

## Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report January 2015

It had not been a great month for **Golden Plovers** with 1230 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3000 on the 11<sup>th</sup> being the only high counts until 3000 birds were again present feeding on the wet grass fields on the 29<sup>th</sup>; close scrutiny of this flock by N Drinkall however, turned up one of the rarest birds ever to have occurred on the Flats by virtue of the date of occurrence along with the rarity of the species in a British context. A small golden plover with long legs proved on closer views to be a winter plumaged **Pacific Golden**



**Plover** a species with a breeding range that stretches from the mainland dwarf shrub and lichen moss tundras of Siberia, from 70 degrees east, eastwards across the Bering Strait, to the western edge of Alaska (Tundra Plovers). Although there were records of many captured by plover catchers in the Netherlands in winter in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the modern era of birdwatching has shown the species to be almost exclusively a late summer and early autumn visitor to western Europe in small numbers with a total of 83 having occurred in Britain



to the end of 2013. One of the first records of the modern era however, concerned a winter bird at Fraisthorpe near Bridlington from January 26<sup>th</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1985 itself only the fourth British record at the time. In Lincolnshire there have been three previous records in July – August



1986 at Tetney and at South Ferriby on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> 1993 and South Ferriby again on July 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> 1994 so this bird forms the 4<sup>th</sup> county record and the first in winter. Interestingly it was speculated in Tundra Plovers that winter birds in the Netherland may have been caught on grasslands where the trappers operated after the plovers were forced there as winter weather froze out the coastal mudflats normally frequented by



the plovers. The Alkborough Flats bird arrived during a period of hard winter weather and it is interesting to speculate that it may have been wintering on the estuary with the 35000+ Golden Plovers recorded in November 2014.

Of the other waders there were 2220 **Lapwing** on the 2<sup>nd</sup> then 3830 13<sup>th</sup> with 2200 again 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>. Most unusually there were ten **Avocets** on the 1<sup>st</sup> and five still there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> one of these being a colour-ringed bird RB RG a bird ringed on Greenabella Marsh, Teeside, on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2010 that had previously been seen at Alkborough Flats on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2012. A first-winter **Little Stint**



associated with the Dunlin flock from the 1<sup>st</sup> to around the 30<sup>th</sup> and it has been a very good winter for **Dunlin** with birds feeding on the inundation area and also on the flooded grass and arable fields. At least 900 were noted on the 1<sup>st</sup> but numbers peaked with 1530 on the 13<sup>th</sup> though there were between 1100 and 1300 on most days to the end of the month. The only **Ruff** was seen on the 29<sup>th</sup> and the **Green Sandpiper** proved particularly elusive but seemed to have been present all month. A dedicated search located four **Jack Snipe** on the 1<sup>st</sup> and three on the 2<sup>nd</sup>; the same area also revealed 32 **Common Snipe** on the 2<sup>nd</sup> but the area was not searched later in the month in order to avoid disturbance to the birds during the spell of hard weather. **Black-tailed Godwit** numbers seemed to vary between about 120 and a peak of 162 birds and one colour-ringed bird was noted on several dates. During the day there were never more than 196 **Curlew** but roosting birds swelled the dawn and dusk counts on some dates with a peak of 451 noted on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> but oddly on some other evenings numbers were less than half that total so it seems that the birds have alternative roost sites probably on the estuary. Up to ten **Spotted Redshank** were present in the first half of the month but as the colder weather set in



numbers dropped and there were no more than three in the last week. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> there were 101 **Redshank** on the site but the number of birds fell quickly to 61 by the 13<sup>th</sup> and only 30 at the end of the month.

In general wildfowl numbers were rather low for January and certainly no comparison with those recorded in January 2014. The geese peaks were only 88 **Greylags** on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 78 **Canadas** on the 2<sup>nd</sup> while several flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** overflowed the site but few landed one exception being 300 seen on the Humber grasslands on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The only notable count of **Shelducks** was 157 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and many days saw less than 40 birds on the site. Similarly **Wigeon** peaked on the 2<sup>nd</sup> with 761 birds including 580 on the Trent but **Teal** bucked the trend slightly with 262 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> increasing to 324 on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 492 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. One or two Gadwall were on the new reedbed on a few dates but there were never more than three **Shoveler**, noted on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, a disappointing decline in winter abundance for this species. The new reedbed pools held small numbers of **Coot**, up to eight, **Pochard**, maximum five and **Tufted Duck**, peak of nine on the 13<sup>th</sup> while two **Little Grebes** returned early being seen from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> before the ponds froze over and

the birds departed again.

At least one ringtail **Hen Harrier** was seen on a few dates through the month with observations on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> referring to a juvenile. Up to six **Marsh Harriers** were noted daily with at least one adult male being present



in the area. A **Merlin** was seen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and two to three **Peregrines** were fairly regular with two juveniles sparring on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

A second winter **Mediterranean Gull** joined a small party of Black-headed and Common Gulls on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and there were typically gatherings of up to 50 **Great**



**Black-backed Gulls** on the inundation area early in the mornings as they left their Humber roost sites. Two **Kingfishers** were seen on the 1<sup>st</sup> and one on the 5<sup>th</sup> while a single **Barn Owl** was also noted on several dates. Two **Water Pipits** were still on the site from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> but appeared to leave the area later in the month though there were at least 14 **Meadow Pipits** and a flock of 30 – 40 **Reed Buntings**. One pair of **Stonechats** was particularly obvious moving up and down the fencing of the Humber grasslands but there were at least five birds on the 25<sup>th</sup> and it is possible that all of the wintering birds were still around. Thrushes are not always that obvious



on the Flats but there were at least 10 **Blackbirds** on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, eight **Fieldfares** on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and six **Song Thrushes** on the 13<sup>th</sup> the latter birds all feeding in areas of rough grass and thistles an unappreciated wintering habitat. The male **Cetti's Warbler** stayed put in a relatively restricted area of ditch with brambles, a typical habitat, often making itself obvious with bouts of rattling and calling in addition to brief bursts of song. There appeared to be far fewer **Bearded Tits** on site than in the late autumn but the species are always much less vocal and active in the winter and hence can be under recorded. The **Snow Bunting** was seen again on the 4<sup>th</sup> but not thereafter.

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