



Welcome to the LBC eNewsletter 2019/Issue 03

It was a pleasure to attend the LBC/BTO conference at Whisby on 26th January and for those of you who couldn't be there our Hon Sec Jim Wright has produced a fantastic account which you can read herein and see what you missed. I'd like to thank everyone who took part and especially Chris Gunn the BTO Regional Representative for North Lincs who organised the event.

John Clarkson our County Bird Recorder North spoke entertainingly at the conference about the birds of Covenham Reservoir over its nearly 50 years. John has been a stalwart since the club was formed 40 years ago and has been Recorder for the last 10 years. He has decided to step down from his role to focus on seeing and photographing more birds. On behalf of the committee and membership I'd like to thank him for the massive contribution he has made to the life of the club and particularly the annual bird report.

John will formerly step down at the AGM on 9th April and the opportunity now arises for new blood to take on this important role. If you are interested in becoming County Recorder North please contact me or John to discuss what is involved.

Phil Espin Follow me on twitter @philespin

Lincs Bird Club AGM

Our speaker at the AGM on **Tuesday April 9th 2019 at 7.30pm** will be local Lincs birder Alex Lees, who is now a respected academic ecologist.

He will be talking about Rewilding and has some interesting ideas to share about opportunities in Lincs. We are changing the venue this year to **The Golf Hotel, Woodhall Spa** and I look forward to seeing you all there.

Alex Lees is a lecturer in biodiversity at Manchester Metropolitan University and lives in the Peak District.
Twitter: @Alexander_Lees

Deadline for submission of 2018 records

Sorry to labour the point, but.... 2018 is well behind us and now is a good time to submit your records in our standard spreadsheet format if you can. No need if you've already submitted through Bird Track, ebird etc. The draft 2017 Lincs Bird Club report is at the proof-reading stage but the treadmill continues.... Please note our advice concerning records submission which we circulated in Newsletter 06 - the LBC Committee agreed at the October 2018 meeting to set a deadline for record submission for preparation of the 2018 report as follows:

[Submission of 2018 sightings records by 1st June 2019](#)

Submission of rarity descriptions to LBRC BBRC: for those lucky enough to find a bird requiring a submission to either LBRC or to BBRC, please do this as soon as possible after the find. On-line submission is easy and quickly completed.

We hope this will promote a speedier report write-up from now on. [Phil Hyde](mailto:PhilHyde@lincsbirdclub.co.uk) (recorder_south@lincsbirdclub.co.uk) and John Clarkson (recorder_north@lincsbirdclub.co.uk)

Missing BBRC 2018 records

Message received from BBRC Secretary Chas Holt this week:

I am in the process of eeking out BBRC submissions for 2018 records not yet received. Following a quick trawl through the Birdguides database, I've pulled out a couple of records/reports for Lincs:

Long-billed Dowitcher, Frampton, 24 Aug to 29 Dec

Blue-winged Teal, Alkborough Flats, 11 Aug

Snowy Owl, Frampton and Freiston, 1-10 May

Can the finder's of these national rarities please submit the descriptions please !

LBRC Committee

It's goodbye to Steppe Grey Shrike.....for now

In the latest update from the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris* is restored to a sub-species of Great Grey Shrike, *Lanius excubitor*. IOC statement from their website as follows:

Lanius pallidirostris is split from *Lanius excubitor* (King 1997, Hernández et al. 2004, Panov 2011) but not by HBW, Clements, H&M4. Restore to status as subspecies of excubitor pending full resolution of this complex.

This reduces the Lincolnshire list (and that of everyone else using IOC taxonomy).

Shrikes continue to pose considerable taxonomic difficulties with the “red-tailed” shrikes (Isabelline and Red-tailed) still under review by the BBRC.

Water Pipit influx at Baston Fen NR

by **John Redshaw**

January 2019 has seen an unprecedented number of Water Pipits at Baston Fen nature reserve in south Lincolnshire. The previous status of this species in the county, according to BoLaSH 1989, was as a “passage migrant and winter visitor. Wintering birds have been more present in the last ten years (1979 – 1989) with up to three at Saltfleetby during 1980 to 1985. A few birds have been recorded inland”.

