

# OGSTON BIRD CLUB

SEPTEMBER 2023



## NEWSLETTER



### TABLE OF CONTENTS

CLUB NEWS.....	1/3
RABBIT TALES by Mary Wilde.....	4
BOOK REVIEWS by Martin Kaye.....	5
ARTICLES OF TOPICAL INTEREST .....	6/8

### NEWS ROUND-UP – WHAT’ BEEN HAPPENING AT OGSTON BIRD CLUB?

#### ANNUAL REPORT

Our 2022 annual report was finally printed in August and distributed, a little later than in recent years. The committee welcomes the opportunity to apprise members of all the highlights of the year in the report, and to present the officers’ reports to explain what has been done with your subscriptions and kind donations. Thanks again.

2023 has unfolded with a larger committee of ten people in place and a good deal has been achieved by way of maintenance and development at both the reservoir and Jim Mart Nature Reserve at Press Lane.

**We had the exciting find** of Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillars at “Jim Mart”. Their host plant, Rosebay Willowherb, is abundant and the species is not rare, but it’s nice to know we are providing a conserved habitat for them. The adult is a moth of stunning beauty.



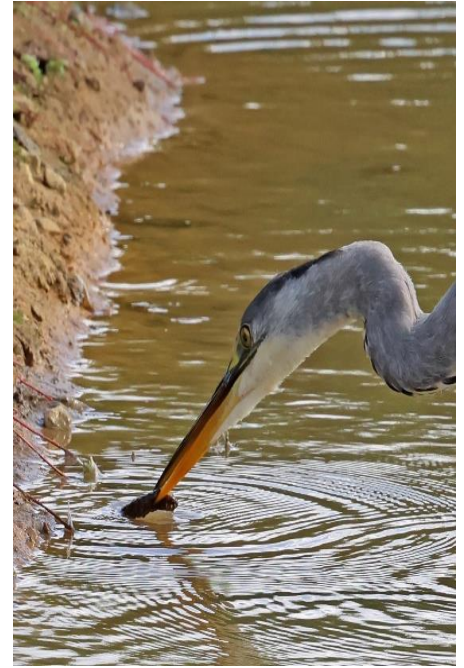
**To swim or not to swim; that is the question.**

Typically, Mary Wilde observed a Heron at the reservoir finding an Elephant Hawk Moth larva on the island in the scrape. The bird seemed to find the meal disagreeable and dropped the caterpillar in the water, whereupon it “swam” to dry land.

**....and speaking of unlikely swimmers**, Mary also followed the events of an adult female rabbit swimming to the same island with nesting material, to give birth to five young which in turn swam over the “scrape” to terra firma. Mary’s account of these events makes interesting reading.



The scrape, which at present is really a pond for much of its depth, is providing small fish for the Herons and Little Egrets. Mary’s remarkable photo shows one of the fish – presumably fry of a coarse fish species.



Our new tern raft positioned towards the south end of the reservoir was occupied for successful breeding by both Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls. Here we see one of the three young terns being fed by an adult.



These seven Black-Tailed Godwits visited on 17<sup>th</sup> July. Distinguishing the species from Bar-tailed Godwit is easier when the birds are showing their white wing markings in flight. Bar-tailed have none. The Black Tern came over on 1<sup>st</sup> June.

There was a flurry of excitement on 31<sup>st</sup> August when Steve Sutcliffe, who is in the member's hide most days, found and photographed a Spotted Crake: a distinct county rarity and a first for Ogston. Subject to any "stop press" the crake seems to have departed on its journey to (probably) Africa on or about Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September. The bird gave excellent views from the main members' hide, and indeed drew new members.



There have been two "firsts" for Ogston so far this year, following a Golden Oriole (subject to acceptance) on 22<sup>nd</sup> May.



The excitement was further enhanced by our regular migrating Ospreys in late August and September. There were perhaps fewer lingering birds than has been the case in recent years, with just maybe three "fly-throughs" but a juvenile did take up temporary residence from 5<sup>th</sup> September and is still here as I write this. Photos by Steve Walker.



There's always plenty to see at the hides by way of birds and bird behaviour.

Onward and Upward

**Bill Padley** 19/09/23

**STOP PRESS:**



Cattle Egret (second only recorded sighting at Ogston) flying South in front of main hide on 14<sup>th</sup> September photographed by Steve Sutcliffe.

**SW Editor** 20/9/2023

## RABBIT TALES by Mary Wilde

Since the scrape was remodelled, we have had some good bird visits. But we also had a rabbit which seemed to be eyeing up the new island. I wondered if it was attracted by the vegetation. But on July 20<sup>th</sup> she appeared with nesting material on the 'shore' and proceeded to swim to the island. Some days she would attempt to jump back to shore but never quite made it.



