



‘What’s About’

No 28

Autumn and early Winter 2011

Perhaps the mild autumn encouraged **Brent Geese** to linger longer in Scandinavia. It was only flocks of a dozen or so that flew in our part of the river until the end of October. By mid November a flock of 500 birds, memorable for its size and noise, crowded along the tideline and on some of the green fields adjacent to the river. Within a week the flock had dispersed, leaving about 350 birds to roost at the southern end of the island and the channel by Stonner Point, where fluctuating numbers have remained into December.

Brents were heard first on the evening of the 14th Oct, and on the 15th about 30 birds were seen near the island. The morning of the 8th Nov seemed to be particularly dreary, but Sally wrote, ‘I’ve just walked round the river at low tide. Hundreds of Brent Geese were feeding under the Tips. Their chuntering floating through the mist with bubbling Curlews was quite magical.’

The number of duck was slow to build up, but by mid November, as the weather cooled, large numbers of **Wigeon** and **Teal** were to be seen and 25 **Pintail** were counted below Manor House on the 18th Nov. On 4th Dec 2 male and 1 female **Goldeneye** were near the island.

Some interesting waders have been seen. On the 13th Nov 150+ **Golden Plover** were visible on the beach side of the island and on the 19th about 250 birds were there until the rising tide persuaded them to make for the Stonner Point shoreline. **Grey Plover** tend to be more solitary but scans of the tideline in our stretch of the river generally record 20-30 feeding birds. 3 (possibly as many as 5) **Red breasted Mergansers** were on the open water to the south of the island on the 19th Nov. 9 **Great-crested Grebes** were downstream of the island on the same day. On most days this species can be seen easily on the open water. **Little Grebes** are back within the moorings, usually in a loose group of half a dozen, but they’re tricky to count owing to their constant diving to feed. However, 9 just off Debenair were enjoyed by Janette on the 1st Dec.

Lapwings also frequent the island and 150 + are often seen there. They fly inland to feed in fields and good numbers have been seen in the sheep pasture towards Newbourne. 40 were seen flying near the Church on the 14th Nov. and there were over 100 in the same area on the 30th Nov. **Oystercatchers** enjoy the sand bar at The Tips where 63 were counted on the 13th Nov.

2 **Greenshank** were sighted not far from the boatyard on the 6th Nov. 40 **Black-tailed Godwit** were counted on the mud near the grazing marsh on the 27th Nov.

50+ **Avocets** could be seen on the shoreline toward Ramsholt Rocks on the 19th Oct. and this large flock was in Kirton Creek on the 1st Nov. 49 could be seen near Stonner Point on the 13th Nov. and 63 on the 19th Nov. On the village side of the river Avocets are seen less frequently, but 4 were on the mud near the grazing marsh on the 6th Dec.

A **Heron** perched on the garden arch at Cornfield Cottage and there, whilst watched by Stella, remained motionless for more than 10 minutes.

A **Woodcock** was put up from near the bridge at Howe's Farm on the morning of the 26th Oct. Another was put up from the hedgerow in Sandy Lane on the 16th Nov and one was seen in flight near the pond thicket in Fishpond Road on the 25th Nov.

Marsh Harriers have been seen regularly over the saltings to the south of the village, over the island and at Stonner Point. They are seen less regularly to the north, but as the weather becomes more wintery and disturbance by river users less frequent they are likely to range to Methersgate and Kyson. A Marsh Harrier was over Church Field and then School Road on the 4th Oct. Two Marsh Harriers were mobbed by a Crow at Kirton Creek on the 6th Oct. **Hen Harriers** have been recorded this winter at Falkenham and King's Fleet, they are likely to hunt on the Hemley marshes too.

A **Buzzard** was noted over the Cross Farm saltings on the 27th Sept and another, which put up many Wood Pigeons, was over the down river saltings on the 27th Nov. 2 Buzzards were over Church Field on the 30th Nov. Marsh Harriers and Buzzards are likely to be seen on any walk near the river to the south of the village.

