



‘What’s About’

**No 39
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Short-eared Owl Dairy Farm Marsh photo: Donna Morgan

The recent good weather and favourable winds have encouraged the return of our summer migrants. The first **Nightingale** was heard on the 14th April in the Manor Cottage area near the large oak with the swing, and one was uttering a few notes on the 15th April at the back of the woodland near the gorse. A **Cuckoo** was heard near Cross Farm on the 14th April and one called briefly on two occasions at Novocastria on the 15th April. In 2014 the first Nightingale was heard on the 13th and Cuckoo on the 14th. In March of this year the first **Chiffchaff** was singing on the 23rd, a week later than in 2014. Northerly winds that seemed to blow for much of the month held migrants up in continental Europe whilst they waited for a tail wind to

speed them over the Channel. Now Chiffchaffs can be heard in most of the wooded places around the village and Whitethroats, calling their scratchy song, can be heard in roadside hedges. Fluting **Blackcaps** are singing in gardens where a wilder patch, perhaps of bramble, tolerated by the owner, has been left as a potential nest site. In 2014 the first Swallow around the village was spotted on the 15th April, but as yet I have not heard of a sighting in or around the village, although they have appeared along the coast. House Martins ought to arrive by the fourth week of April. After a three-year lapse a **Cetti's** Warbler might have returned to the reservoir. The call is strident, it brings you up with a start and makes you ask 'What was that?' Just three notes were heard on the 14th and a slightly longer call on the 16th April.

One of the joys of the early morning dog walk is the opportunity to hear **Skylarks** pouring their 'full heart' from high above many of the fields around the village. Later, with the noise of the day, one might have to make a more conscious decision to listen for them, but if you stop and tune in you become aware of the song that comes from somewhere skywards.

The winter birds have gone and the river is fairly quiet, we await the bobbing rafts of young **Shelduck** and fishing terns. Early in the year the bay between the Tips and the Hams held 63 Shelduck on one occasion. These birds have dispersed, some up to half a mile or so inland to where there are suitable nest sites. A pair have taken a fancy to standing around on one of the new islands created on Dairy Farm Marsh, but it would not be their intention to nest there, if they're going to breed they'll be off to a disused rabbit burrow or a hole several feet off the ground in an old tree.

Many of the winter duck were leaving by the end of February and early March. 450 + **Brent Geese** were on our part of the river early in the year and a good number continued to roost around the island but by the early evening of the 13th March only a small number could be heard 'talking' to one another in the channel behind the island. A handful of **Widgeon** remained on the river. **Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew and Redshank** could still be seen on the saltings. Their numbers reduce in the summer months with non-breeding individuals remaining. The degradation of the salt marsh and the frequent inundation by the tide in our part of the river makes successful nesting for the Redshank unlikely.

Curlew are a distinctive bird of the salting, but they occur inland too, and use the fields alongside the river as high tide roosts and feeding grounds. 26 were on the field below Sandy Lane on the 23rd Feb and people driving to Woodbridge have noticed them on the fields by Walk Farm wood and across to Thatched Farm and Hill Farm.

37 **Avocets** were seen on the tideline upriver of the quay on the 23rd Jan, 3 **Goldeneye** were at the northern end of the moorings where at least a dozen **Little Grebes** were feeding.

Little Egrets are always noticeable and several were noted in close proximity on the saltings on the 11th March.

A **Woodcock** was disturbed from the side of Woodbridge Road by Howe's Farm bridge on the 3rd Feb and from close by on the 9th March. On that same day another flew out of the elm thicket beyond the school and one was also flushed from the edge of Church Field.

A **Little Owl** was seen on the northern edge of the golf course on the 6th Feb and again on the 20th March. In mid March they were heard calling regularly in Waldringfield Heath.

