenty of parking nearby, now pay and display whilst at high tide as with most sites the views of the birds are very close indeed.

At Shellness I was now joined by Danny Chesterman and Gary Howard, whilst others remained in position at their chosen watch points. Viewing from Shellness in a strong North Westerly results in the birds flying into the wind and being pushed into the Swale mostly following the south shore therefore closer to the observers at Oare. Further east where most other observers were, the birds were moving at times very close to the shore thus aiding with identification of the Skuas especially. Seawatching is by no means always straightforward, as observers often don't get a second chance at identification with individual birds seen for a limited time as they rapidly fly past. Another issue with seawatching is how the light can change an individual's perception of plumage tones with pale birds appearing dark in some lights and bleached out almost white in other lights. I indicated that birds being close often help with Skuas identification yet strangely enough distant Skuas or indeed Shearwaters when seen more distantly are actually easier to identify based on apparent size and structure.

As I was no longer Billy no mates at Shellness having other observers present watching seabirds can lead to lots of discussion, changes of opinion, frustration at not getting onto birds called out but ultimately helps pass the time away and second, third opinions help with identification.



Pomarine Skua by Dominic Mitchell

Establishing now that the birds were following distinct routes into and out of the Swale it became easier to pick out birds as they passed by. It would be difficult to give exact numbers of seabirds passing the North Kent coast that day but all four Skua species were recorded, Bonxies, Arctic, Pomarine and

Long-tailed Skuas in that order of magnitude. Gulls wise, a few Kittiwakes were moving plus two adult Sabine's Gull, Sooty and Manx Shearwater, a few Leach's Petrel, plenty of Gannet, Sandwich Terns, a Short-eared Owl migrating to Shellness point, Common Scoters and a few Wigeon. The Shearwaters were recorded at many localities along the North Kent coast, some Manx affording spectacular close views almost coming overland whilst the Sooty Shearwaters remained in the Swale flying back and forth for over an hour whilst some were seen close past Reculver and Tankerton.



Leach's Petrel by Terry Laws

The Skuas still seemed to be hugging the south shoreline but after the early large numbers of Bonxie in the morning some flocks numbering forty plus birds many were coming into the Swale very high up maybe several hundred metres above the water. Pomarine Skuas pretty much all adults at this time of year many still retaining the long characteristic adult tail spoons were literally almost flying over the Hide at times at Oare whilst at Shellness birds were a little more distant but one particular group of five birds was still sitting offshore when we left. Looking south east from the blockhouse we tracked one flock of Skuas which we realised comprised five adult Pomarine, an Arctic Skua and a diminutive Long-tailed Skua. This particular flock initially was quite low over the Swale but then gained height and we lost them really high up looking south way over Graveney Marshes. Overland Skua passage is not uncommon and presumably accounts for those Skuas that find themselves well inland on reservoirs, rivers and sometimes fields.



Long-tailed Skua by Simon Mitchell

Long-tailed Skua is the jewel of the Skuas and almost expected in autumn if winds are right but is also often very tricky to identify yet current literature has aided greatly as has the advent of digital photography allowing clinching features to be seen. The long-taileds tend to be juveniles whilst Arctic Skuas were adults and juveniles, with juvenile Pomarines extremely rare at this time of year.

The late great Dave Davenport was a migration and seabird obsessive who established some of the migratory routes of Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas long ago and his jovial and knowledgeable presence are still greatly missed. I recall Dave once seawatching off Dungeness and proclaiming in his deep voice that he had an Arctic Skua that proceeded to take a fish off of a Sandwich Tern, needless to say the rest of us with him couldn't even see the Skua let alone the attack on the Tern.

Other observers including Dick Elvy now often watch off Shellness but Dave's absence on this day made us realise just how good he was at predicting seabird movements almost to the hour.

Leach's petrels seen off Shellness were very distant and mid channel in the Swale yet remained in the area flying back and forth for thirty minutes or so whilst the views off Reculver were much closer. The Sables Gulls both adults flew into the Swale one past the wader roost at Shellness and onwards to Oare



Sabines Gull by Alan Fossey

Looking at the day's sightings, four species of Skua were recorded off Grain, Oare, Shellness, Tankerton, Reculver, Grenham and Palm Bay possibly involving up to three individuals, though we'll never know for certain as some birds may cut in from further out at sea before heading towards the coastline whilst Arctic Skuas were in good numbers, I think seventy off of Palm, Walpole Bay was the highest. Pomarines came through in small groups with large numbers recorded off Reculver to Oare. Bonxie is the really difficult one to estimate but it's conceivable that up to five hundred were seen past the coast, a truly remarkable number. Simon Mitchell was at Oare that day along with Dominic Mitchell and others, and have fantastic photos.



