

OGSTON BIRD CLUB

MARCH 2025



NEWSLETTER



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025.....	1
NEWS ROUND UP.....	2-5
WHY DO FALCONS HAVE STRIPES UNDER THEIR EYES?.....	6-9
LINKS TO OTHER ARTICLES OF GENERAL INTEREST.....	9
CLUB FACEBOOK GROUP.....	10
TRIPS CALENDAR 2025.....	11

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

This year as last the Ogston Bird Club AGM is again going to be held in Ashover Parish Hall on **Friday 13th June** at the usual time of **7:30 pm**.

Ashover Parish Hall, Milken Ln, Ashover, Chesterfield S45 0BA

This location has excellent parking and facilities.

After the business of the meeting (of which further details later) we shall be entertained by the Guest Speaker who will hopefully be Matthew Capper, presently Head of Public Engagement and Communications at Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust. Not to be missed!

So get this date in your diary/calendar without further ado.

CLUB MEMBERSHIP 2025

It is opportune to thank all the members who have renewed their membership for 2024. If any of you reading this have not renewed yet and intend to do so, it isn't too late, you still have until the end of this month (March) to renew before we have stop bothering you with Club correspondence. Of course, you would be welcome back anytime! We have said this many times before, but our members are at the heart of Ogston Bird Club and we could not continue to fulfil our objectives without your support.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Welcome to the Spring 2025 newsletter. In relative terms it has been a mild winter, although with some brief spells of cold weather with severe ice.

Plenty of ornithological interest at the reservoir.

Did you know that last year, a fantastic total of 163 species were reported to the club at Ogston and its recording area? This amounts to over 7000 sightings shared by our members!

In order to compile this list and to continue to share what is seen on a daily and monthly basis, our Recording Secretary, Richard Gratton, depends on club members reporting their sightings. There are different ways in which you can do this - by writing in the hide diary when you visit (this is kept in the Main Hide) or by emailing Richard directly at richg76@gmail.com. You can also become a member of the Club's Sightings group on WhatsApp. This was launched in November 2024 and already has over 170 members. It's a place for reporting the more notable sightings as they happen (for more information on this, please email Richard.) When you share or send your reports, we are interested in hearing about **ALL** of your sightings and counts; not just the more 'notable' sightings so please continue to report what you see - already this year 94 species have been reported from 1800 reports.

The gull roost has been somewhat reduced in recent years, perhaps associated with the closure of waste tips, but nonetheless remains significant. There have been at least two Caspian Gulls: a regular adult and an occasional juvenile. The Caspian Gulls had departed around mid-February.

Whilst the white-winged gulls (Glaucous and Iceland Gulls) have certainly become less numerous in recent winters, we have seen occasional Mediterranean Gulls, as in the attached photograph taken by Trevor West. On the 27th February. When in winter plumage amongst a roost of Black-headed Gulls, they take some finding, but the white primaries of the adults distinguish them, even when peering into the gloom! The roost of maybe 3,000 gulls had become reduced by the end of February to more like 1,000, as the birds progressively disperse to breed



One, and occasionally two, Stonechats have appeared in the car park and area of the hides in the early weeks of the year.

A lone Curlew was present on 22nd February, rising to twelve by Friday 28th February, Up to three Oystercatchers progressively arrived from the first week of February to take up their residence for the breeding season; possibly more by the time this newsletter is circulated. it remains to be seen what success they enjoy

this year. In 2024 a pair were predated, almost certainly by a mink, on the large island, but they or others then nested successfully on the public hide roof.



The star of the show was a fine Red-crested Pochard which arrived in December and stayed into the new year. Two Bramblings appeared near the hides on 11th January



Photographs

Stonechat: Brambling. Mary Wilde

Curlew and Oystercatchers, 22nd Feb. Red-crested Pochard, 29th Dec.

Steve Walker

Mediterranean Gull 27th Feb. Trevor West



A New Sand Martin Bank!

Severn Trent Water have kindly funded for us a new **Sand Martin Bank**, which with support from our volunteers, was supplied and installed on 27th February by the manufacturers Green Future Buildings Ltd of Honley, near Holmfirth. There is a shortage of natural Sand Martin banks in north Derbyshire, and we are pleased to be doing our bit to help.