A **Short-eared Owl** was seen hunting along Dairy Farm Marsh wall on the 12th Feb. and again on the 16th Feb. By the beginning of March the owl was being seen regularly on the marsh and Janette took a number of photos as did Donna Morgan. On the 1st March it was seen being mobbed by a Marsh Harrier, before it sought refuge amongst the branches of one of the oaks. It paid little attention to walkers on the river wall and good views could be had of it both in flight and when it perched on close by fence posts and stumps. On the 20th March the owl was watched as it evaded a mobbing magpie. The last time the owl was recorded was on the 28th March. Most short-eared owls breed in northern Britain, 'our' owl might have begun its northward migration, however, a dead Short-eared Owl was found on the salt marsh just downriver of the village on the 31st March. Damage to the bird indicated that a large raptor, perhaps a Marsh Harrier, had made a kill.



Donna Morgan



Short-eared Owl

Janette Mace

A **Barn Owl** was seen hunting in all the usual locations during Jan and early Feb., but there was a disconcerting lack of sightings in the second half of that month. However, more sightings were made in early March and these have continued through to the end of the period. Most sightings were in the early morning before earth moving work began, but it was interesting that the owls continued to hunt over the remaining undisturbed grassland.

Tawny Owls have been calling throughout the late winter period. One was seen near Walk Farm wood on the evening of the 23rd March.

Marsh Harriers became more evident close to the village in the second half of Feb with one being seen over the island on the 8th Feb and on the salting alongside the dinghy park on the 14th Feb. One was seen near Newbourne Springs on the 23rd March.

Single **Buzzards** have been seen overhead, but Tony and Christine watched one perched in the oak tree at the bottom of their garden on the 27th Feb. Sally noted two spiralling high over her garden in the early afternoon of the 10th March. A single was seen over Howe's Farm valley on the 20th March and one was over Waldringfield Heath on the 22nd March.



Sparrowhawk

Photo: Stan Baston

Look at those claws!

Stan Baston had noticed feathers around the bird feeder in his garden so he wasn't surprised that a **Sparrowhawk** was frequenting the area. The surprise came when he saw one perched just feet away from his house window. Stan was faster than the hawk, grabbing his camera he got the shot through the glass before the hawk made off.

A Sparrowhawk was seen to take a blackbird on the track beside Novocastria on the 20th March and on the 25th a Sparrowhawk was seen carrying a Blackbird near Chapel crossroads.

On the 7th March Sally observed two **Kestrels** clashing talons and chattering loudly above the field alongside her garden. It looked aggressive but this was almost certainly impressive courtship displaying. Single Kestrels have been seen over Church Field, and in several other locations around the village.

Kingfishers continued to entertain lucky observers. On the 4th Jan one was watched at Swan's Nest sluice. It was preening and then fished successfully, but was joined by a second Kingfisher that challenged for the catch. There was a short squabble after which the first Kingfisher, with its catch, flew off inland. Another Kingfisher that successfully fished near the Sailing Club was watched on the 30th Jan. Before the end of Feb several people had seen Kingfishers along the marsh ditch and through to the reservoir.

A pair of **Bullfinches** was in Fishpond Road on the 17th Jan.

A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was heard drumming in the trees by the cricket field on the 17th Jan – particularly early in the year. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming there on the 29th Jan. A GSW was an irregular visitor to feeders and fats balls in a number of gardens during Feb and March.

A flock of about 8 **Redwings** were seen several times in Jan and Feb on the stubble fields near Plum Tree Cottage. Ever wary they soon moved on to feed a distance further away. One or two **Fieldfare** were sometimes with them, but there were fewer Fieldfare about this winter.

Few **Redpoll** came to feeders, but one was a regular visitor to a niger feeder in Fishpond Road in the first week of Feb and 2 visited the feeder in Christine's garden on several days during the last week of Feb.

Stock Doves came to our garden feeder of black sunflower seeds on the 25th Feb and one was on the same feeder on the 16th March.

A few **Yellowhammers** have been seen, one was by Church Farm sluice and another was along Sandy Lane on the 6th March, and a pair can be seen often along the track to Manor Cottage. A Yellowhammer was seen on the edge of the golf course on the 28th March. A particularly brightly coloured male was on the riverside path below the reservoir on the 16th April.

