

OGSTON BIRD CLUB

AUGUST 2025



NEWSLETTER



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NEWS ROUND-UP – WHATS BEEN HAPPENING AT OGSTON BIRD CLUB?

Welcome to the club newsletter for August.

Everyone should have received their **2024 annual report**; if not please contact Steve Slack on ogstonbirdclub@gmail.com

Thanks to all who helped in collecting and distributing the reports. When we post them all, as during the pandemic, the postage cost was some £800. Collection and delivery this time reduced this to about £200. Well done.



I must apologize for a lapse – ie my oversight in omitting from the annual report Mary Wilde's excellent photographs of our celebrated visiting Bearded Tits (there were eight between 4th and 8th November 2024) so here they are! They say that a female in particular resembles the colour of last year's reed stems, resulting in effective camouflage in a reed bed. You can see the point.



The Club's **Annual General Meeting** took place on Friday 13th June at Ashover Village Hall and was well attended. The committee for the forthcoming term was elected, with the addition of Tim Sexey and David Marshall. Maureen Shearer and Andrew Woodhouse stood down this time and Steve Walker, having resigned earlier, did not seek re-election.

Matthew Capper presented to us his illustrated talk on Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, touching upon a number of sites which we regularly visit on our birding trips. The history and development of the Trust is a fascinating story, and a visit to a number of the present sites will be amply rewarded with birds, seals and natterjack toads to be observed. Matthew's excellent talk was enjoyed by all.

Birding highlights since the April newsletter have been very rewarding. Our visitors have included these **Dunlin** in fine fettle (6th May), up to five **Whimbrels** during May, and this male **White Wagtail** (the continental sub-species *alba*, of "our" Pied Wagtail) on 13th May. Other notables were six **Little Ringed Plovers**, and a fleeting visit by three **Sandwich Terns** on 23rd March, of which this bird landed briefly near the main hide on 3rd April.



The Breeding attempts of ground nesters have been helped by low water levels in what we are told was the driest spring in the UK for 100 years. As I write these words in mid-July, we are enjoying the third recent heatwave, with temperatures above 30 °C. Young waders have fallen foul of predation in many cases, mainly by the Carrion Crows. These young **Lapwings** in the scrape were a rewarding sight, but seemed to disappear one by one. Birds seen with young included **Canada Geese, Greylag Geese, Mallards and Herons, Tufted Ducks** are not frequent Breeders at Ogston but there was a brood of five in Chapel Bay. There was at least one active **Great Crested Grebe** nest; outcome awaited. **Long tailed Tits built** a nest easily observed from the roadside on the west bank.



The Heronry continues to prosper perennially. There were 22 active nests this year. This is Carr Pond on 13th July, showing the *Persicaria amphibia* (Amphibious Bistort or known by a number of other local names) in fine flower, and no shortage of fish.



The Meadows were cut in late July and the cuttings removed by STW's contractors Wildwood Forestry and the cuttings removed to assist the more delicate species in the flora, including the orchids and Betony. In late August and beyond, our work parties will complete the raking exercise to the same effect, and will embark upon vegetation and pond clearance in the areas of the hides and reedbeds, following a very vigorous growing season.

The Field Trips: the long periods of dry weather this summer have eventually had an impact upon our trips schedule beginning with the cancellation of the visit to Blacktoft Sands on 20th July and putting into doubt the trip to Frampton Marsh on 3rd August. Particularly on the east side of the country, the shortage of water has led to a profound decrease in the number and variety of birds which puts into doubt the club encouraging long journeys with their associated carbon footprint, of doubtful benefit. This year it would seem that we have to play it by ear so it's a case of watch this space ie wait for email updates. Martin Kaye 21/7/25

Work has continued as always at the **Jim Mart Nature Reserve** at Alton, where the spring and summer are proving very fruitful for the butterflies and moths, and the dragonflies and damselflies. Mammals had a good showing also and a mammal survey is planned in the summer.

This shot is of a Red Soldier Beetle on the reserve. The site must be a top Derbyshire site for breeding warblers, three pairs of Common Whitethroat bred this year – this photo shows an adult about to feed young at the nest. Under Rob Simmons' direction a great deal of ongoing habitat management continues at the site, with outstanding success at the butterfly bank and development of the ponds at the planning stage.



The **club trips** have continued to good effect, and there was a particularly enjoyable visit to Lawrence Field and Padley Gorge, where we located the elusive Wood Warbler in full song on 7th May. Here he is, photographed from some distance.

