

A Guide to Birding in Southwold

by Stuart Ling and John Cawston



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In Suffolk, we are fortunate in having a number of excellent coastal sites for birds, the majority of which are already well known and frequently visited by birders eg. Landguard, Minnmere, Benacre and Lowestoft. However, the Southwold area has been under-watched in the past and only in the past two or three years has there been a consistent effort to watch this excellent site.

The aim of this paper is to highlight those areas of most interest in and around Southwold and to give an indication of some of the birds that can be expected there.

Southwold has a wide variety of habitats, situated in quite a small area, which are attractive to a diverse range of species. These habitats include: fresh marsh, a boating lake, numerous gardens providing a variety of cover, a golf course and coastal denes. The whole area gives plenty of scope for an interesting day's birding.

The sites described below are the areas that we consider to be of most ornithological interest in Southwold.

1. Southwold Boating Lake

This is situated just north of the pier at the northern edge of the town and, if undisturbed, can be attractive to many birds. Apart from the resident wildfowl, winter may produce the occasional rare grebe or sawbill and in spring and autumn small numbers of waders occasionally drop in to feed. The grassy edges to the lake are attractive to pipits and wagtails, including Scandinavian Rock Pipit in the last two winters.

2. Seawatching

Situated at the northern end of Sole Bay, the town of Southwold projects at least a further two miles out to sea than the east facing coastline immediately to the south and is therefore one of the County's best seawatching sites. The best place to watch is from the small shelter situated on the promenade just south of the pier.

The variety of species to be expected is much the same as at the principal localities further north, i.e. Covehithe and Corton, and in recent years highlights have included: Cory's Shearwater, Leach's and Storm Petrels, Grey Phalarope, Long-tailed Skua, Sabine's Gull, Roseate Tern and Puffin.

The shelter provides obvious protection from the weather, but lacks the height of Covehithe and Corton.

3. Gun Hill and St Edmunds Churchyard

The town has many well-vegetated gardens which are an obvious attraction to migrant passerines. In our experience the best of these are situated on Gun Hill, near the Coastguard lookout and in and around St Edmunds Churchyard. At Gun Hill, the mature Sycamores regularly hold migrant warblers, flycatchers and other passerines including, in the past two years, Icterine and Yellow-browed Warblers, Firecrests and a Red-backed Shrike. The high ground here is also excellent for observing visible diurnal migration, especially during the autumn when early morning watches frequently show large numbers of hirundines, finches etc. to be moving south.

St Edmunds churchyard, situated in the town centre, is also worth checking, particularly for flycatchers and berry-feeding birds such as thrushes. Recent sightings here have included a Yellow-browed Warbler and up to a dozen Crossbills.

4. The Denes

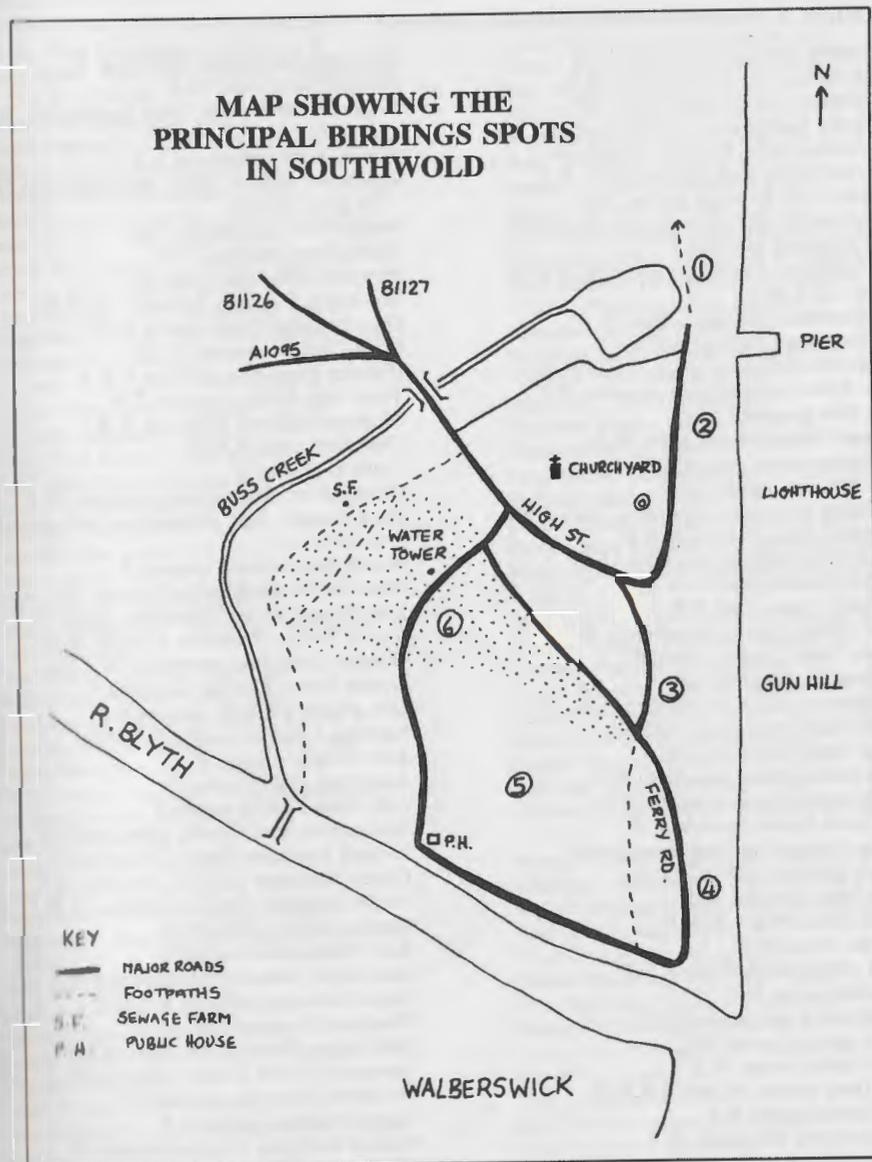
These extend from Gun Hill to the harbour entrance and consist of short turf and marram grass, bordered on the Ferry Road side by a vegetated bank. This area is attractive to many birds including finches, buntings, pipits, chats and warblers and the occasional Wryneck and Ring Ouzel. Early morning is the best time to check this area as it soon becomes disturbed by dog-walkers and such like.