Manx Shearwater by Simon Mitchell

The Margate area watchers had the lion's share of the Shearwaters with thirty seven Sooty and forty five Manx seen. Duck numbers were generally low with a few Eider, Wigeon and Arctic Terns featured amongst the movement with a few LittleGulls.

There were few records of displaced seabirds at sites inland, though following this article is a short note from Dave da Silva, detailing one of these.

As is often the case the next day was much quieter as the weather had changed, a few Skuas were still in the Swale but as a rule it tends to happen mostly on one day, the combination of north west winds, heavy overnight and early morning rain, poor visibility and the birds are pushed in from the North Sea close to the Kent shoreline. The low cloud cover accounted for some birds going up River as far as Rainham in Essex as they evidently got disorientated and unable to see extensive open water. As we finished up along the coast it was brilliant sunshine very little wind and the seabirds stopped bar a few Skuas relaxing in the Swale. The double blow of strong winds in quick succession, high tide and birds following deep water channels account for the exact route the birds tend to take hence the choice of location that individual chose to watch from.

It was a fantastic day that all those present will fondly remember and I hope the photos attest to the superb views that some of us were getting of these seabirds. I don't ever recall seeing all four species of Skua in one scope field of view. The Skuas this particular day rarely harassed Terns, though the odd Arctic would make rapid chase of the Sandwich Terns, most of them simply ploughed along over the sea hardly deviating their path.

This is by no means a comprehensive account of the day or all the reasons as to why this was a particularly good day. It's just a quick resume of events and I'm grateful to many that helped me out with information, thanks to all of you, I won't list names as I may inadvertently miss someone out, cheers to all

Barry Wright

Inland Skua sightings

As the amazing reports of skuas and other seabirds from the Swale and north Kent coast rolled in that weekend I grew increasingly frustrated as I knew needed to be in Tonbridge. However, with some birds reported heading high and west out of the Swale, and being aware of past overland skua records, I wondered if the Medway, running SW from the Thames estuary, might help direct the birds in that direction.

I only had a couple of hours free late on that Sunday afternoon but managed to get to a view point on my local patch along the Medway, slightly east of the town. After two hours and at approx. 6.15pm and with evening drawing in I'd seen nothing of note and was walking back to my car when I was suddenly surprised by eight all dark "gulls" crossing my line of vision about 40 metres up and 200 metres away. After a second or two of incomprehension I got them in view but they quickly swept away into the sun, flying strongly westwards towards the centre of town. They were clearly large skuas, deep chested, and with a suggestion of wing flashes and I even saw a dark cap on one bird but no more detail. I called birder Martin Garwood in the town in the hope that he might see them but he was not around. I also wondered, rather forlornly, if they might have been seen at BB Reservoir but nothing was reported. I assume, given the number of Bonxies in the Swale, that they were probably this species. So, although frustratingly, I was left with "skua sp" on my patch I did at least feel vindicated that the Medway route had acted as a "flyway" on this occasion.

Dave da Silva

From the Archives

When I began birding in the 1960's camera equipment was "antiquated" and mobile phones and computers had still had to be invented and so up until the 1990's virtually all rarity descriptions sent to the KOS or the British Birds Rarities Committee were either entirely written or typed and if illustrated contained drawings or paintings of varying quality depending on the skill of the observer/artist.

Within the archive of the KOS there are many historic records that contain interesting descriptions and illustrations such as this one I produced of the Arctic Warbler found in Bishopstone Glen in October 1996.

FIRST WINTER ARCTIC WARBLER SEEN AT
BISHOPSTONE GLEN ON 2ND OCTOBER 1996

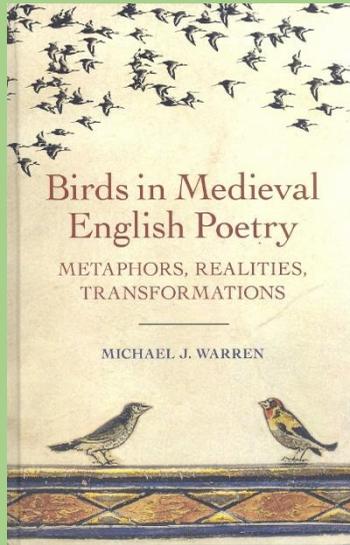


This bird was seen moving very actively through the foliage of trees and bushes, feeding. It had a very powerful appearance for a phylloscopus and seemed to move through the leaves, pushing them aside as it went. General impressions were of a stout-billed, large phylloscopus warbler, its size being enhanced by its somewhat pot-bellied appearance. It did not call, but other observers said it had a distinctive, metallic, robin-like 'tzick.'

