

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report October 2014

A notable passage of **Whooper Swans** occurred through the month with small parties on several dates and 12 then 13 birds on the 21st and 23rd; this was part of a major movement of the species through eastern England as they arrived from Iceland and staged before



continuing to their wintering grounds. There were also record numbers of **Pink-footed Geese** on the Humber with 15,000 counted on the 19th the highest count since 1959 when the same number was recorded. Of these up to 6000 were around the Whitton Sand end of the estuary with skeins of birds being seen daily over the Flats as they flew to and from feeding grounds on the harvested fields inland but in addition passage flocks heading for Norfolk from further north and west were also noted. A neck collared bird seen at South Ferriby on the 3rd then went the other way and was seen in Lancashire on the 14th. A **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** was on site from 6th – 8th while the local **Barnacle Geese**, up to 1200 birds, occasionally landed on the northern pastures. After a rather quiet summer and autumn **Shelduck** came back in better numbers with counts of 348 on the 9th and 390 on the 23rd conforming to the usual October influx of birds returning from their summer moulting grounds but actually being the second lowest October peak on record. **Wigeon** numbers were on a par with recent years peaking at 280 birds on the 9th but the number



of **Teal** was rather more notable with peaks of 3200 on the 9th and 2810 on the 17th the former count being the second highest October total ever only beaten by the 3388 counted in October 2013. On the 17th an adult probably a female **Garganey** was found amongst the Teal, a notably late record of this scarce summer visitor but on the following day there were two birds a juvenile



and the adult. Both birds were present to the 20th with the adult seen again on the 24th forming the latest ever record for the Flats perhaps not surprising given the very mild weather. Up to seven **Pintail** joined the other waterfowl while **Shoveler** numbers seasawed somewhat as birds commuted back and forth from Blacktoft Sands but the peak of 80 on the 17th was joint second highest monthly total following on from the record numbers in September. The new reedbed still had 25 **Tufted Ducks** on the 2nd and unusually four **Pochard** on the 31st and there were still up to 14 **Little Grebes** scattered around the site.

Although **Marsh Harrier** numbers fell around the estuary up to six birds could be seen on the Flats with some nice plumaged males; interestingly the birds were often hunting over the reedbeds where the Starlings roosted and they have been seen collecting dead Starlings from their overnight roosts where variable numbers must die



overnight. At least one female was also seen attempting top catch Teal on the water. The first **Hen Harrier** of the autumn was a female or juvenile seen on the 17th but it was yet another poor period for Merlin with just a single sighting on the 2nd. One or two **Peregrines** were regular with a juvenile often being present in the afternoons



chasing waders. Up to three **Common Buzzards** wandered out over the Flats from the escarpments to the south but we are still waiting for the first Rough-legged Buzzard in what has been a notable east coast autumn arrival for this nomadic species.

Avocet numbers held up with 470 on the 2nd and 450 on the 20th but there was considerable movement of birds between the Flats and the Humber off Read's Island and several days saw less than 100 birds on site. The last three years have though seen more Avocets lingering on the Flats through October than in previous years when it was actually rare to see any birds after the end of September. A rapid build up of **Golden Plovers** saw the highest ever October total for the Flats when 10,000 were present on the 17th an excellent start to the late year gold show.



Rather less obvious in the month were **Lapwings** with a peak of just 1700 birds perhaps reflecting a continuation of their long-term decline in wintering numbers. After the worst ever autumn for rare waders October failed to make any impact with the only **Little Stints** being at least two different birds 17th – 21st with a juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** 17th – 24th. Five **Knot** on the 2nd were the only birds of this species and even **Dunlin** had a poor month with less than 30 birds on most days but an isolated peak of 380 on the 17th. A colour-ringed bird seen on the 18th had been ringed earlier in the year at the Vistula river mouth in Poland. The **Ruff** flock typically became more erratic in their appearances after a peak of 52 birds was logged on the 17th as birds started to leave the site and feed on inland fields only returning in the late afternoon

to roost. Three **Jack Snipe** found on the 3rd coincided with an arrival of birds from Scandinavia and the fact that they were all in one small area of the site hinted at a much larger presence. **Common Snipe** were more obvious with the majority feeding in the wet grass field



behind the hide; here 92 birds were found on the 17th again suggesting there must have been in excess of 100 birds on the Flats at that time. Around 260 – 290 **Black-tailed Godwits** were noted on most days but the total jumped to 390 on the 23rd but the only notable **Curlew** count was of 220 on the 24th as again most birds were feeding off site and only gathering in numbers to roost. There were also up to 13 **Spotted Redshanks** with 75 **Redshank** and 1-2 **Greenshank** hanging on all month but **Green Sandpiper** numbers fell from three in the first week to a single by the 31st.

Passerine records included up to three **Kingfishers** feasting on the small fish in ditches around the site and a noisy **Green Woodpecker** from 17th – 31st. Less usual were records of one to four **Rock Pipits** as Water Pipit is more regular on the Flats but these records coincided with a good westerly passage of birds up the Humber as they arrived from Scandinavia. It was good to see an improvement in the fortunes of the **Stonechat** with 1-2



birds on several dates and a peak of five being recorded on the 17th; the species was badly affected by the 2010 winter and has only just started to recover. A **Ring Ouzel** on the 19th was the only bird of the year thus far and there was only one **Fieldfare** on the 23rd but 294 **Redwings** flew south on the 17th. **Bearded Tit** numbers certainly declined from the September peaks but at least 100 were present on the 2nd. A singing male **Cetti's Warbler**, inadvertently missed from the September report, was first found on the 30th of that month and stayed through to November but a larger attraction would be murmuration viewers was the roost of **Starlings** that built up quickly from 8000 in the first week to a magnificent 50,000 on the 20th.



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