Certainly, at Baston Fen, single birds were recorded in December in the years 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2010, with further singles in February 2005 and March 2013. Two, possibly three birds were seen at Baston on 29th and 30th December 2018, breaking the reserves previous records. A disappointing visit on 31st produced only Meadow Pipits. However, on 18th January up to seven were reported increasing to twelve, possibly fourteen, on 20th an unprecedented number. From 21st to 26th numbers reported fluctuated between three and nine as the birds became more flighty.

Shallow patches of flood water on the low wash in late December may have provided margins which attracted the first birds. Subsequently controlled flooding of the washes started in early January, and the shallow margins were pushed further west as the flood waters rose. The pipits were then to be found around the margins at the western end of the middle (second) and eastern end of the high (third) wash. Frost and bright sunlight on 19th and 20th January meant that the birds became more obvious due to very good lighting, and this is when the highest numbers were seen. It has been reported that the birds have occasionally been seen flying over to the adjacent Stewardship Wetlands, and this probably accounts for some of the low or negative sightings from the reserve.

Elsewhere in the county six were recorded at ponds at East Halton Skitter on 13th January, when there was one at Gibraltar Point, and up to two at Frampton Marsh between 21st and 26th.

These often shy and elusive individuals have rarely been more viewable or as numerous than at Baston Fen this winter, don't miss out!

I am grateful to several birders who made their records available either to me or to Birdguides.

Ref: Lorand & Atkin, Birds of Lincolnshire and South Humberside (BoLaSH), 1989

A treasure trove of Lincolnshire's wildlife - past and present

by Nick Tribe

The contents of *The Transactions of the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union* (*The Lincolnshire Naturalist* since 1996) are now available to read online.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library has scanned the journal of the LNU and it can be accessed from the LNU webpage. <https://lnu.org/publications/transactions/> An article list appears beside the link for each scanned part to make searching straightforward.

The link below the scanned document (*Transactions/ Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union*) will open the document in a window where its size can be adjusted.

The LNU first published *Transactions* in 1905 and has published it every year since.

There is an early collection of papers from 1893 and 1894 including the famous ornithologist John Cordeaux's inaugural Presidential Address of 1893.

There are plenty of articles that capture a lost Lincolnshire - for example *A List of Lincolnshire Butterflies* by G.W. Mason from 1906.

Bird articles appear from about 1913. That was the year that G.H Caton-Haigh, Lincolnshire's most famous ornithologist of the day, addressed the LNU on *The Migration of Birds As Observed in Lincolnshire*. It was his Presidential Address and it is worth reading now.

The first comprehensive list of birds for Lincolnshire was written by the Reverend F.L Blathwayt and appeared in 1914, entitled *The Birds of Lincolnshire*.

Blathwayt wrote articles for *Transactions* from 1906 (*Notes on the birds which inhabit Scotton Common*) to 1919.

Caton-Haigh provided articles as observational notes and accounts of migration in north-east Lincolnshire between 1922 and 1935.

Frank Hind provided notes on the birds of the Skegness district between 1918 and 1932.

The rook surveys of 1944-45 (published 1946), 1969-70 and 1975 (published 1975) and 1980 (published 1980) are all covered.

The *Bird Report* appeared as part of *Transactions* in 1955, originally entitled *Ornithology Report* and edited by Dick Cornwallis.

The *Bird Report* was published as a separate part between 1967 and 1978. All are now online.

The Lincolnshire Bird Club was formed the following year, and it took over the publishing of the annual *Lincolnshire Bird Report*.