7 **Pied Wagtails** and 5 **Magpies** were counted on Church Field on the 9th March.

A pair of **Reed Buntings**, fairly common residents, was noted below the reservoir on the 9th March.

18 **Linnets** were counted going into the roost in the gorse on Dairy Farm Marsh on the 17th March. By the end of that month they will have dispersed to breeding sites, hopefully they will return next winter to what has been an annual winter roost site.

On the 22nd March Christine reported that a **Chaffinch** with a warty growth had been coming to her birdfeeder. Growths such as this on Chaffinches and Bramblings may develop on the leg or foot of over a lengthy period of time and the bird may otherwise appear quite healthy.

A **Treecreeper** was seen at Newbourne Springs on the 23rd March and on the 11th April one was observed on the boundary oaks on the northern edge of the golf course.

A **Blackbird** with a white tail feather has been seen in the School Road area

The British Trust for Ornithology produces a series of helpful online identification videos comparing similar species, eg Collared Dove and Turtle Dove; Swallows, Martins and Swifts; Nightingales and other night singers

Go to www.bto.org click About Birds click Bird Identification and select the video of your choice.



Jays have come into gardens occasionally.

This one was so close to the house that John Smith was able to photograph it through a window

Otter spraints have been found regularly at points along the river bank and at the reservoir and there were sightings of 2 Otters on the 21st Jan and one on the 24th Feb.

Muntjac have been reported quite often with one in Sue Larsen's garden on the 31st Jan.

12 **Red Deer**, including 3 stags, were on the track on the northern edge of the golf course and then in the fields to the north on the 6th Feb. The following day 4 hinds were seen near Dr Watson's Wood. The larger deer that we see are usually **Fallow** from the herd at Nacton, Red Deer stags are recorded occasionally, a herd of this size is very unusual.

A dead **Badger** road casualty was found in Newbourne Road on the 12th March and on about that date another was found on Mill Road beyond Church Farm.

A **Common Seal** was seen in the river by the dinghy sailors at the end of March.

2 bats were seen flying along the hedge line of Sally's garden on the evening of the 9th March.



A form of young leverets

Photo: Michael and Anne Parkinson

A form (nest) of 4 young leverets was photographed by Michael and Anne Parkinson on the 18th March in their garden. No doubt this was a place safe from foxes for the **Brown Hares** to be born. In the last couple of months a number of Brown Hares have been seen out on the fields, most have been fairly sedentary out in the middle, or sprinting off as fast as they are able, but there have been few observations of the traditional boxing or the chasing of ‘March hares’.

A **Lizard** was seen by Charlie Clover as it scuttled across the river wall by Dairy Farm Marsh on the 9th March. More recently the ecologists, working ahead of the excavators, have trapped several lizards and moved them to a suitable habitat at the back of the marsh.

Frogspawn was late this year. First noticed in Christine’s garden on the 1st March. On the 9th March 13 frogs were heard and seen in her pond. It wasn’t until the 21st March that frogspawn was found in our pond and Angela noticed frogspawn in her pond on the 29th March. She reported that in 2014 it was found in February.

Encouraged by a warm spell two **Peacock** butterflies emerged from hibernation in Sue Winship’s garden on the 6th March. A **Brimstone** was in Kit’s garden on the 7th and a **Small Tortoiseshell** was flying over the stubble field at the corner of Sandy Lane and Fishpond Road on the 8th March.

For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Jackie Brinsley, Joe and Kit Clark, Charlie and Stephen Clover, Pam and Bob Crawley, Rosalind Erskine and Jonathan Webb, Christine Fisher Kay, Serena Gold, Stella James, Sue and Steffen Larsen, Joe Lubbock, Tony Lyon, Angela Mace, Janette Mace, Anne Maddison, Michael and Anne Parkinson, Sally Redfern, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson, Alyson Videlo, Linda and Jon Wilkins, Neil Winship

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