Chris Hindle

Review:

Birds in Medieval Poetry by Michael J. Warren
D.S.Brewer, Cambridge (2018) ISBN: 978 1 84384 508 9



This is an intriguing and challenging book.

In the modern age we rather take for granted access to historical records of birds in our county or country through a long tradition of regional avifauna's, stretching back to the earliest such, A Natural History of Oxfordshire, by Dr Robert Plot, published in 1677.

I cannot quite remember when I became aware of birds as a feature of the medieval landscape, but it is likely that as a schoolboy the Shakespearean quote in Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom triggered my interest. My interest grew when I found James Fisher's 'Shell Bird Book', which effectively put birds into a wider historical context and drew my attention to the early poem '*The Seafarer*'. As a refugee from South Wales deposited in an English Grammar School with a strong accent and blessed with a Polish Latin teacher, I struggled with languages and my curiosity about medieval birds developed through my interest in drawing, bringing me to focus on the images of birds illuminated manuscripts



Wuducocc by John Siferwas, Sherborne Missal (early 15th century)

It has been said that “*people [in medieval times] knew little about birds and cared even less*”. This fails to recognise that images and text surviving from the period were the prerogative of only a small proportion of the population, most of which still lived in an oral tradition of storytelling. And yet, some of the images show acute observation of many species and, although none of the text purports to be a field guide or species monograph, we can find evidence that birds were familiar and, to the limits of prevailing knowledge, understood.

So where does Michael Warren’s book fit into this area of scholarship? He takes us through five examples of poetry from the period, from *‘The Seafarer’* and *Exeter Book riddles* (late tenth century) to Chaucer’s *‘Parliament of Foules’* (late fourteenth century), providing both the original text and his translation. Here we find a significant advance in this area of study; much of what has previously been translated by scholars and linguists about both images and text leaves me uneasy, with the sense that they were not, in our terms, birders and as a consequence made some optimistic and even incorrect identifications

Michael Warren is both a scholar of medieval literature and a birder in the best of the modern sense of the term. He reveals how one of the Exeter Book Riddles provides a clear and strikingly accurate description of the nesting of the Cuckoo and includes examples of the use of birds in local Anglo-Saxon place names (such as: *on masen mere* ‘to the tit-mouse’s pond’). There are many other examples which confirm the view that birds were both familiar and understood through the ages. However, central to this work is an investigation of birds as metaphors and to me this reinforces the view that birds were central to Anglo Saxon experience, as a metaphor only works if the context is familiar to all.



Vueldevarde by John Siferwas , Sherborne Missal (early 15th century)

This is an academic work, replete with footnotes and bibliography and a useful glossary of Old and Middle English bird names. As such it is challenging for those like me with only a rudimentary grasp of Anglo Saxon, but I found myself turning to other texts from my library (and even the internet) to support my reading and enhance my understanding. It was absorbing, thought-provoking and informative. It inspired me to look out my old notes and even to start reading the original text again and enjoy the revelation of speaking some of these ancient lines aloud. In doing that, I found that the Anglo Saxons are not so far away after all!

Norman McCanch

KENT BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2018 - Chris Hindle

Where necessary the acceptance of records within this report is subject to ratification by the "British Birds" Rarities Committee (species in capital letters) or the KOS Rarities Committee. The results of their deliberations are regularly published on the KOS Website.

Species that fall into these categories and therefore need descriptions can be found in the list at the end of the Kent Bird Report.

WEATHER

	Shellness	Oare Marsh	Tankerton	Reculver	Grenham Bay	Walpole Bay	Forenes
Sooty Shearwater	9	1	6	28	15	37	37
Manx Shearwater	6	4	12	30	35		45
Leach's Petrel	2		1	4			
Great Skua	94	450	208	168	71	150	165
Arctic Skua	26	175	35	64	20	70	82
Pomarine Skua	10	15	2	9	3	2	2
Long-tailed Skua	2		1		2	1	3
Sabine's Gull	1	2		1	1		

Seabird movement during heavy rain and strong northerly wind on the north Kent coast on 23rd September

(These birds are not included in the main text)

The start of **September** was fine and warm and this continued to mid month after which there was a particularly windy spell with a succession of active depressions moving through. The last week was anticyclonic with settled autumnal weather. The monthly rainfall at Bishopstone was 40.25mm but 22.5mm of this fell on 23rd when there was a northerly gale prompting an excellent passage of seabirds on the north Kent coast.

October began with high pressure with the second week being unseasonably warm due to southerly winds but Storm Callum brought wet and windy weather on 12th. After another relatively settled spell with high pressure a northerly outbreak on 26th and 27th resulted in a cold end to the month.

WILDFOWL

The first ten **Dark-bellied Brent Geese** of the autumn flew past Oare Marshes on Sept 14th whilst there was a record autumn count at DBO of 6,200 on Oct 18th.