The unit has 48 nest holes and chambers which we have packed with grit sand and await the arrival of the Sand Martins.



The unit is mounted on a substantial frame which is *postcreted* in position and should survive high winds with no difficulty. It is positioned unobtrusively at the north end of the main reedbed where the birds will have an uncluttered approach, and the intention is that the front is visible from the public hide.



The degree of success enjoyed by artificial Sand Martin banks on other sites has varied. Much seems to depend on maintenance; particularly replacing the sand in occupied chambers annually to counteract parasitizing by flat-flies to which hole nesters are particularly vulnerable.



There have occasionally been **Kingfishers** adopting holes in these Sand Martin banks, and ground nesters have laid on the roof if covered by temperature-regulating fibrous material or pebbles

Habitat maintenance

A certain amount of vegetation clearance is planned around the hides to avoid two areas in particular becoming overgrown. We have been rather hampered by very high water levels in the reservoir, and will have to respond as conditions permit. Of course, such work cannot be undertaken during the bird breeding season

The West Bank Viewpoints

Severn Trent and their contractors, Wildwood Forestry, have been particularly busy with management of the SSSI and especially clearance of viewpoints with our co-operation. Thanks indeed to them.

The burgeoning reedbed in the **Damp Patch** has been opened up, with careful control of tree growth to improve light. Such work has to be conducted strictly within guidelines for the SSSI. Where small trees have been reduced, tree stump killer pegs have been used, as members walking down the west bank have observed.



A viewpoint towards the south of the reservoir has also been cleared in a sizeable exercise by Wildwood Forestry. This is at present *the gap with no name*. Shall we call it South Gap?



All our main observation landmarks now appear on a Google Earth map to be found on the website and in your annual report, and are signposted discreetly on site, to assist with records of sightings.

A good deal of management has been undertaken at **Jim Mart Nature Reserve** during the winter.

Our own artisan, Andrew Woodhouse, has been able to undertake hedge-laying assisted by volunteers under his instruction. This has improved the hedges for wildlife, including nesting birds. The large footbridge is to be retired, and the area redesigned to provide for access across the stream. The “meadow“ continues to be developed to encourage less dominant plant species.

Trees growing around the former underground reservoir have been pruned to improve the position for bats approaching what is now their hibernaculum. The intention is that the bat population will be further surveyed this summer, and a mammal survey by the Derbyshire Bat Group is proposed.



WHY DO FALCONS HAVE STRIPES UNDER THEIR EYES?

The answer is more complex than we thought

by Arjun Amar and Chevonne Reynolds, *The Conversation*



Peregrine, (© John Pringle)

Falcons are found worldwide, from the fast and slick hobbies to the large and powerful gyrfalcon of the Arctic tundra. In Africa, falcons are found across many habitats. Several species are unique to the continent, including the endangered Taita falcon, which nests on high cliffs, and the greater kestrel, which breeds in the old nests of other species, particularly crows.

There are 39 species of falcon in the world. They occur on all continents except Antarctica. Falcons belong to a group of unrelated birds called raptors (or birds of prey), which are distinguished mainly by their hooked beaks, keen eyesight and sharp talons.

As scientists studying falcons, we have always been fascinated by the dramatic dark stripes beneath their eyes (malar stripes).

These eye markings don't just define their look—they've long been thought to act like natural sunglasses, reducing the amount of sun glare reflected into their eyes and thus improving their ability to hunt in bright sunlight.

This idea may also sound familiar to sports fans. Athletes in baseball and American football often smear dark stripes, known as "eye black", under their eyes to enhance their vision in bright conditions. Scientific studies show that this can improve contrast sensitivity and reduce glare, providing a critical advantage for athletes tracking fast-moving balls. Could it be that nature perfected this innovation long before humans caught on?

In 2021, we published a paper providing evidence that this "natural eye black" might help peregrine falcons, the most widespread raptor species, to spot and hunt prey in sunny environments. But in our new paper, we reveal a more complex story—one where these markings may play other roles across different falcon species.

Studying Peregrine Falcons.

