



‘What’s About’

**No 38
December 2014**



Icy weather on the 30th December

When the tide recedes a good number of wading birds can be seen feeding out on the mud. They are distant and without binoculars or a telescope, they are often difficult to identify. Nevertheless, it’s good to know that they are there! Even from a distance it is clear, however, that there are not as many duck and waders as in most previous winters. The extended warm autumn in northern Europe has discouraged many birds from continuing their south-westerly migration, after all, from the birds’ point of view, if the weather’s good and there is still plenty of food there is no need to migrate very far. Most of the species that we would expect to find on the river are here, but their numbers are relatively low. In years gone by the tideline in the bay between the Tips and the Hams was lined with feeding duck and waders, but in the last few days the duck that are in that area are visible mostly along the edges of the gully that runs

from that sluice out towards the red No 10 buoy. Goldeneye don't seem to have arrived here and we're short of a Merganser or two, and many more Widgeon, Teal and Pintail. The **Brent Geese**, however, have been a treat, several hundred - six hundred at times – have commuted up and down the river in noisy, spectacular flights. The island off the sailing club and the channel beyond provide a safe roosting site for many of them. Others perhaps go down river towards Ramsholt and Kingsfleet or take the short flight over to the Orwell and Stour estuaries.

If the cold spell at the end of December continues both here and particularly on the European coastline, birds will move quickly in a general south-westerly direction and in the next couple of weeks we are likely to see an increase in both river and farmland birds. I'm told that on Monday the 29th Dec about 100 Bewick Swans were seen coming in off the sea towards the north of the county. Others might follow.

The colder spell has brought more birds to my garden feeders. Now we have several **Blackbirds** that greedily devour windfall apples that are thrown out onto the lawn and **Chaffinches** and **Greenfinches** are doing overtime on the sunflower seed feeder. Migrant **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** have remained scarce, but if they do arrive listen out for the loud and distinctive 'chacking' of the wary fieldfares when they are disturbed from a feeding site.

The RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch takes place over the weekend of the 24th/25th Jan. Details of this easily completed survey can be found at <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch> and the results might be particularly interesting this year.



Little Egret by Alexis Smith

On the 8th Oct 11 **Brent Geese**, about 100 **Widgeon**, 15 **Black-tailed Godwit** and 10 **Grey Plover**, as well as **Redshank**, **Curlew** were on the Sutton shoreline and on the 10th Oct about 80 **Avocets** were near Kirton Creek. A similar number of Avocets was seen in the Kirton Creek and Ramsholt Rocks area of the river on the 14th Oct during the Group trip on the Jahan. In December a few Avocets could be seen feeding along the mud to the north of the boatyard, 10 were counted there on the 14th Dec. There will be better views when the footpath is fully open. Through binoculars their brilliant white and black plumage is instantly identifiable when they are on the Sutton shoreline.

27 bird species were seen from the Jahan, and of particular interest was about 60 **Golden Plover**, just downstream of Ramsholt Quay, as well as Avocets, **Little Egrets**, **Hérons** and flights of Brent and **Greylag Geese**. Over the winter period Golden Plover can occasionally be seen, together with Lapwing on the island opposite the sailing club. **Grey Plover** were also seen from the Jahan but they tend to be more solitary than Golden Plover and were in mixed groups of Redshank, Curlew and Black-tailed Godwits and **Oystercatchers**.



Oystercatchers by Alexis Smith

A flock of 6 Little Egrets flew on to the saltings upriver of the village on the 20th Oct 40 Black-tailed Godwits were on the field above the grazing marsh on the 20th Oct.

Black-tailed Godwits are surprisingly fearless and quite often one or two can be seen on the mud in close proximity to the slipway and quay. Perhaps they're just too involved in squabbling over their personal feeding spaces to notice nearby watchers. Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew often roost or feed at high tides in the fields not far from the river. On the 17th Dec. 30 Curlew and 23 Bl-t Godwits were on the field between Novocastria and the river.

4 or 5 **Little Grebes** or Dabchicks are often to be seen swimming within the area of the moorings and a little further down the moorings a couple of pairs of **Great-crested Grebes** can be spotted.

350+ Brent Geese were feeding on fields around the village on the 11th Nov, increasing to 500+ in the next couple of weeks.

A **Woodcock** flew out of the road hedgerow at Howe's Farm on the 9th Dec. and on the 10th Dec one was seen flying along the hedgerow near Plum Tree Cottage.

More **Kingfisher** sightings have been noted by our members this year. The grazing meadow dyke, the river by the beach and the saltmarsh at the reservoir are where sightings have been made. But a dead Kingfisher was found out of its usual haunt on the path between Deben Lane and Sandy Lane on the 31st August. On the morning of the 27th Sept one was seen by marsh sluice and later that day 2 flew through the moorings in front of the sailing club. One was at the marsh sluice on the 16th Oct and again on the 20th Oct. On the 16th Nov., 1st, 5th 12th 20th and 28th Dec. a Kingfisher was observed flying just off the beach and in the dingy park area to the reservoir. The Kingfisher appears as a rather small, dark bird with fast wing beats and a direct flight that is usually low over the water. Only when the light is right are you further rewarded with a flash of kingfisher blue.