5. Southwold Town Marsh

Situated between Ferry Road and Blackshoe Road this extensive grazing marsh is an important area for both breeding and wintering wildfowl and waders. During the spring small areas frequently flood, attracting migrant waders, notably godwits, Ruff, Whimbrel, etc. Garganey have also been noted regularly. The footpath adjacent to Ferry Road gives excellent views over the whole area. In the winter, Short-eared Owls can often be seen hunting and flocks of finches and buntings regularly feed on the marsh.

6. Southwold Common and Golf Course

Coastal golf courses are well known for their attraction to birds and Southwold's is no exception. The prime areas are the bushes along the southern edge of the golf course, the Holm Oaks around the water tower and the tennis courts near the Club House. Birds seen in this area in the past two years include Barred and Icterine Warblers, Wrynecks, Firecrest and Red-footed Falcon.



At the time of writing the list of species recorded within the parish boundary of Southwold (the area bordered by Buss Creek, the R. Blyth and North Sea) stands at 235.

The following list includes all species that have occurred in this area. An attempt has also been made to record the status of these birds. We would be glad to receive any additional information on the status of these birds and any additions to the list that we have overlooked.

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APPENDIX A — Checklist of the birds of Southwold

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* W,P
 Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* W,P
 Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* RP
 Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* B,R,W
 Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* W,P
 Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* W,P
 Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* W,P
 Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* RW,P
 Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* P
 Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* 28.8.86
 (three), 19.8.88
 Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* P
 Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* P
 Storm Petrel *Hydrobatas pelagicus* 21.11.88
 Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* RP
 Gannet *Sula bassana* P
 Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* W,P
 Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* W,P
 Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* V
 Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 13-20.5.90
 Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* R,W,P
 White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* 23.9.57
 Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* RP
 Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* B,R
 Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus* W
 Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* W
 Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* W
 Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* W
 White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* W
 Greylag Goose *Anser anser* R,W
 Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* R,W
 Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* RW
 Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* W,P
 Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* F
 Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* B,R,P
 Wigeon *Anas penelope* W,P
 Gadwall *Anas strepera* B,W,P
 Teal *Anas crecca* W,P
 Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* R,B,W
 Pintail *Anas acuta* W,P
 Garganey *Anas querquedula* S,P
 Shoveler *Anas clypeata* W,P
 Pochard *Aythya ferina* W,P
 Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* R,B,W,P
 Scaup *Aythya marila* W,P
 Eider *Somateria mollissima* W,P
 Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* W,P
 Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* W,P
 Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca* W,P
 Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* W,P
 Smew *Mergus albellus* RW
 Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* W,P
 Goosander *Mergus merganser* RW
 Red Kite *Milvus milvus* RP
 Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* S,P
 Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* W,P
 Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* RP
 Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* S,W,P
 Buzzard *Buteo buteo* W,P
 Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* RW, RP
 Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* P
 Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* R,B
 Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* 6.6.58,
 24.5.90, 20.6.90
 Merlin *Falco columbarius* W,P
 Hobby *Falco subbuteo* S,P
 Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* RP
 Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* R,B
 Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* R,P
 Quail *Coturnix coturnix* V,(B)
 Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* R,B
 Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* P,W
 Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* R,B
 Coot *Fulica atra* R,B,W
 Crane *Grus grus* V
 Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* W,P
 Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
 22.4.49 (six)
 Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* P
 Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* (B)
 Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* P
 Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* W,P
 Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* 30.9.79
 Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* P
 Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* P
 Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* R,B,W,P
 Knot *Calidris canutus* P
 Sanderling *Calidris alba* P
 Little Stint *Calidris minuta* P
 Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* RP
 Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* V
 Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* P
 Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* W,P
 Dunlin *Calidris alpina* W,P
 Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* P
 Jack Snipe *Lymnocyrtus minimus* RW
 Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* R,B,W,P
 Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* P
 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* B,P
 Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* P
 Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* P
 Curlew *Numenius arquata* P
 Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* P
 Redshank *Tringa totanus* R,B,W,P
 Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* 5-6.5.47
 (three)
 Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* P
 Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* W,P
 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* P
 Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* 2-6.6.51
 Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* P
 Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* W,P
 Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* 22.12.87,
 8.11.89