And so – plenty to enjoy with Ogston Bird Club.
Onward and upward, and thanks to everyone for continuing support.

Bill Padley.

Photographs:

Mary Wilde

Bearded Tits 5th November 2024, Lapwing chicks 12/05/25, Dunlin 06/05/25, Little Ringed Plover 06/05 /25
Whimbrels 10/05/25

Steve Walker

Photos at Carr Pond, Male White Wagtail 13/05/25

David Griffin

Red Soldier Beetle 01/07/25, Common Whitethroat 01/07/25, Wood Warbler at Padley Gorge 07/05/25

Trevor West

Sandwich Tern 23 /03/25



Swift Success

Well actually getting Swifts to nest in our boxes was not swift at all. However, when you understand the way that Swifts operate, the fact that we had them nesting during the third year that the boxes were in place, is probably as quick as it could be.

The rest of this article is intended as unashamed encouragement to members to put up Swift boxes or install swift bricks to help this species recover from the massive decline of 66% between 1995 and 2022 (there are indications that this is even worse now).

In earlier newsletters, I have written about how to help Swifts: April 2024 'How Can We Help Our Swifts' (a detailed description of how and where to install swift boxes) and August 2024 'How Can We Help Our Swifts Part 2' (an update on Swifts showing an interest in our boxes). These can be accessed on the OBC website under ARCHIVES / NEWSLETTERS, or by clicking this link [archives](#).

Now I can report that we have been successful in having one of our three nest boxes occupied by a nesting pair and recently, seen another bird entering one of the other boxes on two separate occasions.

Generally, Swifts don't breed until they're four years old and indeed, until that point, have spent their time since fledging, on the wing, migrating to South Africa in August and returning to the area where they were born in May. During their second and third year, they will spend time getting to know in detail, their natal area and particularly in year three, locating a nesting hole and prospecting for a mate. It is these younger birds that are the ones found in parties, shearing through the air at breakneck speeds and screaming as they do so.

We installed our boxes early in 2023 on a west-facing wall (the only possible location for us), not ideal so as a precaution we painted the lids white in an effort to reduce over-heating. We also installed a sound system designed to draw the Swifts' attention to the boxes. That year, we had to be satisfied by the sight of small groups flying very close to the boxes, screaming as they did so. In 2024, our hopes for nesting Swifts came to nought, but in late July we did see two Swifts enter one of the boxes and remain inside for over 5 minutes.

Fast forward to early May 2025. Hopes were massively high but with the threat of a heat wave, my other half, the project manager/supervisor, wanted the boxes painted white all over. So the 'goffer' took down one of the boxes, and upon removing the lid, discovered that the nest cup was lined with small feathers which were stuck down. Needless to say, that the box was immediately returned in a bit of a panic, unpainted. Whether this nesting material had been put in place in 2024 by the nest prospectors or very recently, was not known.

We continued to see swifts round and about the house several times a day but we didn't notice any birds going in and out of the boxes so we assumed we had been unsuccessful - until about 9.30pm on 13th June when we heard a Swift call and went to investigate. We saw a Swift go into one of the boxes. A little while later the second bird went into the box.

Since then, the project manager has become completely obsessed with Swifts to the extent that she and the poor old 'goffer' had to observe the boxes for at least three half-hour stints per day to record behaviour and attempt to photograph the comings and goings. This has led to a number of interesting observations:

- When they are no longer brooding, the parents can be absent from the box for long periods which means that you might need to wait a long time to guarantee seeing some action.
- When seeing the adults leave the box, it becomes obvious why the box has to be mounted at least 5 metres above ground and with clear space in front, because by the time the emerging bird has managed to unfurl its 40+ cm wing span, it has already dropped over a metre.
- The first parent to return to the box, does so silently while the second bird makes a short screeching sound, presumably to let the other one know that it's their partner rather than a stranger.
- We also thought that we could identify the parents when flying, from their behaviour, often hunting together in a measured way rather than the 'mad fighter pilot' displays of the teenagers.

We noticed our nesting pair were seen entering the box regularly but infrequently and this continued during the rest of June. Upon returning from holiday on 13th July, a youngster was seen peering from the entrance to the box. From 16th July, it was no longer observed so we assume that it had fledged. The adults continued to return to the box so we assumed there was another chick or that they were confused by the absence of the chick [1].

We are now optimistic that more than one box will be occupied next year. The 'supervisor' has even suggesting delaying the summer holiday but then I did say that she was obsessed.