Sparrowhawks are seen regularly. On the 5th Dec Christine wrote, 'Last week I was buzzed by a Sparrowhawk - it had been hanging around our garden and made a failed attempt at some sparrows on the feeders. I sat outside with my cup of tea and peered at it with binoculars, where it was lurking among some rustic timber overgrown with hops. It observed me also and then suddenly whooshed towards me, flying between the top of my head and the pergola. It then completely and instantly vanished'.

Kestrels are seen occasionally over the fields around the village, but they are often encountered at Hemley and Kirton Creek.

At least 2000 **Wood Pigeons** flew across the river from the Sutton side in the early morning of the 27th Nov and by 08.30hrs Sally had noted 40 Wood Pigeons feeding on her lawn. Whether these birds had come from a favoured roost to the east of the Deben, had come from further north within Britain or were recent migrants from the continent would be interesting to know.

We seem to have a healthy population of **Tawny Owls**. Whilst territories are proclaimed and juvenile birds are moved on to establish their own locations they have been calling in most of the wooded areas around the village. Until November sightings of **Barn Owls** had been scarce but single birds have recently been seen over the grazing marsh and two hunting birds were seen on the 8th Nov. One of these birds caught a small mammal but was immediately harassed by a pair of Crows. The owl flew off into the thicket where it appeared to out-manoeuvre the Crows but the outcome is unknown; there is a price to be paid for daylight hunting. A Barn Owl was heard calling whilst in flight over the field near Deben Lane on the 13th Sept.

Little Owls have been heard calling in the wood behind Rivers Hall and one was heard on the green lane alongside the golf course on the 26th Nov. A **Short-eared Owl** was hunting along the riverbank near Ramsholt Rocks on the 13th Oct.

A **Kingfisher** was spotted perched on one of the dinghies on the beach on the 24th Sept and on the 6th Oct one was seen to fly down river past the beach and inland towards the reservoir. Another sighting was of a bird sitting on the sluice near Swan's Nest on the 13th Nov and again favouring the same perch a couple of mornings later.

By mid October migrant **Blackbirds** had arrived from the continent. A flock of 12 noisy but wary birds was feeding on hawthorn berries on the Manor House track during the morning of the 15th Oct and at the same time a flock of 40+ **Starlings** flew northwards over the track. No doubt they were also newly arrived migrants. A flock of **Fieldfares**, **Blackbirds** and probably **Redwings**, about 25 birds, flew from the golf course to a field adjacent to the river on the 7th Nov. On the 8th Nov. Sally noted 8 **Blackbirds** feeding in her garden, as well as many **Wood Pigeons**, 2 **Jays** and 2 **Magpies**. A flock of 10 **Fieldfares** were in hawthorn bushes near Whitehall on the 27th Nov. Joe has recorded a number of **Fieldfares** in his garden. No doubt they were attracted to fallen apples.

A **Green Woodpecker** was feeding in the short grass of the river wall near Debenair on the 21st Sept. and one was calling in Sally's garden on the 29th Sept. A **Great-spotted Woodpecker** was in Christine's garden on the 15th Nov and one was in Pam's garden on the 27th Nov. At the same time a ringed, female blackbird was in the garden. Pam says that 2 **Greenfinches** come regularly to a feeder and it's not unusual to see **House Sparrows** feeding on peanuts.

The third generation brood of **Swallows** fledged at Rudd's Barn on the 23rd Sept and within two days had left the area. About 40 **House Martins** were feeding over the grazing marsh on the 10th Oct.

The **Cetti's Warbler** was calling at the reservoir on the 13th Sept and a **Chiffchaff** was calling near the Sailing Club, with another at Novocastria, both on the 21st Sept. 2 **Goldcrests**, tiny birds that like to busy themselves in pine tree cover to search out insects and spiders, were seen in Fishpond Road on the 5th Nov. and another was in the area on the 26th and 28th Nov. Feeding parties of **Long-tailed Tits** are to be seen but they have not yet been observed in the large groups noted in some previous winters. 6 -10 were seen near Hemley Church and in birches along Fishpond Road in early Oct. A pair of **Coal Tits** was seen feeding in a Scots Pine on Fishpond Road on the 14th Oct.