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* P
 Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* P
 Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*
 25.9.88, 28.9.88
 Great Skua *Catharacta skua* P
 Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* RW,P
 Little Gull *Larus minutus* RW,P
 Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* 12.6.88
 Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* R,W,P
 Common Gull *Larus canus* W,P
 Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* P
 Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* W,P
 Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* RW
 Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* W,P
 Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* W,P
 Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* S,P
 Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* 6.10.89
 Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* S,P
 Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* P
 Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* S,P
 Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* P
 Gull-mot *Uria aalge* W,P
 Razorbill *Alca torda* W,P
 Little Auk *Alle alle* W,P
 Luffin *Fratercula arctica* RW,RP
 Pallan's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus* V
 (1888 invasion)
 Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* R,B
 Stock Dove *Columba oenas* R,B,P
 Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* R,B,W,P
 Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* R,B
 Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* S,B,P
 Winged-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* F
 Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* S,B,P
 Barn Owl *Tyto alba* W
 Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* R,B
 Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* P
 Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* W,P
 Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus* 30.10.01
 (two)
 Swift *Apus apus* S,B,P
 Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* R,B,W
 Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* 16.8.67
 Hoopoe *Upupa epops* 5.5.83, 13.10.90
 Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* P
 Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* W,P
 Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* P
 Woodlark *Lullula arborea* 4.10.80
 Skylark *Alauda arvensis* B,R,W,P
 Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris* RW,RP
 Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* S,P
 Swallow *Hirundo rustica* S,B,P
 Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*
 21-25.11.87, 4.5.89
 House Martin *Delichon urbica* S,B,P
 Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* 7.5.89
 Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* P
 Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* R,B,P
 Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus* W,P
 Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* W,P
 Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* P,S,B
 Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* P
 Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* R,B,P
 Waxwing *Bombicilla garrulus* RW
 Wren Troglodytes *Troglodytes* R,B
 Dunnock *Prunella modularis* R,B,P
 Robin *Erithacus rubecula* R,B,P
 Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* S,(B),P
 Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* 4.9.65 (two), 11.5.85
 Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* P
 Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* P
 Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* P
 Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* W,P,B
 Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* P
 Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* P
 Blackbird *Turdus merula* R,B,P,W
 Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* W,P
 Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* R,B,W,P
 Redwing *Turdus iliacus* W,P
 Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* R,B,P
 Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* P
 Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
 S,B,P
 Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* S,B,P
 Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* RP
 Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* (B)
 Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* RP
 Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* S,B,P
 Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* S,B,P
 Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* S,B,P
 Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* S,B,P
 Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*
 V
 Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* RP
 Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* S,B,P
 Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* S,B,P
 Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* P
 Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* P
 Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* S,B,P
 Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* P
 Bearded Tit *Parus biarmicus* RP
 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caedatus* R,B
 Marsh Tit *Parus palustris* P
 Coal Tit *Parus ater* P
 Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* R,B,P
 Great Tit *Parus major* R,B
 Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* RP
 Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* RP
 Jay *Garrulus glandarius* P
 Magpie *Pica pica* R,B
 Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* 19.10.22
 Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* R,P,W
 Rook *Corvus frugilegus* R,P,W
 Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* R,P,W
 Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* R,B,P,W
 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* R,B,P

Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i> P	Crossbill <i>Loxia curvirostra</i> V
Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> R,B,W,P	Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i> 2.6.91*
Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i> W,P	Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> R,B,P
Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris</i> R,B,W,P	Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i> V
Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> R,B,P	Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i> RW,P
Siskin <i>Carduelis spinus</i> P	Snow Bunting <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i> W,P
Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> B,P	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> R,B,P
Twite <i>Carduelis flavirostris</i> W,P	Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> R,B,P,W
Redpoll <i>Carduelis flammea</i> P	Corn Bunting <i>Miliaria calandra</i> P
Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni</i> 26.11.90	

Key: R — Resident; B — Breeder; (B) — Has bred; W — Winter Visitor; S — Summer Visitor; RW — Rare Winter Visitor; P — Passage Migrant; RP — Rare Passage Migrant; V — Vagrant; F — Feral Wanderer; * — Subject to acceptance by the Suffolk Ornithological Records Committee.