Reporting of Disturbance along the Humber Coast

Pete Short, RSPB Humber Site Manager and Mike Pilsworth, RSPB Humber Sites Warden request that if you see disturbance of birds or other problems at sites along the Humber Coast, but particularly within the RSPB Tetney Marshes Reserve or the Cleethorpes Local Nature Reserve, please report the incident to the RSPB Warden for the area, Mike Pilsworth on 01405 704665 (Landline), or by email to Mike.Pilsworth@rspb.org.uk

Your report should include the place, date, time, cause of the disturbance (dogs, jet skiers with registration number, paddle boards, kites and kite surfers, drones, paramotors, etc), and number and species of birds disturbed, if possible. Photos would also be useful.

However, please note: -

- You must not put yourself at risk in any way
- You must not do anything that would inflame the situation
- There are designated areas where some of these activities can be carried out legitimately

Wildfowling on Tetney Marshes is being carried lawfully out under licence and is strictly controlled.

Will this be the new Frampton Marsh?

by Jim Wright



Taking shape - the new reserve will be managed by North East Lincolnshire Council

It is unlikely to be complete much before the end of the year, but work is well underway on creation of a new wetland bird reserve off South Marsh Lane in Stallingborough, seven miles from Grimsby.

The hope is that, in time, it will become as much a magnet for birds as the RSPB's reserve at Frampton Marsh.

In response to a request from the LBC, North East Lincolnshire Council's ecology officer, Mike Sleight, has agreed to give a talk to any club members interested in the project.

This will be held at 10am on Tuesday March 5 at the Discovery Centre in Cleethorpes.

The centre is located on the foreshore and adjacent both to the boating lake and the saltmarsh, allowing opportunities for birding both before and after the event.

English Farm Woodland Survey

A new survey funded by Natural England. Since 1988, over 22,000 farm woods have been planted in England. The woods are mostly small, between 1 and 5 hectares in size, which will make survey coverage quite quick and straightforward. These farm woods were planted in a wide variety of settings, ranging from complete isolation through to alongside existing established woodland. This provides a very interesting natural experiment to assess how well birds have colonised these new woodlands on farmland. This survey plans to provide data on how birds have colonised woods planted in farmland. There is a map online that you can direct volunteers to, so they can sign up for a square. Many of the woodlands are small and will be fairly quick to cover. BTO, through the Forestry Commission will seek permission from the landowner, and then provide contact details to the volunteer. Due to this complexity around permissions, and personal contact details of landowners, BTO is handling the allocation of squares to volunteers. Action: Please promote this survey widely in BTO regions in England. Coverage is currently modest with about 350 squares requested to date, so it would be great if each English region could aim to get coverage of at least 5-10 squares. Access has been granted for over 700 survey squares (these are high Priority and colour Blue on the request map), which aren't currently being covered so please ask potential volunteers to select these if possible. The remaining Green squares, are available and access permission is being requested but not guaranteed. <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/english-farm-woodland-bird-survey> Contact: Daria Dadam or Greg Conway (farmwoodlands@bto.org)

In summary:

- Between 15 March and 15 July,
- 4 morning visits will be required
- Plot all birds seen and heard
- BTO will gain permission from the landowner

Tawny Owl Calling Survey

Twenty minutes once during your week is all it will take to find out just how Britain's Tawny Owls are faring.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is asking members of the public to listen out for Tawny Owls to help build a picture of what is happening to our most widespread owl.

Evidence suggests that our Tawny Owl population is falling and it might be that we are losing them from our towns and cities. Taking part in the BTO's Tawny Owl Calling Survey will help make this clearer.

Tawny Owls are very difficult to monitor, as they live their lives during the hours of darkness, so we often hear them rather than see them. We want people to listen for the distinctive 'hoot' calls of the males and sharp 'kee-wick' of the females. Anyone can take part and the BTO website has a series of Tawny Owl recordings for people to familiarize themselves with the various calls.

Claire Boothby, Tawny Owl Calling Survey Organiser at the BTO, said, "Getting involved couldn't be simpler - Just wrap up warm and give yourself 20 minutes to listen for the haunting calls of Tawny Owls between now and the end of March. You can listen from your garden, local wood or park, or even from the comfort of the sofa with your window open, and tell us whether or not you hear an owl. Don't worry if you don't hear one in your 20 minutes; that record is just as valuable and you'll become one of our Zero Heroes!"