There were five **Pink-footed Geese** at Worth on Oct 7th whilst the first two **Russian White-fronted Geese** were recorded from Scotney on Oct 23rd and there were 17 at Sandwich Bay on 28th.

During September and October up to 91 **Egyptian Geese** were recorded from Bough Beech with as many as 12 at Sevenoaks WR, Penshurst Estate, Oare Marshes and Dungeness RSPB and there were up to 22 **Mandarins** seen at Furnace Pond, Sandwich Bay, Bough Beech and Pittswood.

In the autumn up to seven **Garganey** were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Grove Ferry, Romney Marsh and Sandwich Bay with the last bird at Dungeness RSPB on Oct 20th.

A juvenile **Red-crested Pochard** was recorded from Grove Ferry on Sept 7th and another juvenile was seen at Milton Creek on Oct 20th with two there on 24th.

Five **Velvet Scoter** were seen at Swalecliffe and later reported from Reculver on Sept 24th after this up to eight birds were recorded at Seasalter, Reculver, Deal, Ramsgate, Foreness, Oare Marshes, Grenham Bay, Pegwell Bay, Swalecliffe and DBO.

A **Long-tailed Duck** was seen off DBO on Oct 29th.

The first three returning **Goosanders** were recorded at Bough Beech on Sept 28th and then during October one or two birds were seen at Dungeness RSPB, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay and Pegwell Bay.

PARTRIDGE TO GREBES

The first **Black-throated Diver** of the autumn flew past Cliftonville on Sept 21st and subsequently single birds were reported from DBO, Reculver, North Foreland and Bockhill whilst the first **Great Northern Diver** of the autumn was seen at DBO on Oct 5th with another at Shellness on 27th.

After the large movement of seabirds on Sept 23rd a **Leach's Petrel** flew past Minnis Bay the next day and other birds were seen at Sandwich Bay and Reculver on 28th. In October birds were reported from Gravesend on 10th and 23rd whilst on Oct 28th and 29th with a strong NE wind blowing in showers up to

five birds were seen at Reculver, Oare Marshes, Shellness, Seasalter, North Foreland, Foreness, Herne Bay and Swalecliffe.

Two **Cory's Shearwaters** were seen at Shellness on Oct 26th with one reported off Foreness the next day.

Single **Sooty Shearwaters** flew past DBO on Sept 11th, 16th and 20th and Oct 4th with five flying past on Oct 11th and single birds reported from Shellness on Oct 26th, 27th and 29th with one at Grenham Bay on the latter date.

Single **Manx Shearwaters** were seen at DBO on Sept 10th, 11th and 16th and on Oct 4th and 5th. One or two were also seen at Shellness on Sept 12th and at Lower Hope Point, Birchington, Swalecliffe and Reculver on Sept 28th. In October single birds were recorded at Sandwich Bay on 7th and Swalecliffe on 24th.

Three **Balearic Shearwaters** flew past DBO on Sept 11th and 19th with two on 18th and ten on 20th.

A tatty **White Stork** probably from a Spanish reintroduction scheme wandered around Kent during September and was reported flying over Dover on 7th, at Dartford and Ebbsfleet on 10th, Sevenoaks WR on 11th, 15th and 16th, at Worth Marshes on 14th, Sandwich on 23rd and Chillenden on 25th.



Spoonbill by Peter Maton

During the autumn up to five **Spoonbills** were recorded from Dungeness, Pegwell Bay, Grove Ferry, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Swalecliffe, Seasalter, Cliffe Pools and Capel Fleet. In addition, on Sept 13th, eight juveniles flew S over Dungeness RSPB with seven still present the next day and five on 22nd and 23rd.

During the autumn single **Bitterns** were seen at Grove Ferry and Dungeness RSPB.

Up to nine of the group of 13 **Cattle Egrets** seen at Dungeness RSPB at the end of August were still there on Oct 31st. There were also seven at Elmley on Sept 15th which were still present on Oct 31st. In addition, a flock of 20 with one Little Egret, were videoed flying past Westcliff, Ramsgate on Oct 20th. Two were also reported flying N at Dartford Marshes on Oct 23rd.

During the autumn up to 23 **Great White Egrets** were recorded from Dungeness RSPB with up to seven at Capel Fleet, Lade, Grove Ferry, Pegwell Bay, Walmer Beach, Reculver, Bough Beech, North Foreland, Luddenham, Swale NNR, Foreness, Cliffe Pools, Halstow Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Uplees, Bough Beech, Kennington and Brookland. On Oct 8th not only the 23 birds were recorded at Dungeness RSPB but another group of nine also flew in off the sea.



