

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report December 2014

Passerines were still notable during December as the winter failed to throw any severe conditions at the area until just after Christmas when a short freezing spell left the site ice-bound for three days with milder conditions returning again from the 31st. The **Snow Bunting** was still around on the 28th being seen alongside one of the elusive **Water Pipits** which seemed to vary in number from at



least three to possibly six or more birds during the latter part of the month. The rough fields at the south end of the site produced a good count of 80+ **Reed Buntings** and



unusually there were two **Yellowhammers** on the 12th; the latter species though breeding on the Flats in small numbers is now seldom seen after the breeding season. The last large count of roosting **Starlings** was of 5000 on the 1st but thereafter numbers dropped to less than 1000 an amazing contrast to the huge numbers present in the roost in November. **Bearded Tits** continued to ping from a few of the reedbeds around the Flats particularly



those in the flooded field by the main car park but there were clearly far fewer birds than in the late autumn though the birds' habit of feeding quietly in the denser clumps of reeds in the winter months makes them much more difficult to detect. The mild conditions allowed a **Chiffchaff** to survive around the sewage works from the 1st to the 5th but it was not heard later in the month in contrast to the **Cetti's Warbler** that remained in the ditch by the hide throughout the month; the latter is a robust species that is clearly capable of surviving some



pretty hard winter weather so this month should have presented it with no problems. An influx of thrushes saw totals of 120 **Fieldfares** and 80 **Redwings** on the 12th the former concentrated on the berry laden hawthorns by the Trent Falls hide where they quickly decimated the crop leaving only eight birds to clean up the remnants



by the end of the month. The wintering **Stonechats** created confusion on the counting front as seemingly established pairs appeared to break up and the number of birds located on a daily basis varied from two to six the latter total comprising two pairs and two single males. Two **Kingfishers** continued to frequent the ditches and pools and a **Green Woodpecker** was seen on the 5th. After the exceptional **Whooper Swan** passage in November there were just two records in December with three on the 1st and five on the 16th. There was no arrival of scarce geese but the number of **Canada Geese** was



higher than in recent winters peaking with 208 on the 1st while the flock contained a number of hybrids with Greylag Goose and Barnacle Goose. A good count of 346 **Shelduck** on the 12th was the fourth highest total in the year. Up to 380 **Wigeon** were on the Flats but a count of 616 on the 21st involved 584 birds loafing on the Trent. The highest count of **Gadwall** since September involved 14 on the new reedbed on the 1st with six on the 12th and four on the 21st completing a good year for this increasing species on the Flats. Following the high counts of **Teal** in October and November there has been a drastic reduction in numbers with a maximum of just 464 being recorded on December 12th and it appears that food availability may be affecting the number of birds now using the site as the vegetation increases around the edges of the inundation area and reduces the areas that are suitable for this small dabbling duck. Up to 156 **Mallard** were present but **Shoveler** numbers fell from 52 on the 1st to just 26 on the 12th and less than ten by the end of the month. On the new reedbed one or two **Pochard** and up to 21 **Tufted Ducks** were present



along with three wintering Coot and a **Little Grebe** that lingered to the 12th before apparently departing. A single **Bittern** was seen on a few dates while there were one to three **Little Egrets**.

Up to eight **Marsh Harriers** were seen daily and when a green wing-tagged juvenile was seen on the 5th it was assumed to be the long staying NT but examination of photographs showed it to be a different bird from the same East Anglian ringing scheme and one of at least four birds ringed in summer 2014 and seen in



Lincolnshire during the autumn and late winter periods. In spite of the fact that up to five **Hen Harriers** were roosting just across the Trent at Blacktoft Sands there were only odd sightings of a single ringtail at Alkborough Flats and a male passed through en route to roost on the 24th despite frequent watching of the site in the late afternoons. A **Merlin** though was a frequent visitor throughout the month a positive development following several poor winters and no doubt a result of the increasing numbers of wintering Dunlin, of which it was seen to take at least two in the month, and also a good flock of wintering Reed Buntings feeding in the rough grass. At least three different **Peregrines** continued to be seen often perching for long periods in the dead willows in the centre of the site and interacting with the Marsh Harriers between bouts of chasing waders. There were no more sightings of Short-eared Owl but a **Barn Owl** was seen on several evenings hunting around the southern part of the site.



Usually by early December all the Humber **Avocets** have departed but this year a small flock is clearly set to winter and this was the source of a party of four birds that returned to the Flats on the 14th for a brief sojourn. After their abundance in October and November **Golden Plovers** numbers were decidedly low key with a peak of only 2320 on the 12th but **Lapwings** did better with 300 for most of the month and 5000 on the 23rd just prior to the cold snap. A single **Little Stint** continued to winter with the **Dunlin** flocks that reached a peak of 942 on the 12th with an unseasonal **Knot** arriving two days later. One or two **Ruff** were present for most of the month with three birds on the 21st being one of the last sightings of the year. After a good autumn passage there were still notable totals of **Common Snipe** with 30+ on the 6th but the count of four **Jack Snipe** on the 12th was considerably more noteworthy. The **Black-tailed Godwit** flock seemed to stabilize at around 130 birds but all of the waders were forced off the site by the cold snap late in the month. The record of 343 **Curlew** on the 23rd was by quite a way the highest count of the late winter period as was the 105 **Redshank** seen on the 19th but the records of ten **Spotted Redshanks** from the 7th was more expected for this rather rare wintering wader. Finally at least one and probably two **Green Sandpipers** again settled in for the winter continuing a recent tradition on the site.

Graham Catley, Nyctea Ltd
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