

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report April 2015

Although there were early signs of promise April proved to be a rather lacklustre month with regard to bird movements, another such month on a series of springs that have been dominated to variable but often cool temperatures and poor weather in southern Europe holding back migration of trans Saharan visitors. In fact the cold weather and persistent northerlies seemed to hold back the departure of several species of waterfowl with birds hanging on in higher numbers than area typical for April. Three **Pink-footed Geese** were still around on the 13th but by the 23rd the first broods of **Greylag Geese** were appearing around the site and on Whitton Sand with three broods totalling 16 young being counted on the 24th. Up to 80 adults also grazed the pasture fields. Variations in water abundance on the inundation area affected the number of **Shelduck** seen daily with peaks of 282 on the 1st and 208 on the 27th but a low of just 81 birds being noted in the intervening period. As usual there was a lot of display and courtship amongst the adult birds during the month with potential nest sites being investigated around the edges of the Flats. While many species of winter visitor were slow to depart the **Wigeon** flock disappeared almost overnight with only 62 remaining on the 1st and the last individual a single drake being seen on the 13th. **Teal** numbers were more volatile with 80 present on the 1st and then 134 on the 13th presumably as spring passage birds moved through the site but 74 on the 23rd was followed by a count of just 24 on the 24th though 64 were again noted on the 27th. For the second successive winter there was no record of **Green-winged Teal** on the site after a long run of occurrences but spring passage brought a drake to the Flats from April 25th to May 4th 2014 so there was hope of a return in 2015 and bang on cue a fine adult drake was found with the Teal on the morning of the 24th. A really striking individual with a wide, bright white



vertical breast stripe and beautiful pink tinged fore breast it must be the same bird recorded in 2015 but was it also the same drake that occurred on April 7th 2012, another bird noted on spring passage with Teal that year's bird was only seen on one date. **Gadwall** are becoming more regular on the site with their period of occurrence moving earlier in the spring and later in the autumn and occasionally through the winter so it was not surprising to see numbers rise from 12 on the 1st to a peak of 38



on the 23rd with a total of 14 females possibly hinting at an increase in breeding numbers. Gadwall tend to nest late in the year though so maintaining high water levels in potential breeding sites through to July is essential to successful breeding. A lingering female **Pintail** stayed from the 17th – 24th being joined by a drake on the 26th and there were then three birds on the 27th. After a poor winter for **Shoveler** spring passage brought a peak of nine birds to the site on the 23rd with four females present. Unfortunately falling water levels do not bode well for successful breeding by this species. On the new reedbed a peak of 25 Pochard included seven females on the 13th but there were never more than 14 Tufted Ducks. The first brood of **Coots** hatched on the 22nd and pairs were found in other parts of the site where deeper water persisted throughout the spring. At least four pairs of **Little Grebes** are in residence. Up to five **Little**

Egrets were present throughout the month but only one **Spoonbill** put in a brief appearance from the 17th – 18th; a **Bittern** was seen on the 12th.

Two different **Red Kites** took the annual tally to three birds with singles on the 1st and 10th conforming to the regular spring passage pattern of this species. With a number of pairs breeding within visible distance from the Flats though they might be expected to be more regular but once resident in an area the birds have a limited home range and tend to wander little outside of their home territory. A pair of **Marsh Harriers** settled in and started nest building but whether their attempt will



succeed as the internal reedbeds dry out during the late spring and summer allowing Foxes to wander through the reedbeds, remains to be seen. A pair of **Kestrels** were also prospecting but seemed to have no nest on the Flats at the end of the month. The first **Hobby** of the year, a superb adult, appeared over the escarpment before shooting along the base of the hill and over the



edge of the Flats on the afternoon of the 24th. The cold weather seemed to hold up breeding **Avocets** with a large flock of 350 birds present on the 1st and 300 remaining to the 13th. The birds were frequently in flight and clearly anxious to be off to their chosen nesting areas with pairs and small parties noted in display and agitated chases. Pairs were often mating and fighting in small flocks before settling to feed in the rich waters of the lagoon by the main hide. As the site offers no breeding habitat for the species they started to leave from the end of the second week with a sudden drop leaving only 32 birds by the 23rd and less than 20 at the end of the month. The first **Little Ringed Plovers** of the spring, three birds, arrived on the 10th with four noted on the 14th and single on the 24th but there was again no



suggestion of birds staying to breed. A flock of 11 Ringed Plovers on the 17th was a precursor to the main passage of this species while **Dunlin** numbers reflected the slow start to that species spring passage with nine on the 13th before 23 on the 23rd and a peak of 40 on the 27th. A total of 11 **Ruff** had been seen on most days of the month but the flock often broke up into smaller groups. On the 27th there were 14 birds with some of the males starting to get nice summer Ruffs. The colour-ringed female was present with the flock throughout confirming that these were in fact all the same birds as seen in

March. Two different **Jack Snipe** were located on the 10th and 13th but of much greater interest on the latter date a dedicated walk over about 70% of the site located a total of 110 **Common Snipe** one of the highest counts of this species ever on the Flats and more significantly a late total for what are presumably wintering birds though passage individuals could well have boosted the local total. A good sized flock of **Black-tailed Godwits** was



present all month although numbers did fall slightly from the peak of 260 on the 3rd to 171 by the 27th; several birds were in superb spring plumage but a proportion were rather more dowdy and clearly first-summer individuals that may well spend the summer in Britain rather than returning to Iceland with the breeding adults. A single **Whimbrel** on the 12th was the only bird noted. There were still 165 **Curlew** on the 13th but birds departed quickly after this date. The number of resplendent black plumaged **Spotted Redshanks** rose to 16 by the 23rd demonstrating why they were traditionally known as the Dusky Redshank in early British literature. The Icelandic **Redshanks** built up to 120 on the 3rd and there were still 56 present on the 13th but only ten birds at the end of the month and these could be potential breeding birds though there was not much in the way of song or display to support this suggestion. A single **Greenshank** arrived on the 18th with two on the 24th and single **Green Sandpipers** were seen on the 11th and 23rd but whether they were the same individual seems open to question. An **Arctic Tern** fed in front of the ain hide for most of the morning on the 23rd before the mist cleared and it left.



A **Swallow** appeared on the 3rd and the first four **Sand Martins** on the 8th with two **House Martins** arriving on the 13th. Other spring migrants included the first Yellow Wagtail on the 10th with seven on the 26th, three White Wagtails 26th, a fine male Whinchat 26th, a Wheatear 23rd with seven on the 26th, the first singing Grasshopper Warbler 23rd with three on the 26th, a Sedge Warbler 13th and Reed Warbler 26th.

Graham Catley, Nyctea Ltd
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