The BTO would like at least 10,000 people across the UK to take part, nearly 6000 volunteers have already told what us what they have heard, you can help by listening out too.

Please visit www.bto.org/owls for more information.

Vacant BBS Squares

Due to volunteers leaving the area, and the release of new squares, there are now a number of BBS squares that are vacant. If you could help to do one of the following squares it would be much appreciated. Just 2 visits are required and I am happy to meet with you and discuss any queries you may have. I shall be running another training session for those interested February 2020. (contact Mike Daly Regional Representative Lincolnshire West Mike.btorrwl@gmail.com)

SK8081 S Leverton & Cottam
SK8174 Dunham on Trent
SK8186 near Lea
SK8349 Claypole
SK 8449 Claypole
SK 8649 Stubton

SK 9881 Hackthorn
TF 0760 Blankney
TF 1348 Ewerby
TF 1889 Ludford
TF 1945 East Heckington
TF 1950 South Kyme

Britain needs more holes

As part of National Nest Box Week 2019, which kicks off on 14 February, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is calling for homeowners to put up more nest boxes for declining garden birds like House Sparrow and Starling. To support homeowners in doing this, the Trust has produced a new 'essential guide', full of useful information on i) what to look for when buying a nest box, ii) box placement and iii) looking after a box longer term. The free guide is available from gbw@bto.org or by calling the BTO's Garden Ecology Team on 01842-750050.

The simple act of putting up a nest box can make a real difference for our birds, providing them with the space they need to raise a family.

A growing proportion of the global human population now lives in towns and cities, with the United Nations predicting that by 2050 two-thirds of us will live within such urbanised landscapes. Urbanisation is considered to be one of the greatest threats facing birds, resulting in the loss of natural habitats and the feeding and nesting opportunities associated with them.

Newly urbanised landscapes often lack the mature trees that provide nesting cavities for small birds, such as Blue Tit and Great Tit, while other cavity-nesting species - such as Starling, Swift and House Sparrow - have seen changes in building regulations reducing nesting opportunities that once existed under the roof tiles of our houses. The loss of such sites may have played an important role in the significant declines seen in the breeding populations of these species since the early 1990s (Starling -74%, House Sparrow -35%, Swift -51%).

Rob Jaques, part of the BTO's Garden Ecology Team, commented 'Homeowners can provide new nesting opportunities for birds by putting up suitable nest boxes and now is the ideal time to do this. You can either purchase a nest box or build your own, and there is plenty of information in our free guide, from cutting plans through to information on where to place nest boxes.'

Five things to look for when purchasing a nest box

- The box should be constructed from timber that is at least 15 mm thick.
- The size of the entrance hole should be at least 25 mm in diameter. Hole size determines which species will use a nest box. Blue Tit and Coal Tit favour 25 mm, Great Tit and Tree Sparrow favour 28 mm, House Sparrow favours 32 mm and Starling favours a larger box with an entrance hole diameter of 45 mm.
- Avoid nest boxes with perches; small birds don't need these and they may provide a foothold for a predatory squirrel or weasel.
- The nest box should be accessible, allowing you to lift the lid or remove the side at the end of the breeding season in order to clean the box out. Boxes may be cleaned out between 1st September and 31st January.
- Don't buy a nest box where the entrance hole is less than 12 cm above the base, since a cat may be able to reach in and grab chicks if the distance is less than this

Nine of the best: the LBC-BTO conference at Whisby



Speakers during the morning session - from left, Mike Drew, John Clarkson, Teresa Frost, Nicholas Watts, Andy Sims and LBC chairman Phil Espin

The 80-plus delegates who attended the recent LBC-BTO conference were treated to nine excellent presentations, plus refreshments which included a buffet lunch.

Held at Whisby Nature Park on January 26, the event was expertly organised by Chris Gunn, of the BTO, and jointly chaired by Phil Espin (LBC chairman/ BTO Lincolnshire East representative) and Mike Daly (BTO Lincolnshire West representative).