Shag by Mark Chidwick

During the autumn one or two **Shags** were recorded at Dover Harbour, Reculver, North Foreland, Sandwich Bay, Bockhill and Samphire Hoe.

A **Slavonian Grebe** was reported from Dungeness RSPB on Oct 13th and one or two **Black-necked Grebes** were recorded from Lade, DBO, Grenham Bay and Dungeness RSPB.

BIRDS OF PREY

During September and October single **Ospreys** were seen at DBO, Conyer, Abbotscliffe, Uplees, Hoo, Shellness, Oare Marshes, Marden, Bough Beech, Boughton Monchelsea, Harty, Reculver, Horsmonden and Dover.

In September one or two **Honey Buzzards** were reported from Gillingham, Galloways, Pegwell Bay, Seasalter, Hythe, Hildenborough, Higham and Sandwich Bay.

A ring-tailed **Hen Harrier** was identified at Elmley on Oct 4th and single males were seen at Swale NNR on Oct 8th, Oare Marshes on 16th, 17th and 25th, Uplees Marshes on 21st and Grove Ferry on 22nd with a ring-tail at Reculver on 19th, 21st, 26th and 29th. A male and ring-tail were at Grove Ferry and a young male was at Bockhill on Oct 23rd and there were ring-tails at Harty Marshes on 25th and DBO on 29th. On Oct 31st ring-tails were recorded from Sandwich Bay, Shellness, Elmley and Stodmarsh and a male was seen at Dartford Marshes.

A juvenile **Montagu's Harrier** was reported flying SW at Bough Beech on Sept 6th.

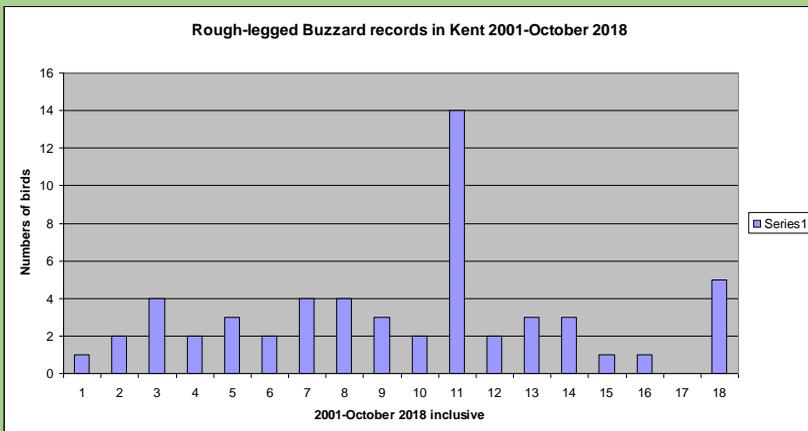
During the autumn up to seven **Red Kites** were recorded from Graveney, Edenbridge, Sundridge, Birling, Bough Beech and Higham.



Rough-legged Buzzard by Alex Perry

There was an arrival of **Rough-legged Buzzards** at the end of October when juveniles were identified flying NW over Cliftonville on 22nd, flying in off the sea at Reculver on 28th, at Dungeness RSPB on 30th, at Dartford Marshes on 30th and 31st and at Grove Ferry also on 31st.

This is the first major influx since 2011 when 14 were recorded in the County. These influxes occur as their numbers rise and fall with vole and lemming cycles in their Scandinavian breeding range. It remains to be seen how many more birds will be recorded during the rest of 2018 and into 2019.



RAILS TO WADERS

The **Spotted Crake** first seen at Grove Ferry in August was still there on Sept 23rd and another found at Oare Marshes on Sept 15th was seen again from Oct 8th to 19th.

A **Stone-curlew** was seen from Cliffe on Oct 7th and a **Kentish Plover** was reported from Dungeness RSPB on Sept 14th.

An **American Golden Plover** identified at Oare Marshes on Oct 23rd remained there until 25th and is the sixth record of this species in the County.

During September single **Dotterel** were recorded from St Margaret's-at-Cliffe on 1st Dungeness RSPB on 2nd and Pegwell Bay on 13th.

During September as many as five **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen at Oare Marshes, Cliffe Pools, Elmley, Dungeness RSPB and Pegwell Bay. A late bird was also reported from Oare Marshes on Oct 11th.

After the first **Purple Sandpiper** of the autumn was recorded at Reculver on Sept 12th up to three birds were seen at Herne Bay, Dover Harbour, Foreness and Swalecliffe.

During September as many as four **Little Stints** were recorded from Oare Marshes and Pegwell Bay whilst one was seen at Oare Marshes on Oct 31st.

A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was identified at Scotney GPs from Sept 25th-Oct 2nd and a **Pectoral Sandpiper** was found at Dungeness RSPB on Sept 8th and remained there until 13th with it or another also seen between 22nd and 28th.