Using over 2,000 photos of peregrine falcons submitted by birdwatchers around the globe, our earlier study tested the "solar glare hypothesis" by investigating whether peregrines living in brighter environments had larger or darker malar stripes. For each photo we assessed the size (length and width) and darkness of each falcon's malar stripe. We also described the direction in which the bird was posing in case this had an effect on the malar stripe's appearance. We then linked the location of each photo to a global dataset of solar radiation exposure.

This allowed us to estimate the level of solar radiation to which the birds in the photos were exposed, and to compare that with their malar stripes.

We found that peregrines living in sunnier regions, like Australia, had larger and darker malar stripes than those in areas with less sunlight, like Scotland. The findings supported the idea that these markings evolved as an adaptation to bright, sunny environments and work to shield the falcons' eyes from glare, giving them a better chance of spotting and catching prey mid-flight.

This was the first empirical support for a hypothesis that had long been part of popular ornithological (bird) lore, and often taught to undergraduates, but had never been rigorously tested. Peregrines, the fastest species in the world, hunt agile birds like pigeons and doves, and therefore rely heavily on precise vision. Thus, the idea that their malar stripes could work to enhance this ability made evolutionary sense.

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What about the other Falcons?

Inspired by these findings, we set out to explore whether the same pattern applied to other falcon species. We used over 10,000 images of 39 falcon species collected from citizen science platforms, including the Macaulay Library. Surprisingly, this larger study challenged our earlier assumptions.

We again linked the solar radiation levels experienced by the falcons in different locations to the size and darkness of their malar stripes. Contrary to what we observed in peregrines, for these other species the size of their malar stripe was unrelated to the level of sunlight exposure. In our new analysis, peregrines still showed a clear connection between brighter environments and darker stripes. But this was not the case for their relatives. We also didn't find an overall pattern of species living in sunnier regions like Africa having larger and darker malar stripes. In fact, some African species, like the Dickinson's kestrel, had no malar stripes at all.

Our findings supported the opinions of previous research which also pointed out inconsistencies with the solar glare hypothesis. It was noted that many desert falcons, like the Saker falcon, have relatively small or inconspicuous malar stripes.

So, why the stripes? These results suggest that malar stripes may serve different purposes depending on the species. For peregrines, the solar glare hypothesis still seems to hold up. But for other falcons, these markings might play roles unrelated to sunlight. Perhaps they help to camouflage the falcon's eyes from prey or act as social signals to other falcons.

This variability underscores the complexity of evolution. Just as athletes in different sports wear specialized gear, falcons' malar stripes may have developed in accordance with the unique challenges of their environments and lifestyles. The stripes are not a one-size-fits-all solution but reflect the diversity of adaptation.

Citizen Science Peregrines remain the poster child for the solar glare hypothesis. But our findings remind us of the need to not assume that relationships in one species hold true for others. Future research could test these ideas experimentally or delve into the social and ecological functions of malar stripes in other falcon species.

We hope that citizen scientists and their photos can still play a key role in these efforts. Without their data, we could not have undertaken this research. Such photos are playing an increasingly useful role in understanding the ecology and evolution of raptors, with recent studies using photos to examine raptor diet at unprecedented scales.

If you're interested in supporting raptor research, consider uploading your raptor photos to citizen science platforms like eBird or iNaturalist. Your observations could help unlock new discoveries about these remarkable birds.

9 January 2025

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Links to MORE ARTICLES of general interest

DOG TRACKING STUDY

https://www.birdguides.com/articles/dog-tracking-study-reveals-disturbance-to-lowland-heaths/?utm_campaign=1606413_Weekly%20News%20from%20BirdGuides%2027%2F01%2F2025&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotdigital&dm_i=73DM,YFIL,ZVD5U,4CFTT,1

PESTICIDES MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY CRISIS

https://www.birdguides.com/news/pesticides-a-major-contributor-to-global-biodiversity-crisis-says-stud/?utm_campaign=1915886_Weekly%20News%20from%20BirdGuides%2017%2F02%2F2025&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotdigital&dm_i=73DM,152B2,ZVD5U,4MC02,1

FACEBOOK GROUP PAGE

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



This is a “private” Group, membership of which is only open to Ogston Bird Club members, so hopefully by now you have renewed your Club membership for 2025 to ensure your continued uninterrupted and valued participation.