On the 10th Nov Judith reported that in the last few days up to 3 **Tree Sparrows** had been coming to a feeder in her garden - an important record as the species has become scarce in recent years.

Relatively few birds came to garden feeders in October and early November but as the weather cooled the usual species that benefit from feeders arrived. However, there seems to be a consensus that few **Greenfinches** are coming into gardens. In mid November Christine noted that, '...no **Greenfinches** had been seen since the summer,

but on the 18th Nov one had appeared at a peanut feeder and on the same day 2 **Siskins** had come to the feeder. **Goldfinches** had started to monopolise a sunflower feeder, preferring this to niger seeds. **Coal Tits** had come regularly to a feeder and a **Robin** had been taking sunflower seeds too. A ringed **Greenfinch** was at the feeder on the 22nd Nov and at that time a **Chaffinch** with growths on both legs had been present'. Then on the 5th Dec, 'We have so many sparrows now on fatballs etc I don't think anything else is getting a look in!'

About 15 **Rooks** began to make early morning inspection visits to the rookery in Fishpond Road and they have continued to return during December.

A pair of **Yellowhammers** was seen in Sandy lane on the 12th Nov.

25+ **Linnets** were seen to emerge from the roost in the riverbank gorse in the early morning of the 13th Nov, and they can be watched darting into the gorse at dusk.

Twite, winter visitors from upland Britain, have been seen on the saltings. A flock has been present on the island, in particular, where up to 50 have been recorded. On the 6th Dec the flock was about 20 strong and was in association with 5 or 6 Goldfinches. A couple of years ago colour ringed birds were identified as being ringed earlier in that year on their breeding ground in the Pennines.

An **Otter** was seen just up river of Swan's Nest on the 10th Oct.

A **Badger** was watched at 7.30am in the garden of a house in School Road on the 28th Sept. Again there have been plenty of badger scrapings along the edge of Fishpond Road near to the pond.

A **Fox** that entered Alexis' garden was seen by her to creep under a hay shed. After some time Alexis approach the shed and peering underneath could see the tail of the comfortably resting fox. It departed! And the hole under the shed has been blocked!

There have been few reports recently of **Muntjac**, perhaps colder weather will bring them into gardens. One was near Whitehall on the 17th Oct and a doe and half grown fawn raced across the road near the dip at Howe's Farm on the 3rd Nov.

Hares in groups of two or three are seen in the open fields, but a group of 5 was seen on the 18th Oct. What's the collective noun for hares? Perhaps... a comb-over ...? Your ideas, please!

A **Stoat** was seen to cross the road on the golf course bends on the 18th Sept.

Moles have been making their presence felt in some people's lawns, a mole was found dead on Cliff Rd on the 13th Nov.

Pipistrelle bats are known in various parts of the village, but there are always some surprises and Max Pemberton found a mummified Pipistrelle in the loft of his house in early November.

A pair of **Ruddy Darters** were in mating flight over the pond at Cornfield Cottage on the 18th Sept.

Stella discovered a queen **Wasp**, perhaps preparing to hibernate, in the finger of a gardening glove (before she put it on, I imagine!) on the 30th Sept

The last **Red Admiral** was recorded by Pam in her garden on the 24th Nov.

In mid November some good specimens of **Orange Peel** fungus could be seen on the edge of the first stubble field along Woodbridge Road. Several **Fly Agaric** fungus made a colourful display under the birches opposite the school.



Fairy Ring on Church Field



Fly Agaric on Cliff Road verge

Photos by Christine Fisher Kay



*Orange Peel Fungus in stubble
Photo Peter Maddison*

.....and one year ago 2nd December 2010



For this edition I am grateful to the following contributors: Jill and Michael Atkins, James and Rolls Barclay, Joe and Kit Clark, Pam Crawley, Stella James, Christine Fisher Kay, Joe and Ruth Lubbock, David and Angela Mace, Janette Mace, Anne Maddison, Max and Margaret Pemberton, Sally Redfern, Alexis and John Smith, Judith Stinson.

Please send your sightings to:

Peter Maddison, Barnmead, Fishpond Rd

prmaddison@yahoo.co.uk