Grey Phalarope by Chris Bond

A **Grey Phalarope** was seen on the sea off the fishing boats at DBO from Sept 20th-26th and another was seen at Bough Beech from Sept 22nd-Oct 5th and in addition one flew W at Birchington on Sept 28th.

During September one or two **Wood Sandpipers** were seen on Worth Marshes, Waterbrook, Bough Beech and Willesborough.

A **Jack Snipe** was discovered at Bough Beech on Sept 30th and during October up to three were recorded at Sandwich Bay, Oare Marshes, Chamber's Wall and Beachborough Park.

During the autumn as many as six **Spotted Redshank** were seen at Sandwich Bay, Worth Marshes, Cliffe Pools, Conyer, Dungeness RSPB, Murston, Riverside CP and Oare Marshes, but on Sept 27th there were 20 reported from Motney Hill.

AUKS TO GULLS

An adult **Sabine's Gull** was reported from Grenham Bay on Oct 28th and a juvenile was off Reculver on 29th.



Little Gull by Mark Chidwick

In the autumn up to 11 **Little Gulls** were identified at Ramsgate Harbour, Palm Bay, Shellness, Oare Marshes, Swalecliffe, Pegwell Bay and DBO whilst on October 28th and 29th with a strong NE wind blowing up to 82 birds were recorded from the north Kent coast at Oare Marshes, Tankerton, Swalecliffe, Reculver, Grenham Bay, Herne Bay and Folkestone.

There was a record count of 1,900 **Mediterranean Gulls** at DBO on Oct 18th, but this was surpassed when 2,050 were seen on 20th and a **Glaucous Gull** was reported from the fishing boats on Oct 13th.

During September and October one or two **Caspian Gulls** were identified at DBO and single **Yellow-legged Gulls** were seen at DBO, Reculver, Pegwell Bay, Egypt Bay and Oare Marshes.

A juvenile **Roseate Tern** was reported from DBO on Sept 20th.

In September up to 67 **Black Terns** were counted at DBO with up to 14 at Dungeness RSPB, Oare Marshes, Shellness, Ramsgate, Walmer, Tankerton, Luddenham, Sevenoaks WR, Lower Hope Point, Reculver, Pegwell Bay,

Gravesend and Bough Beech. In October two birds were reported from Shellness on 2nd with one on 29th which was also seen at Oare Marshes on 31st.



Arctic Skua and Sandwich Tern by Barry Wright

Up to 44 **Arctic Skuas** were recorded at DBO, Sandwich Bay, Reculver, Shellness, Grenham Bay, Bockhill, Hythe, Cliffe, Oare Marshes, Tankerton and Swalecliffe.

In addition to those birds seen on Sept 23rd a **Long-tailed Skua** was reported from Palm Bay on Oct 7th.

The first **Pomarine Skua** of the autumn was seen at DBO on Sept 5th whilst an adult flew past there on Sept 15th. Following the large seabird movement on the north coast on Sept 23rd during the rest of the month and into October up to eight birds were seen at DBO, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay, Herne Bay, Grenham Bay, Lower Hope Point, Herne Bay, Seasalter, Leysdown, Shellness and Reculver. There were however 25 birds reported from Shellness on Oct 27th.

During the autumn up to 18 **Great Skuas** were seen at DBO, Shellness, Foreness, North Foreland, Grenham Bay, Graveney, Tankerton, Herne Bay, Sandwich Bay, Reculver and Swalecliffe.



Little Auk by Alex Perry

A **Little Auk** flew past Botany Bay on Oct 27th whilst on 28th, 29th and 30th with a strong northerly wind blowing up to three were recorded at Foreness, Reculver, Tankerton, Herne Bay, Oare Marshes and Grenham Bay.

DOVES TO RING-NECKED PARAKEET

A late **Turtle Dove** was seen at Pegwell Bay on Oct 22nd.



Turtle Dove by Barry Wright

The **Long-eared Owl** first seen at Sandwich Bay at the end of August was still present on Sept 1st and others were found at Capel Gate on Sept 23rd, at DBO on Oct 8th, Sandwich Bay from 19th-21st, Cliffe on 25th, Northward Hill on 29th and 31st and at Worth on 31st.

During these two months up to ten **Short-eared Owls** were recorded from Sheppey with up to three from Cliffe Pools, Reculver, New Romney, Swalecliffe, Cliffe, Botolph's Bridge, Hope Point, Hythe, Bockhill, Grain, Lade, Lydd Ranges, Grenham Bay, Seasalter, North Foreland, Foreness, New Romney, Cliftonville, Sandwich Bay and Bockhill.