The Facebook Group currently has in the order of 270 members – there are as ever 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.

Male Brambling Feb 2025

If you are 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. But do **please bear in mind the importance of not drawing attention to “sensitive” breeding or nesting birds in your postings on this or any social media site for that matter.**

Curlew Mar 2025



Steve Walker_ March 2025

Calendar of Trips 2025

Trip	Day/Date	Meeting Point	Time	Dist from Chesterfield	Leader	Notes and target species
Cutthroat Bridge South Yorkshire	Wednesday 9/4/25	Car park in massive layby on south side A57 heading towards Sheffield at SK21 7875 one mile east of Ladybower Inn (map on website)	08:30	16 miles	Martin Kaye	Half/Full day depending on whether you opt for the short walk (2 miles) or the 5 mile tougher one (see website details under TRIPS/TRIPS DIARY) Looking for Ring Ouzels. Other species might include Red Grouse, Golden Plover, Raven, Kestrel and Peregrine.
Lawrence Field, Upper Padley Gorge, Bar Brook Plantation	Wednesday 7/5/25	Park at the side of the Grindleford to Foxhouse road (SK258800)	08:30	15 miles	Martin Kaye	Half/Full day (see website details under TRIPS/TRIPS DIARY) may need packed lunch. Dist 1-2 miles. Lawrencefield - Stonechat, Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, maybe Whinchat. Padley - Redstart, Pied + Spotted Flycatchers, maybe Wood Warbler + other woodland birds. Bar Brook - as above but more likely to get Whinchat.
Whisby Nature Park and RSPB Langford Lowfields	Wednesday 14/5/25	Whisby reserve is brown signed left from the roundabout on the A46 just west of Lincoln	09:30	45 miles	Steve Slack	Take lunch if you want to stay out into the afternoon. Short gentle walking around the reserves. Whisby - Blackcap, Garden Warbler, both types of Whitethroat. Langford Lowfields - Hobby and possibly Bittern and Bearded Tits
First Nightjar trip	Wednesday evening 21/5/25	Flash Lane (Darley Moor) at large layby SK293694 (see map on website)	9pm	6 miles	Steve Slack	Arrive early for Tree Pipits and other woodland birds then as it turns dark, Nightjars and Woodcock
Second Nightjar trip	Tuesday evening 27/5/25	Flash Lane (Darley Moor) at large layby SK293694 (see map on website)	9pm	6 miles	Martin Kaye	Arrive early for Tree Pipits and other woodland birds then as it turns dark, Nightjars and Woodcock
Annesley Pit Top	Wednesday 11/6/25	Newstead SK523530 (see map on website)	09:30	20 miles	Martin Kaye	Half day. Exploring a local nature reserve. Black-necked Grebe should be the stars but a good variety of birds, dragonflies and stunning wild flowers.
Blacktoft RSPB	Sunday 20/7/25	RSPB reserve DN14 8HR	09:30	60 miles 1 hour 15	Martin Kaye	Full day. Packed lunch. Water birds, Marsh Harriers and possibly Bearded Tits
Frampton RSPB	Sunday 03/8/25	RSPB reserve PE20 1AY TF356392	09:30	75 miles 2 hour	Martin Kaye	Full day. Packed lunch. Returning migrant waders e.g. Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper, wildfowl including early geese and shelduck. Various Raptors. 50+ species!
Dearne Valley Tour	Sunday 5/10/25	Edderthorpe Flash Wombwell Ings RSPB Old Moor	09:30	44 miles	Martin Kaye	Starting at Edderthorpe Flash (see map on website), a lovely reserve viewed from an area used regularly for flytipping but don't be put off (if you have a scope, bring it). Wombwell involves a bit of a walk but proper birding. Old Moor around lunch time with all its hides and maybe a visit to nearby Adwick Washlands if anything special reported.

All three scheduled trips have run to date so let us hope that the weather stays kind for the remaining programme which is outlined above. Obviously, the focus is now on the one to Cutthroat Bridge where we hope to see the mountain blackbird, the Ring Ouzel along with a supporting cast of other moorland birds and a variety of raptors.

Martin Kaye _ March 2025



**OGSTON
BIRD CLUB**