Left - youngster showing white throat patch and forehead. Right - adult with dark forehead - photos C Nelson



Adult entering the box with a bit of a squeeze, showing the long wings and the tail fanned to aid braking on the approach - photo C Nelson

It's now down to our members - click on the [archive](#) link and read the April 2024 newsletter to see if it's possible to put up one or more Swift boxes. Best of luck!

Martin Kaye 20/7/25

[1] Swifts and Us by Sarah Gibson, Collins - available in paperback, a brilliant read, giving a hint of the science without becoming boring.

ARTICLES OF TOPICAL INTEREST

Tracking the Comeback: How Young Goshawks Are Reclaiming Britain's Skies

https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/Tracking_the_Comeback_How_Young_Goshawks_Are_Reclaiming_Britains_Skies.aspx?s_id=6979266

New research by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) uncovers how these scarce raptors are slowly spreading and adapting to potential new habitats.



Once a widespread bird of British forests, the mighty Goshawk was almost completely wiped out in the UK by the start of the 1900s. However, small numbers managed to cling on despite extensive deforestation and relentless persecution. Adding to the bird's fragile plight was the fate suffered by most other birds of prey in the mid-20th century, the deadly impacts of the pesticide DDT. Since the banning of this highly toxic chemical, Goshawks have slowly recovered, along with other raptors, despite unwanted attention from egg-collectors, falconers, and game managers.

Today, although far from common, Goshawks are showing signs of continued population growth and range expansion and are now thought to number around 1,200 pairs across the UK. To better understand the dispersal and habits of young birds in their first winter, researchers at BTO carried out studies in two contrasting areas of lowland England: Norfolk/Suffolk and Gloucestershire.

Scientists attached state-of-the-art tracking devices to 29 individual Goshawk chicks at their nests, under special license. This allowed the researchers to map the movements of the juvenile birds as they headed out into the world after fledging. Would the youngsters move large distances in search of suitable woodland habitats, similar to where they had been raised, but uninhabited by other Goshawks? Or might they simply go the shortest distance from the nest site that would take them outside of their parents' territory? Or would they do something else altogether?

Remarkably, having left their nest area, most of the fledged hawks moved a similar distance of around 10 km, to spend their first winter as independent birds. Each young Goshawk, on average, then established a winter home range of just under 5 km by 5 km. One major difference between adults and first year birds was the use of habitat.

Whereas adults and juvenile females were mainly associated with dense forest-dominated environments, the smaller males showed a preference for much more open farmland landscapes, interspersed with blocks of tree cover. This may be related to the different prey types and hunting styles used by the differently sized birds, with more open habitats providing a greater density of the small to medium sized birds, favoured as food by the males.

After the first complete year, young Goshawks matured and became inclined back towards denser forests where they would establish territories, like their parents, all year round. Given the slow pace at which the species is increasing across the UK, and the relatively short dispersal distances covered by young birds, it may be some time before we see Goshawks nesting in urban parks, as they do in several other European countries.

Ian Henderson, Senior Research Ecologist at BTO, says "The tracking devices really helped underline the adaptability of this species to use habitats outside the expected large forests, suggesting that range expansion is highly probable. With reduced persecution and continued access to key prey such as Grey Squirrel and Woodpigeon, the future of these dynamic hunters as breeding British birds looks assured."

Ignoring female birds harms scientific understanding

https://www.birdguides.com/articles/ignoring-female-birds-harms-scientific-understanding-say-researchers/?utm_campaign=2372586_Weekly%20News%20from%20BirdGuides%2017%2F03%2F2025&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotdigital&dm_i=73DM,1EUP6,ZVD5U,4ZBW4,1



THE CLUB FACEBOOK GROUP PAGE

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/697216894038085/about>



The Club's **Facebook Group** has been going for a good six years now and continues to be actively supported and enjoyed by over 250 members. This is a "private" Group, membership of which is only open to Ogston Bird Club members. There are a number of regular contributors to the Group and as such it is a good source of information on a daily basis in terms of what birds or other wildlife have been sighted and as often as not are still to be seen in the Ogston recording area.

If you are not on Facebook please consider joining. You do not have to post photos to actively contribute to the Group, liking and commenting on posts is as much a contribution as the posts themselves. You can just use this Group for information on what is out and about at Ogston, but as a member please post your sightings and comments back on the Group page with or without a photo for others to see and enjoy.

Steve Walker - Group Admin 21 July 2025