Pallid Swift by Terry Laws

A juvenile **PALLID SWIFT** was reported from Foreness on Oct 13th.

A **Hoopoe** was reported from Riverside CP on Oct 9th and another was photographed by a non-birder in a front garden near Northdown Park on Oct 18th and what was probably the same bird was reported from Margate on 23rd.

Single **Wrynecks** were seen at Uplees Marsh on Sept 3rd and 4th and at DBO from Sept 6th-Oct 14th with two there on Sept 8th and 9th. One was also reported from Dungeness RSPB on Oct 22nd.

A juvenile **Red-footed Falcon** was seen at Worth Marshes on Oct 12th.

During the autumn one or two **Merlins** were seen at Dungeness, Bockhill, Aycliff, Hope Point, Sandwich Bay, North Foreland, DBO, Shuart, Reculver,

Conyer, Mill Point, Capel Fleet, Cliffe, Egypt Bay, Dartford Marshes and Pegwell Bay.

SHRIKES TO HIRUNDINES



Great Grey Shrike by Lesley Anne Jones

A **Great Grey Shrike** was seen and photographed at Elmley on Oct 10th and another was identified at Worth on 18th.

During the autumn as many as five **Ravens** were seen at widespread sites throughout the County.

A **Waxwing** was found at Strood on Oct 27th.

A **Woodlark** flew W at Foreness on Sept 27th and others were seen at DBO on Sept 29th and Oct 3rd and 4th, flying W at Seabrook on Oct 11th at Bockhill on 13th and flying S at Walmer Beach on 14th. There were also two at DBO on Oct 17th and 24th with one there on 19th, two at Lade on 24th and single birds at DBO and Langdon on 28th.

A **Shore Lark** was seen at Foreness on Oct 25th and there was one at Seasalter on 27th whilst a juvenile **Red-rumped Swallow** was seen at Foreness on Oct 12th and at Kingsgate on 13th with it or another at Sandwich Bay on 27th.

CETTI'S WARBLER TO WHEATEARS

A **Wood Warbler** was recorded from Bockhill on Sept 6th and a **Radde's Warbler** was found at Langdon Cliffs on Oct 7th and is the twentieth record for the County.



Radde's Warbler by Richard Bonser

A **Greenish Warbler** was found at North Foreland on Oct 8th and a **Pallas's Warbler** was discovered at Foreness on Oct 16th with others at Kingsdown on 17th and 18th and Margate on 17th.

After the first **Yellow-browed Warbler** of the autumn was recorded at South Foreland on Sept 24th there was a large arrival of birds on Oct 7th when 30+ were recorded in the County. During the last week of September and into October as many as 10 birds were seen or heard at 35 sites mainly on the east and north coast.

A **BOOTED WARBLER** was seen and photographed at Sandwich Bay on Oct 15th. If accepted by BBRC it will be the 10th record for Kent.

During September one or two **Grasshopper Warblers** were identified at Sandwich Bay, South Foreland, Folkestone, Bockhill and Lade and after the first **Dartford Warbler** of the autumn was seen at Lade on Oct 6th one or two were

recorded during the rest of the month from Lade, DBO, Walmer Beach and Dungeness RSPB.

During the autumn up to ten **Firecrests** were seen at DBO, Shuart, Reculver, Bishopstone, Ramsgate, Bockhill, Kingsdown, Walmer Beach, Northdown Park, Dover, South Foreland, Sandwich Bay and Samphire Hoe.



Ring Ouzel by Jackie Russell

The first returning **Ring Ouzel** was recorded from Walmer Beach on Sept 28th and subsequently up to 18 birds were seen at 26 mainly coastal sites.

The first two **Redwings** of the autumn were seen on Reculver Marshes on Sept 30th and the first **Fieldfares** were seen widely from Oct 7th.

In September and October up to five **Pied Flycatchers** were recorded from 20 mainly coastal locations with the last bird at Pegwell Bay on Oct 18th.

As many as nine **Black Redstarts** were seen at DBO, Lydd, Langdon, Foreness, Dover Harbour, East Malling and Samphire Hoe.

DUNNOCK TO BUNTINGS

Single **Richard's Pipits** were seen flying W at Abbotscliffe on Oct 14th, flying N at Pegwell Bay on 23rd, flying N at Sandwich Bay on 24th, flying W at Seabrook on 26th and at Shellness on 28th.

The first returning **Water Pipit** was seen at Sandwich Bay on Oct 7th and then up to five were recorded at Grove Ferry, Oare Marshes, Sandwich Bay and Dartford Marshes.

A **Hawfinch** flew W over Shuart Farm on Oct 11th with one at Kingsdown and two at Folkestone on 18th, one at Maidstone on 29th and one at Cliffe on 31st whilst as many as four were seen at Shadoxhurst during October.