A raffle raised £140 with proceeds shared between the two organisations. Below are extracts from the presentations.

Nicholas Watts: 40 Years of The Lincolnshire Bird Club

The first days of the LBC were recalled by founder-member Nicholas Watts who described how its first meeting was held at Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory in 1979.

It was a breakaway from the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union, with the members preferring a focus on birds and a more fun-based approach.

Not that the joviality always prevailed. Nicholas remembered the first vice-chairman, Bob Sheppard, once describing the membership as "a dour lot - not easy to motivate".

The first chairman was Chris Whittles who was supported by a committee which also included secretary Robin Goodall, treasurer John Owen and recorder Keith Atkin. Meanwhile, Eric Simm was president.

Later, Nicholas himself served on the committee whose meeting sometimes lasted so long that he did not get home until midnight.

“As I’m a morning sort of person, my committee days did not last long,” he quipped.

Other milestones in the LBC’s 40 years include the opening, in the mid-1980s, of its Cut End bird hide at Boston – an occasion marked by a visit from broadcaster Mike Clegg who cut the first slice of a special hide-shaped cake that had been baked by Steve Keightley’s mother-in-law.

A farmer and birdseed supplier, Nicholas enjoys a national reputation for bird-encouragement initiatives with buntings, finches, tree sparrows and other species on his farm at Deeping St James near Spalding.

In one year, 2014, a remarkable 86 barn owls were hatched – a phenomenon sadly not repeated the following year.

“There was not a single breeding success,” he said. “There were too few voles.

“Food is always the driver for birds to flourish. If a species is declining, it is a sure sign that food is running out.”

Andy Sims: Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers

Fascinating insights into the breeding behaviour of a pair of lesser-spotted woodpeckers came from LBC member Andy Sims.

In both 2015 and 2016, their nest was a hole excavated (between 7am and 9am over 10 days) by the male in a dead horse chestnut tree just 250 metres from his home on the outskirts of Lincoln.

The tree is on the edge of a path favoured by dog-walkers who regularly used to stop and chat just underneath it, but not to the distress of the lessers – they kept calm and carried on

Fortunately, a resident squirrel, a potential predator, overlooked the nest as did a great spotted woodpecker that sometimes visited the same tree

Six young were successfully reared the first year, with three the next year.

The male returned in 2017 and excavated a new hole but he brought with him no mate – female lessers are noted for switching partner- allegiance, sometimes within the same season, and she may have found a replacement.

Last summer, drumming was heard in various parts of the same locality, but the breeding site, if any, was not traced.

Andy expressed huge admiration for the birds, not least the skilful, almost sculptured, way the cavity had been excavated and the diligence of the parents in feeding their chicks, occasionally bring back fat (most unusual for lessers) as well as grubs.

Their foraging was not necessarily close at hand. They seemed to travel relatively long distances from the nest.

Fingers crossed they might return this year, but any long term prospects look uncertain, not least because the site and its surroundings have been earmarked for development.

John Clarkson: Birds of Covenham Reservoir

Covenham Reservoir between Grimsby and Louth is never going to win any awards for its scenic beauty, nor for its sense of welcome.

In winter, it is sometimes the coldest place in Lincolnshire and in spring and summer it is often bedevilled by swarms of large flies.

Yet, as John Clarkson's entertaining presentation confirmed, it enjoys an excellent reputation for attracting ducks, geese, gulls, grebes, divers, waders and other species, some of them real rarities.

Considering the fairly limited range of vegetation, it is remarkable that there have been sightings of no fewer than 27 different species of butterfly.

Once you climb up the 52 steps from the car park, you never know what surprises lie on the other side of the concrete walls.

John's presentation included his own impressive photos of some real stunners - Terek sandpiper, American black tern, little gull, black-throated diver, Slavonian grebe, red-necked phalarope and many more.

Construction of the reservoir started in 1963, and it was formally opened in 1972.

Originally it came under the auspices of the North East Lincolnshire Water Board but it is now part of the huge portfolio of Anglian Water.

