

The ornithological importance of the Fleet and Chesil Bank

Don Moxom
Chesil Bank and the Fleet Nature Reserve



This is recognized in particular by their designation as a Special Protected Area (EC, 1979) and Ramsar Site (internationally protected wetland).

Breeding birds

A nationally important and unique colony of mute swans breed at Abbotsbury, an important colony of little terns currently breed on Chesil, and common terns nest on an artificial island in the Fleet. Chesil also supports low numbers of ringed plover and oystercatcher. Passerine breeding along the Fleet land banks and hinterland is not that well recorded but includes good numbers of important reed bed species (reed and sedge warblers and reed buntings) breed along the Fleet. A few pairs of Cetti's warbler breed and bearded tits and Dartford warbler have bred.



Ringed Plover



Little Tern

Study and research

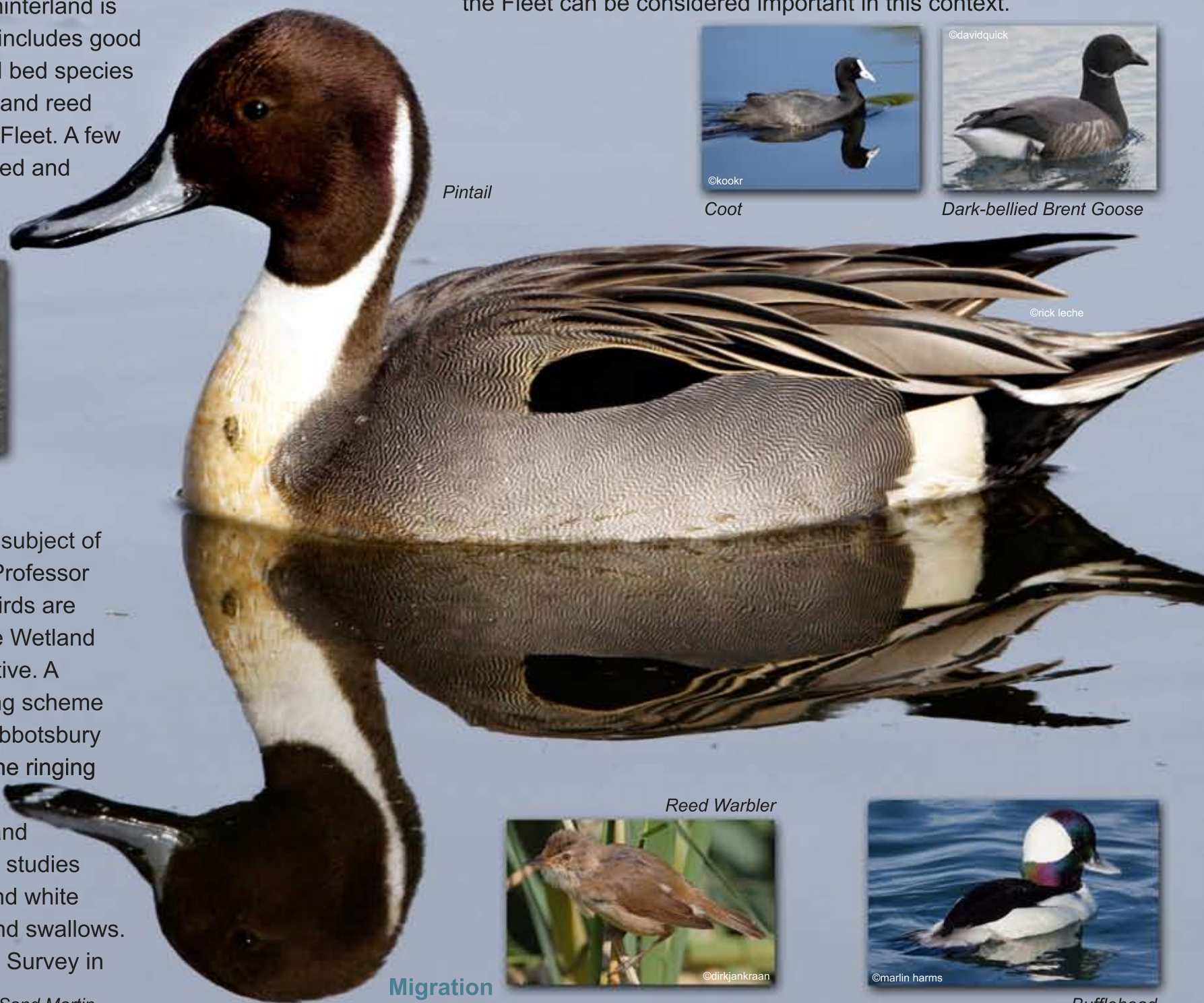
The swans have been the subject of an intensive study led by Professor Chris Perrins. The water birds are counted monthly under the Wetland Birds Survey (Webs) initiative. A 'Constant Effort Site' ringing scheme has been in operation at Abbotsbury since 1994. Other passerine ringing has been carried out on the West and East Fleet, and there are particular ringing studies targeted on yellow, pied and white wagtails, meadow pipits and swallows. There is a 'Breeding Birds' Survey in the hinterland.



Sand Martin

Wintering populations

The Fleet supports an internationally important population of dark-bellied brent geese and nationally important wintering populations of mute swan, wigeon, gadwall, pintail, shoveller, pochard, goldeneye, red-breasted merganser and coot. The wintering wader population on the Fleet is relatively small and not of national importance. However the long stretch of coastline between Poole Harbour and the Exe Estuary has relatively few inter-tidal areas suitable for waders and therefore the Fleet can be considered important in this context.



Pintail



Coot



Dark-bellied Brent Goose



Reed Warbler



Bufflehead

Migration

Owing to its protrusion into the English Channel 'Weyland' offers a first-fall and feeding opportunity for migrants after a long flight. The mixed habitats of the Fleet's landward margin, and particularly its reed-beds, are especially attractive to autumn songbirds most of which are juvenile.

Bird watching

The Fleet has attracted numerous unusual species and some rare vagrants. A never increasing and highly skilled band of birders have contributed to a respectable total of species recorded on the Reserve.