A **Twite** flew N at Sandwich Bay on Sept 30th and another was reported from Cliffe on Oct 7th and four were reported from Swale NNR on Oct 23rd with one on 26th and one at Seasalter on 28th.

During September two **Common Crossbills** were seen at Sandwich Bay on 4th with one at Worth on 14th. In October numbers gradually increased with up to 60 birds recorded from DBO, Shuart, Folkestone, Bockhill, Walmer Beach, South Foreland, Grove Ferry, Ashford, Pittswood, Preston Court, Beachborough Park, Chamber's Wall, Langdon Cliffs, Worth, Pegwell Bay, Higham, Foreness, DBO and North Foreland. Higher counts included 210 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 23rd, 120 on 24th and 122 on 26th with 105 at Bockhill on 23rd.



Ortolan Bunting by Steffan Walton

An **Ortolan Bunting** flew over DBO on Sept 6th and single birds were recorded from Worth Marshes and Pegwell Bay on Sept 13th and DBO on Sept 14th.

The first **Lapland Bunting** of the autumn flew over Pegwell Bay on Sept 24th after which one or two birds were recorded at Bockhill, Hope Point, South Foreland, Pegwell Bay and Foreness and the first **Snow Bunting** of the autumn was seen at Coldharbour, Reculver on Sept 25th and subsequently up to three birds were seen at Reculver, Minnis Bay, Grenham Bay, Foreness, Sandwich Bay, Ramsgate, Swalecliffe, Langdon and Shellness.

DBO = Dungeness Bird Observatory **BBRC** = British Birds Rarities
Committee

RSPB = Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

“The Patch” = the warm water outflow from Dungeness Nuclear Power
Station

NNR=National Nature Reserve **NR**=Nature Reserve **LNR**=Local Nature
Reserve

FC = Field Centre **WR** = Wildlife Reserve **GP** = Gravel Pits **CP** = Country
Park

CONTRIBUTORS

This summary owes much to the contributors to the various sites in “Latest Sightings” on the KOS Website at www.kentos.org.uk, KOSForum, Twitter and the RBA Hotline.

Records have been contributed by B. Benn, I. Black, R. Blackman, Bockhill Birders, Bough Beech (per A. Ford), J. Bloor, R. Bonsor, M. Bournat, R. Brockett, D. Brown, E. Brown, G. Burton, J. Butler, F. Cackett, R. Carr, M. Casemore, B. Chambers, J. Chantler, D. Chesterman, M. Chidwick, J. Cliffe, S. Clinch, R. Collins, G. Coultrip, DBO (per D. Walker), R. Dewire, A. Dunstan, D. Eade, B. East, R. Elvy, D. Faulkener, D. Feast, J. Fletcher, Folkestone and Hythe Birds (per I. Roberts), A. Fossey, M. Garwood, C. Gibbard, S. Ginnaw, V. Green, J. Guiver, S. Haughie, J. Headley, A. Hindle, C. Hindle, M. Hindle, M. Hollingworth, P. Howe, M. Kennett, J. King, A. Lawson, M. Lawson, P. Lloyd, J. Massey, B. Matlock, S. McMinn, S. Message, S. Mills, P. Milton, S. Mount, P. North, R. O'Reilly, M. Paice, A. Pavey, A. Perry, J. Perry, P. Potts, K. Privett, M. Puxley, R. Rackliffe, M. Roser, K. Ross, J. Russell, Samphire Hoe (per L. Collins, P. Holt, D. Smith, and P. Smith), SBBO (per A. Lipczynski and S. Walton), Sevenoaks WR (per S. Clerici), I. Shepherd, A. Skiffington, P. Stevens, M. Sutherland, Swale NNR (per R. Smith, D. Faulkner, I. Davidson), T. Swandale, C. Tedder, J. Thompson, J. Tilbrook, S. Tomlinson, P. Trodd, N. Upton, M. Wilson, B. Woolhouse, B. Wright, M. Wright and D. Young.

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Records sent to me may not all be used for this report as I try to extract the more interesting sightings. However all records are equally important and I forward them to the appropriate Area Recorders who enter them all onto the KOS database.



Letters and Notes

Fifty Years Ago



By Archibald Thorburn (PDI)

Sociable Plover

One at Sandwich Bay from Sept. 28th to Nov. 8th (SBBO et al). This is the first accepted record of this Asiatic vagrant to the county, although one was shot from a party of six on Romney Marsh on May 3rd 1907, and seen in the flesh by Dr C.B. Ticehurst. This bird was mounted by George Bristow and suffered the same fate as the other "Hastings Rarities", rejected by British Birds in 1962.

KBR 1968
Norman McCanch