Despite its reputation, it is visited relatively infrequently by birders unless word gets out about a special 'find' - say a pectoral sandpiper or a long-tailed duck. Then it is liable to become a magnet.

John paid tribute to all those birders who have kept bird records over the past six decades - in particular Keith Robinson who, since retirement, has been making visits some 250 times a year.

On the downside, watersports enthusiasts, who also use the site are not always mindful of their responsibility to respect the birds.

In particular, at least one jet skier seems to make a point of targeting flocks of waterborne ducks and gulls just for the 'delight' of seeing them take flight in panic.

Mike Drew: Protecting and Enhancing Wildlife in Eastern England

Businesses often take the rap for disregarding the welfare of wildlife in their activities.

A notable exception is Anglian Water which devotes considerable time and resources to providing a refuge for birds, butterflies, wildflowers and the rest of the environment.

Within its portfolio of sites in eastern England, it currently accommodates no fewer than 57 hides.

It even has its own biodiversity action plan scientist, Mike Drew who gave a whistlestop tour of some particularly notable sites, starting with Tetney Blow Wells - once noted for commercial production of water cress which was even supplied to the Ritz Hotel in London on the basis of having been grown in 'virgin water'.

As far as wildlife is concerned, Anglian's flagship is Rutland Water - a 'crown jewel' which, in winter, is reckoned to accommodate some 30,000 wetland birds.

Mike reminded the conference that the water is also home to a famous osprey breeding project which has seen some 147 chicks reared since 2001.

Another very important site is Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, home to breeding nightingales whose progress, including their migration to Sierra Leone, has been successfully tracked in a project co-ordinated by the BTO.

Worryingly, as elsewhere in England, their population crashed last year - from nine singing males to just one - and it is by no means guaranteed that any will return this spring.

Mike is a bird ringer, but he confessed to long having had a special admiration for an insect that it took 30 years for him to see his first specimen.

He confided: "When I was about six, I saw in a book a picture of a stag beetle.

"Ever since, I have always considered it to be just one amazing beetle!"

Teresa Frost: Counting Wintering Waterbirds - the Wetland Bird Survey

A valuable update on this important project came from Dr Frost who has been crunching data for the BTO over the past three years.

A mathematician with degrees from Aberystwyth, York and Kent universities, she provided a fascinating historical perspective on our relationship with waterfowl - noting how Lincolnshire once accommodated colossal populations of overwintering ducks and waders.

Writings of 17th Century ornithologists describe how many hundreds of thousands were killed annually for dispatch to city markets.

That widespread slaughter is no longer the main threat - to a large extent it has been replaced by industrial development and climate change.

Teresa quoted a controversial comment made in 1978 by a Government adviser, Sir Herman Bondi: "It is not nice to have large expanses of mudflats."

At the time, this sparked vehement protest from the BTO who pointed out that such habitat is invaluable to millions of birds of many species.

Such was Teresa's inspirational presentation that some delegates are likely to sign up as surveyors for WeBS - the long-established wetland bird counting project run jointly by the BTO, the RSPB and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

The information amassed has provided crucial indications of population trends and is consulted by numerous organisations - for instance, the Government when it wants to get a handle on any outbreak of avian flu.

In her talk, Teresa came up with a succession of nuggets of information - for example, that redshanks typically travel 16m a day and curlews 10km a day.

Hugh Dorrington: Planting Woodlands and Hedgerows for Birds

There is much more to creating a wood than just planting trees. That was one of the messages from Hugh, BTO regional representative for Lincolnshire South and an authority on what types of woodland best accommodate a range both of bird species and the insects which feed them.

Lincolnshire suffers from being one of the least wooded counties in one of Europe's least wooded countries. This can be a disadvantage to species such as woodcocks as they seek habitat after migrating here in autumn and winter.

Hugh described an incident in Suffolk where, having bagged no fewer than 200 birds in a single woodland, wildfowlers assumed, falsely, that the species must be commonplace.