I watched each day in anticipation and eventually at least 5 young rabbits appeared. The question then was would they swim?

Not only did they swim but two had a real fight with both ending up in the water. At the time of writing, we appear to have two left which are growing up fast. Whether the others were predated we will never know. My research says it is rare for rabbits to swim by choice, and doing so to an island is a very unusual record.



**Mary Wilde** September 2023

## BOOK REVIEWS by Martin Kaye

### **British Birds by F B Kirkman & F C R Jourdain**

This book was first published in 1930, revised in 1938 and last reprinted in 1942 and as a consequence is only available second hand. This is no replacement for e.g. any of the recent editions of the Collins 'Bird Guide' in that the art work, while good, is nowhere near the standard of the modern book and the knowledge of birds has advanced enormously since the 1930s. Also, it doesn't cover European birds.

So why bother considering 'British Birds' as a potential addition to your collection? Well firstly it's just a lovely book to have; measuring 20 X 27 cm and with 200 pages, it's a weighty tome with full page colour plates of most birds. However, the real reason for getting hold of a copy is the extra information you get which isn't in the Collins or indeed any other modern bird ID book that I've come across. Each species comes with a lengthy



the three local forms replace it.

**III. Nest and Eggs.**—Placed against a bank, among ivy, on upturned root of tree, in old nests of other birds, stone walls, or holes of any kind; built of whatever material is within reach, but usually largely of moss, though bracken and dead leaves are also often used; domed, with circular entrance at side, and warmly lined with feathers when used for breeding. Eggs: normally 5–6, occasionally 4 or 7, but 8 to 11, 14, and 16 recorded on good authority; white, occasionally unmarked, but generally fine red speckles, chiefly at big end. Average of 100 British eggs, 16.6 × 12.7 mm. (.65 × .50 in.). Eggs of St. Kilda Wren are larger—50 average, 18.3 × 13.6 mm. (.72 × .53 in.). Those of Shetland Wren intermediate. Laying begins late April. Two or more broods. Incubation period, 14–16 days, probably by hen. (Plate 182, f. 2 a–b.)

**IV. Food.**—Chiefly insects and spiders, including small beetles, larvæ of moths, craneflies and larvæ, Trichoptera larvæ; also aphides and some seeds.

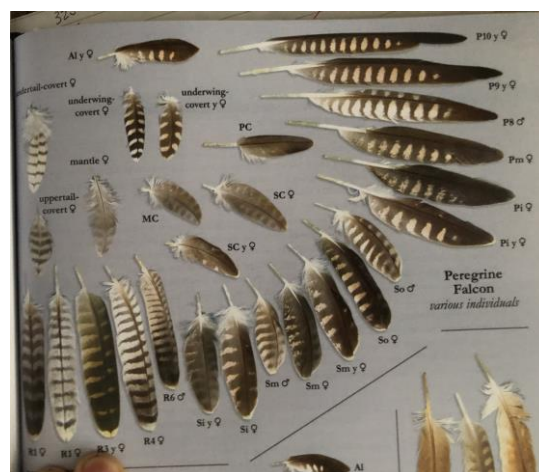
**V. Usual Notes.**—The usual notes of the species are the following:

section on the nest and eggs illustrated by a copy of that

for the wren and in addition, you'll find excellent colour plates of birds' eggs at the back, all to scale. Now have you ever come across an egg and struggled to identify it using either a book or the Internet? This book should make this much easier. Lastly, it's possible to buy a copy in good condition through the likes of Abe Books for less than £10. Thoroughly recommended!

### **Feathers by Cloé Fraigneau**

Have you ever picked up a feather and wondered which bird it came from and then struggled to find any source to help you identify it. This book overcomes that problem. Unlike 'British Birds', this book is bang up to date – published originally in French in 2017, it was translated into English in 2021. At 20 X 29 cm and 400 pages, this is a monster of a book and comes at a price of £40+. However, the amount of work and care that has gone into this book must have been monumental. It contains the colour plates of the different feathers (to scale) of over 300 species of bird offering the reader an exceptionally accurate means of identifying not just which bird the feather came from, but which part of its body. The photo is intended to give you an idea of how comprehensive this book is while not doing full justice to the quality of the original. The book begins with an introduction to the structure and naming of feathers which is then followed by guidance on how to identify which part of the bird your feather has come from. There's an interesting section on how feathers differ according to the demands put upon it by the style of flight e.g. gliding/soaring/flapping flight. The book also includes useful summary keys to enable reader to make comparisons between closely related species. This is an awesome work but at a price.



Martin Kaye 8/8/23

## ARTICLES OF TOPICAL INTEREST

### Some good news and some bad for Hen Harriers

#### GOOD - Successful summer for Mar Lodge Hen Harriers



No fewer than 32 Hen Harriers fledged at Mar Lodge Estate NNR in Western Aberdeenshire this summer, it has been revealed.

