

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report May 2015

May is one of the most anticipated months of the birding calendar prized for its mix of incoming summer visitors and passage migrants all adorned in their summer finery. Waders typically figure strongly in the mix of bird species but May 2015 will go down as one of the worst spring months on record locally with an almost total absence of passage waders and very few passerines to boot. The seemingly persistent cool winds from the north and west seemed to put paid to the prospects of any exciting days in the month.



The effects of winter can often be seen on wildfowl well into the spring with survivors of hunting and other injuries condemning some birds to an ignominious end to their British visitations. Up to three **Wigeon** remained into May but all of them, two drakes and a duck showed signs of shooting injuries while an immature **Whooper Swan** possibly the bird first seen in late March also put in a few appearances on the Humber around Whitton Sand and landed on the Flats on the 9th. Occasionally birds like the Wigeon, if they only have injuries that inhibit long flights, will attempt to breed where they end up for the summer but there was no sign of any such activity on the Flats this year. The local pair of **Mute Swans** though

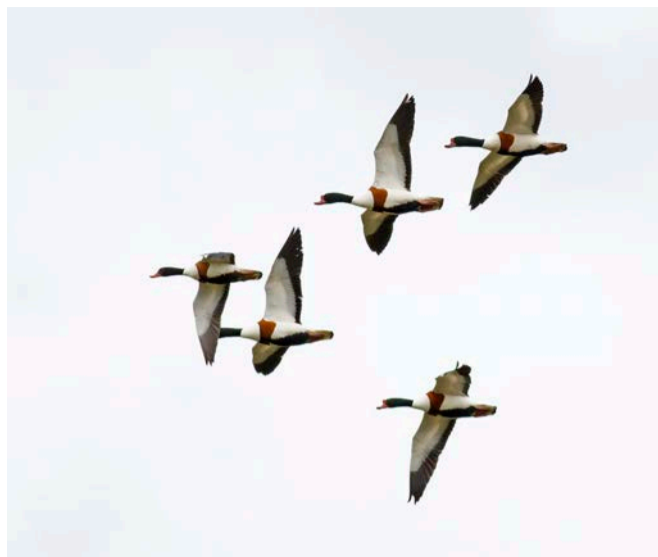


continued to incubate their eggs in the nest by the reedbed footpath but the number of broods of **Greylag Geese** appeared to be well down on last year possibly as a direct result of the colder than normal spring weather. The number of birds without young was also high with 180 gathered on site by the 21st again suggesting a poor breeding season. At least three broods of **Mallard** were scooting around the new reedbed with two containing 12 small young, impressive broods. Many other ducks though were notable for their absence with no **Shoveler** or **Garganey** all month and low peaks of just 12 **Gadwall** and 28 **Teal**, the latter counted on the 5th. The fine drake **Green-winged Teal** stayed put until the 12th making his a



19 day residence a notable one for spring. A total of 202 **Shelducks** was logged on the 5th but as the site started to dry out rapidly available feeding was much reduced and numbers fell quickly but several females were clearly nesting in the local area with lots of parties indulging in chasing displays and fights between rival males. Up to eight **Pochard** and 11 **Tufted Ducks** remained around

the reedbed along with the four pairs of **Little Grebes**.



The number of **Little Egrets** started to rise by the last week of the month with seven birds present most still in their fine breeding plumage adorned with full aigrettes but there was only one record of **Spoonbill**, an immature bird, that was present from 3rd – 5th.

The male **Marsh Harrier** attracted a new female to the site and a second nest was under construction but whether either will succeed as the site dries out during the summer is open to question. Up to four **Common Buzzards** including the pale bird were still patrolling the escarpment and wandering over the Flats but it was generally a poor month for raptors though there were records of **Hobby** on the 10th and 13th.

No **Oystercatchers** appear to be breeding but seven birds were together on the 25th; the number of **Avocets** fell away after 40 were present in the first two weeks and for the first time there appear to be no **Redshank** attempting to nest on the site this year. A single **Little Ringed Plover** was noted on the 17th while the spring passage of **tundra Ringed Plovers** was not much better with records on only three dates; seven on the



5th and 12 on the 15th and 21st. other passage waders were negligible; **Dunlin** only occurred on a few days with a meagre peak of 28 on the 5th, a single **Sanderling** dropped in on the 15th, there were 10 **Ruff** still on the 3rd but five on the 5th was the only subsequent record, two **Bar-tailed Godwits** on the 13th were followed by five on the 15th and two again 17th but there were only three dates with **Greenshank** present, three on the 3rd, one 9th and two 10th. The **Black-tailed Godwit** flock diminished rapidly after 29 on the 5th with less than ten on any subsequent date and after a dapper flock of 11 **Spotted Redshanks** left on the 2nd there were just single birds on the 5th and 15th. The peak of seven **Whimbrel** occurred on the 5th with five on the 7th, two on 10th and one 17th but the only **Common Sandpipers** were two on the 3rd and one 17th. After the April bird another **Arctic Tern** frequented the site on 20th and 21st.

The only record of **Cuckoo** was a bird heard briefly on the 14th a continuing sign of the decline of this once iconic sound of the spring and summer months. The first three **Swifts** were noted on the 3rd but it was another aerial



hunter that would have claimed the record of the year if only they had been more co-operative. Two European **Beeeaters**, a scarce migrant to Britain with their breeding population centred around the Mediterranean were seen and heard high over Faxfleet, just across the Humber, on the afternoon of the 15th; a few minutes later



Beeeater photographed in Hungary

they were heard calling twice over Alkborough but were never seen presumably continuing southward down the Trent. In spite of extensive searching they were never relocated. More regular spring migrants were also few and far between; six **Wheatears** on the 2nd were followed by a single on the 23rd and there were just two records of **Whinchat** on the 4th and 17th. The Whinchat or Furzechat as it was once known was once common throughout England breeding on roadsides and the edges of fields as well as on heathland and in rough fields declined rapidly as agricultural intensification destroyed not only its breeding sites but its food supply and the last proven breeding record in Lincolnshire was in 1974. Even passage migrants have declined in numbers in recent



years as populations in other countries are being affected by loss of breeding habitat and also changes in wintering areas. A female **Ring Ouzel** fed in the pasture fields from 2nd to the 4th. The male **Cetti's Warbler** continued to proclaim his territory and a male **Grasshopper Warbler** was also occasionally in song from 21st to the 23rd. The breeding bird survey is under way and appears to be showing a decline in the number of **Whitethroats** while **Sedge Warblers** are perhaps up to the 2014 level but



as yet **Reed Warbler** numbers are clearly down but this species sometimes arrives in numbers in early June so it is too early to draw conclusions on that species as yet. **Bearded Tits** are making feeding flights and first broods should be on the wing at any time and **Water Rail** numbers seem to be holding up in spite of the loss of wet areas in the reedbeds as the site is drying out.