In reality, shortage of suitable habitat meant that the birds had been forced to congregate in one of the few sites available.

Hugh offered tips on woodland-creation, describing one successful project where a one-hectare site planted in 2000 had matured to the extent that, last summer, it accommodated no fewer than 50 breeding pairs of a range of songbirds.

It is evidently crucial to avoid creating 'monoculture' plantations of the same or similar tree species.

Diversity is the key, with a mixture of 'pioneer' fast-growers, such as silver birch, underplanted by both canopy trees, such as hazel, and also lower-growers. Such a blend, further enhanced by the inevitable incursion of a mixture of other vegetation, provides a continuation of flowers and hence the insects necessary to feed breeding songbirds in spring and summer.

Then, in autumn and winter, there will also be seeds, berries and nuts to tide them over the colder months.

David Bird: Lincolnshire's Grey Partridges

Time was when you could hardly pass a field without seeing grey partridges.

In the 1930s, the species' UK population totalled more than a million pairs. How different now. The number has fallen to no more than about 45,000 pairs, of which 30 per cent are reckoned to be in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Nottinghamshire.

Nor are prospects for recovery particularly bright. Imminent Brexit will lead to a loss of £3-billion farming subsidies from the EU and farmland stewardship schemes will come under threat.

However, David Bird, of the Lincolnshire Grey Partnership Group, is pulling out all the stops to ensure the welfare of the species stays on the farmland bird agenda.

In his purposeful talk, he outlined the latest initiatives and expressed hopes that farmers - supported by birders - would participate in active surveying.

Carl Barimore: The BTO Nest Record Scheme

Although it tends not to be as well known as some of the BTO's other projects, the Nest Record Scheme has an illustrious history dating back 80 years.

Over that period, it has accumulated an invaluable body of research on the nesting behaviour of many, if not most of our breeding birds.

In his presentation, Carl Barimore, who has been with the BTO for the past 10 years, detailed the key information required - the geographical location of the nest, the precise site within that location and the progress/ outcome of the nesting activity.

He stressed the importance of complying with a code of conduct stipulating that observers must cause no damage to the nest, must not cause desertion and must not reveal the nest site to the predator.

Carl described some of the techniques of tracking hard-to-find nests - such as 'tapping off' which requires the use of a long pole to pinpoint nests in reedbeds.

Nationwide, the three species for which most data has been recorded are: great tit, blue tit and, perhaps surprisingly, barn owl.

Species whose nests are currently under-recorded in Lincolnshire include: Mute swan, little grebe, collared dove, song thrush, dunnock, chaffinch, goldfinch, starling, house martin and long-tailed tit.

Lucas Mander: Wintering curlew in the Humber Estuary

Based on his work on the Humber Estuary, French ornithologist Lucas Mander, a researcher at Hull University, provided fascinating insights into the local behaviour and movements of the curlew. This is an iconic species but, globally, one that is in decline.

Although various factors, including weather, come into play, he revealed that the shorter-billed males are more likely than females to relocate from mudflats to adjacent grassland or farm fields, especially in harsh weather. This is because their bills are not so long as those of females, and thus they find it easier to probe for earthworms than than, say, estuary lugworms which lie deeper and beyond easy feeding reach.

There was no response (expect ironic laughter) when Lucas asked for a show of hands from anyone who had seen either an Eskimo Curlew or a Slender-billed Curlew - not surprising given that both are so critically endangered that they may already be extinct. Happily, the survival threat to the Eurasian Curlews that occur in estuaries throughout much of Europe are nowhere near as great, but climate change and other pressures means that there is no cause for complacency.

Lucas is an ecologist with expertise across a range of marine as well as estuarine species, but curlew are the focus of his ongoing studies for a PhD. Although pretty well fluent in English, he preceded his fascinating presentation with a quip. "I apologise for not having a local accent."



The afternoon speakers - from left, Lucas Mander, Hugh Dorrington, Carl Barimore, Mike Daly (BTO regional representative for Lincolnshire West) and David Bird.

Reports by Jim Wright

Advert



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