The figure is the highest number since Hen Harriers colonised the estate, which is managed by National Trust for Scotland, in 2016.

The 32 fledglings came from eight successful nests, the estate revealed. In total, 11 pairs were noted on territory.

A Mar Lodge statement on said: "It is likely that the breeding success this year was in part due to the extremely high vole numbers present which also benefitted other species such as Common Kestrels and owls. We recorded many more Short-eared Owl sightings than usual this year."

The positive news comes soon after a run of satellite-tagged Hen Harriers suddenly disappeared in suspicious circumstances in early August.

#### BAD - Three more satellite-tagged Hen Harriers vanish on grouse moors

Three more satellite-tagged Hen Harriers have disappeared from private grouse moors, the RSPB has revealed. Their GPS tags show they vanished from moors in the Yorkshire Dales, Northumberland and Cumbria between 9 and 15 August, close to the start of the grouse-shooting season. RSPB Chief Executive, Beccy Speight, said it was "the first time so many Hen Harriers have gone missing in such a short space of time, all on driven grouse moors."



"If these magnificent birds are ever going to have a sustainable population in England this has to stop," she said. "Productivity from nests means nothing if the birds don't survive." The charity said the three birds were in addition to 21 reported missing in the 12 months to April. The RSPB said nine other satellite-tagged harriers had vanished or been found dead near Birkdale Common since September 2020.

All three incidents had been reported to the police and the National Wildlife Crime Unit. If you have information about anyone killing birds of prey which you wish to report anonymously, call the RSPB's confidential Raptor Crime Hotline on 0300 999 0101.

## Ouse Fen: the nature reserve where the best is still to come

Creating a nature reserve isn't as simple as letting the grass grow or planting a few trees. Sometimes it's an incredibly complex process of continuous improvement that can take years to complete. Sometimes it takes decades.



### Transforming a quarry into a haven for wildlife

In the heart of the East Anglian countryside, a nature reserve is being created that's going to take a generation to complete.

[Ouse Fen](#) is a joint project between the RSPB and construction company Hanson UK, and together we're working to transform a massive quarry into a haven for wildlife. The quarry itself will be running for 30 years by the time it's closed down, and by the end of its life, over 28 million tonnes of sand and gravel will have been excavated!

When each section of the quarrying is completed, the RSPB and Hanson UK work together to ensure the dumpers and dozers create the high-quality ditches, reedbeds and pools that different species need. Each area is then handed over to the RSPB to manage for nature and for people to visit. It's a trailblazing partnership, and it's the largest project involving this type of quarry anywhere in Europe.

### A new wetland that's great for wildlife and people

Ouse Fen is a wetland site, with pools and wet grassland and a reedbed that, at 460 hectares, will eventually be the largest in the UK. Work is still ongoing at the reserve, but in 20 years, the project has already transformed huge areas into perfect natural havens, and wildlife is pouring in, including some real rarities.

Top species include Bearded Tits, European Cranes, Marsh Harriers, Water Voles and Otters, as well as an important population of Bitterns. In fact, in 2021, an incredible 12 male Bitterns were heard 'booming' out their mating calls at Ouse Fen. Ouse Fen provides a great landscape for people as well. A network of 20 miles of paths is being built to help people explore the wetland, and a new visitor entrance with car park has been added to provide easy access. The local community also helped put together trail maps to help people walk to the reserve from nearby villages. Volunteers have also made a massive difference at Ouse Fen. So far, they've helped to plant an amazing 130,000 reeds – by hand!

## A little history and with more to come

Wetlands are an important habitat, but sadly, they've been vanishing for hundreds of years. Over centuries, people have straightened the Fens' many rivers, and added channels and ditches to drain this low-lying area for farmland. Drying the peaty soils has caused them to shrink meaning that much of the Fens now lie below sea level. Not only has this caused even more problems with flooding, but it's also led to carbon escaping from the soil, which contributes to the climate emergency. Huge areas of wildlife habitat have also been lost.

That's why Ouse Fen is so important: it's replacing this lost habitat that is vital to so many species.

The Hanson-RSPB Wetland Project began in 2001, and the transformation has been gradual because the quarry is still in operation. But it's already making a difference, and by the end of the project, it's going to be even better.



We're already seeing important wildlife moving in, but by 2030, we're hoping to see even more, and have ambitions for 20 booming Bitterns at the site, and 100 nesting pairs of Bearded Tits.

A project of this scale and vision can only happen with the support and enthusiasm of a wide range of organisations and individuals. Hanson and the RSPB would particularly like to thank Cambridgeshire County Council and local people for their help and support in developing this important project.