

# WBC - Kessingland & Benacre

August 30th 2014

As so many times before on the Suffolk coast, the weather forecast was wrong. The promised dry weather seemed to have gone round Hulver at 7.30 on this Saturday morning, heading for the glamour of Kessingland Sewerage Works and perhaps a morning of migrant encounters.

The plan was to liaise with the Kessingland ringing team and Colin Carter at the nets set up around the site, and then to head down to Benacre Sluice under the guidance of Roger Walsh.

Colin explained the layout of the Kessingland site and its blend of environments in a very contained area. The Works themselves attract plenty of insects (at least no-one asked 'why?') which proves an attraction for birds lining up on the coast waiting for a favourable tail wind to head off south, while surrounding it are unmaintained reedbeds, deep dykes, fishing lakes, light woodland and rides, together with scrubby areas.

Ringing itself is a long-term commitment, and is probably not for everyone. The training takes several years, and regular attendance at a ringing site is critical if data relating to trends is to be established. It is also important that both trainer and trainee turn up!

It has its own language too – pullis, re-traps, scribes – a table-full of different size rings, identification guides dealing with the minutiae of tertials and the like, pliers, bags, notebooks, digital scales etc.

*Ringing at Kessingland (Chaffinch & Wren in hand).*









Colin explained that the team were licenced to use recordings of calls and songs, and these were now supplied on MP3 loops, played into small speakers and hidden around the site. That explained the sudden song of Wood Warbler and ChiffChaff which – even when you know it's a recording – still fooled me twice. Goldfish memory....

Ringling also gives you the chance to examine birds in a detail not even Swarovski or Zeiss can match: the V-shape of fat on the breast, revealed by blowing the feathers gently, or the spots on a young Wren's tongue, for instance. But – as Colin pointed out – it is critical the ring goes on first, each one meticulously logged. Too many times a fulsome explanation of the bird's anatomy and migration weight has been followed by its release, with the ringer realising no ringling happened... We explored the site, catching ChiffChaffs, Whitethroat and Lesser-Whitethroat, Chaffinch, watched sullenly by a sickly Wood Pigeon, perching out the rain. Must have been something it ate....but let's not go there at this location.

Rings were clamped onto a couple of Wrens and a rather portly Garden Warbler, and then – RAPTOR ALERT! At first thought to be a Common Buzzard, but – although against the now clearing sky and fairly lofty –

there was much about the profile that suggested Honey Buzzard. But that's how it had to remain – 'probable' Honey Buzzard, which was one up from 'possible'....

And so, to stage 2, and a big thanks to Colin and his team.

The weather was cheering up as the breeze picked up and we headed towards the beach.

The coast had been fairly active during the previous week, bringing Wryneck and Icterine Warbler to various spots – Twitter was announcing a Greenish Warbler at Southwold that very morning.

The extensive, flat, grassy, shingly terrain of Kessingland is a top spot at migration time, with low bushes, brambles and the River Hundred separating the scrub around the caravan park from the Bencacre reserve.

You've got to get up pretty early to beat the dog walkers though, and it seems compulsory that everyone in Kessingland must own at least three.

The breeze was certainly picking up now, keeping what birds there were down, so we headed round the inland edge of the site, picking up Swallow, a few House Martins and Whitethroat on the way.

Bushes round the river produced Linnet and some good views of a pair of Stonechat (and a few alarm calls from a hidden Blackcap) before we got onto the first of four or five Wheatear.

The way they scamper a few paces then stand bolt upright always gives the impression they are announcing themselves to the birder trying to identify them - 'I, sir, am a WHEATEAR!' before scampering off again.

We headed off over the Sluice (after Roger had picked up on a couple of Sandwich Terns heading south over the sea) aiming for Beach Farm at Benacre, where the track runs in a gully for a couple of hundred yards, and thus was likely to provide calmer conditions. We were accompanied on-and-off through this journey by a female Sparrowhawk, which obliged us with a brief perched view.

Turning right up the track to the farm, Kevin spotted a Hobby, flying south and right over our heads.

Dragonflies had been fairly obvious throughout the morning, and I suspect this is what the bird was after. We'd had pretty good numbers of Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker and a few Common Darter. Butterfly-wise, it had been quiet – mainly Speckled Woods at the ringing site, but it wasn't good weather for them.

It was Helga who first located the Pied Flycatchers; a pair of them, using a dead tree as a feeding perch. At first they frustrated the scopes –

perching briefly before heading right and down, out of sight, before returning to not-quite-the-same branch. However, one finally settled, providing rare east coast views of this cute little migrant, with its little slashes of white on the wing, like lobster claws....



Pied Flycatcher by Jane

Eventually, we had to walk on and disturb them, as others were trying to use the path. We scanned the paddock hopefully, looking for something like the serpentine head of a Wryneck, but it was pretty quiet. Further up past the farm, large flocks of Linnet and Goldfinch were located in the hedges.

So, we headed back. The beach had been breached between Beach Farm and Benacre Broad, so it probably wasn't worth heading any further south.

Rob, Helen and myself dawdled a little at the turn-around, and got further good views of the Flycatchers, which were now in another dead tree on the other side of the paddock – or perhaps these were another pair? Or were we just being greedy?

Altogether, an absorbing morning, taking advantage of Colin Carter's encyclopaedic knowledge gained over a lifetime of birding, a good walk, good company and good birds.

But – Bird of the Day? Does a 'definite' Pied Flycatcher and Hobby outweigh a 'probable' Honey Buzzard?

Meanwhile, Mr. Piotrowski was at Southwold, picking up on the Greenish Warbler. But he can tell you about that when you see him.....  
*Report: Paddy Shaw*

### **Bird checklist**

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL, HERRING GULL, BLACK-HEADED GULL, JACKDAW, ROOK, GOLDFINCH, HOUSEMARTIN, BLACKBIRD, ROBIN, COLLARED DOVE, CROW, SWALLOW, GREAT TIT, BLUE TIT, WOOD PIGEON, PHEASANT, MAGPIE, SWIFT – 5 OR 6 DURING THE DAY, SONG THRUSH, CHAFFINCH, WREN, SPARROWHAWK – AT LEAST THREE, WHITETHROAT, LESSER WHITETHROAT, GREEN WOODPECKER, JAY, MUTE SWAN – FAMILY PARTY 2 ADS AND 2 JUVS, KESTREL, PIED WAGTAIL, GREENFINCH, STARLING, KINGFISHER, STONECHAT, LINNET, WHEATEAR – AT LEAST 5, BUZZARD – 4, POSSIBLE HONEY BUZZARD, MARSH HARRIER, SANDWICH TERN, LITTLE GREBE – 4, HOBBY, PIED FLYCATCHER, DUNNOCK, FERAL PIGEON, STOCK DOVE