2 **Hobbies** were reported from the Hemley Hall Farm area on the 14th September

A dead **Tawny Owl** was found in a garden in Waldringfield Heath on the 10th Sept

2 **Buzzards** a Marsh Harrier and a Kestrel were over Kirton Creek on the 30th Sept

A Buzzard and a pair of **Kestrels** were in Howe's Farm valley on the 1st Oct.

A Buzzard was over the fields below Sandy Lane on the 24th Nov and later that day one was seen over the camping field at Low Farm.

Daytime flying **Barn Owls** have not been seen very frequently, presumably this year's high vole population has allowed the owls to hunt successfully during the hours of darkness, but 2 were seen in the cricket field valley on the 4th Oct. One was seen over the field near Rudd's Barn on the 8th Oct. 1 was seen near Plum Tree Cottage on the 29th Dec

Several people have noted Tawny Owls calling at night during the last two months as pairs have bonded and territories confirmed. The higher pitched squeak of the **Little Owl** has also been evident wherever there are good numbers of oak trees - the road out of the village by the golf course, the oaks at the north side of the golf course, the track from Chapel cross road to New Oak Tree Farm are some of the favoured haunts. Let's hear it for oak trees, let's plant some more!

A **Short-eared owl** was recorded hunting along the river bank of the grazing marsh on the 18th Dec.



Sparrowhawk in Pam Crawley's garden

Sparrowhawks have been recorded throughout the autumn. One, which is likely to be a regular visitor in Sunnyhill, was photographed in Pam Crawley's garden, and now Pam moves the position of the bird feeders every few days. On the 25th Nov Sally and Pat watched from their kitchen window a Sparrowhawk sitting in their fig tree close to the bird feeders. Needless to say it was on its own there and without a meal it eventually flew off but not before spending some time watching Sally and Pat watching it! On the 25th a Sparrowhawk was seen to fly along School Road and then into the garden of the Myrtles. Almost immediately it flew back out chased by a couple of noisy Black-headed Gulls!

A possible **Rough-legged Buzzard** was observed on the field next to Rudd's Barn on the 10th Nov but by the time I'd gone home to get my binoculars and returned the bird had flown!

Green Woodpeckers have not been seen often but a first year bird was feeding on the birdtable and then seen digging for ants on the lawn at Sally's house on the 25th Aug. A **Great-spotted Woodpecker** came to feed on fat balls in Sally's garden on the 18th Nov and a single bird has been seen on a few more occasions there. Another was seen coming to a peanut feeder in Alexis garden in Waldringfield Heath on the 21st Dec.

A late **Turtle Dove** was heard calling in Fishpond Road on the 5th Sept and again on the 13th Sept .

A **Goldcrest** was feeding in a conifer in Pam Crawley's garden on the 3rd Nov
2 **Bullfinches** were seen in the hedge on the road at Church Farm on the 24th Nov and 1 was seen by the Sandy Lane pumping station on the 29th Dec.

On the 24th November Sally noted 20 **Goldfinches** in the walnut tree in her garden and reported that finches and tits were very active on the feeders in her garden. Similarly good numbers of birds were reported by Alexis and Christine coming to their feeders in Waldringfield Heath.

6 **Fieldfares** flew out of one of the holly bushes on the roadside near Plum Tree Cottage on the 28th Nov. A small flock was seen by Joe Lubbock in the field below his house on the 11th Dec. At that time the weather remained relatively mild but more blackbirds came into the garden to feed on windfall apples and rose hips, perhaps food in the fields and hedgerows had become scarce. A **Mistle Thrush** was watched in the hedge outside the Village Hall during the coffee break of the Dec WWG meeting on the 13th Dec.

2 male and 2 female **Yellowhammers** were in the oak trees along the path between Deben Lane and Sandy Lane on the 11th Dec. and 2 were again seen there on the 14th Dec.

A flock of **Pied Wagtails** accompanied the sheep when they grazed the cauliflower field at Chapel Crossroads on the 20th Dec.

3 **Common Seals** were at Early Creek on the 30th Sept.

A **bat** was flying in the area of the Church in the early morning of the 17th Dec.

Muntjac pop up anywhere: 1 at Howe's Farm on the 14th Oct and several times since then. 1 was in Sally's garden on the 18th Nov, the reservoir on the 23rd Nov and Whitehall on the 30th Dec.

Large deer prints were visible in the mud on the footpath from the reservoir to Whitehall on the 19th Nov. They were probably those of **Fallow Deer**.

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Joe and Kit Clark, Pam and Bob Crawley, Rosalind Erskine and Jonathan Webb, Stella James, Christine Fisher Kay, Joe Lubbock, Tony Lyon, Janette Mace, Anne Maddison, Sally Redfern, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson, Alyson Videlo, Neil Winship

Please send your sightings to:

Peter Maddison, Barnmead, Fishpond Rd

prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk

