

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report June 2015

Missing from the May report were a colour ringed **Spoonbill** on the 29th and a singing **Quail** found in the rough fields by the car park from the 30th – 31st; this is only the third record for the site.

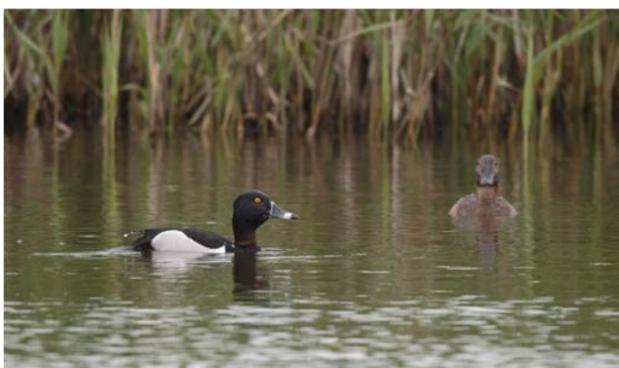
Predicting new birds for the Flats is often a semi-predictable lottery with certain waders and long-legged members of the heron family clearly outstanding on the list but some species seem unlikely due to the lack of



large areas of suitable habitat on the site; add to this the preponderance of rare duck records in the winter months and the occurrence of a new diving duck in mid June was certainly not expected so a very fine drake **Ring-necked Duck** on the new reedbed pools from the 16th – 19th was an unexpected but rather dashing addition to the site waterfowl list. Ring-necked ducks breed from



southeastern and east-central Alaska, central British Columbia eastward through northern Saskatchewan to Newfoundland, and south to northeastern California, southeastern Arizona, southern Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, northern New York and Massachusetts. They prefer



sedge-meadow marshes, swamps and bogs surrounded by woody vegetation. Female ring-necked ducks nest in flooded or floating emergent vegetation and lay an average of 8-10 eggs. The species was first recorded in Britain in 1954 but since then they have increased markedly as a vagrant with 716 birds having been



recorded between 1958 and 2012 averaging 16 a year during 2010–2012. Like other nearctic wildfowl individual birds have a tendency to reappear at the same sites in successive years and clearly involve the same birds that become resident on this side of the Atlantic having made

the long crossing. While drake Ring-necked Ducks look rather similar to Tufted Ducks the females are more like female Pochard and this could be the reason that drake Ring-necks often attach themselves to female Pochards like the Alkborough Flats bird.

A **Pink-footed Goose** on 17th and 18th was presumably an injured bird from the previous winter. After hatching four cygnets the resident **Mute Swans** quickly lost two but still had the remaining two at the end of the month. **Shelduck** attained their highest count of the year on the 6th when 304 adults and brood of 6 ducklings was counted. A further two broods appeared during the month but most seemed to disappear quickly presumably due to predation. The usual late spring arrival of **Ruddy Shelducks** saw three birds on the adjacent Humber and the Flats from the 29th. A peak of 67 **Gadwall** on the 4th was below par for recent years and the month's **Teal** peak was only 43 on the 21st but there were up to 110 **Mallard** and at least seven broods of young; the only record of **Shoveler** of note was 14 on the 16th and none appeared to have bred. Up to 10 **Little Egrets** were present with a



single **Spoonbill** arriving on the 24th and being joined by a second bird on the 28th both staying into July.

The warm weather favoured a good show of *odonata* and butterflies; a late **Orange-tip** was still on the wing on the 16th when the first **Ringlets** and **Meadow Browns** appeared to accompany the **Large Skippers**. Odd **Red Admirals** appeared from mid month with two **Painted Ladies** on the 25th no doubt the precursor of a larger



summer arrival of this southern migrant. Brimstones were also present on a few dates. Most of the interesting dragonflies and damselflies were on the new reedbed pools but odd **Black-tailed Skimmers** were to be found in the long grass on the track sides. Once a scarce species this far north **Black-tailed Skimmer** is now an abundant species on newly created wetlands. Two other species only recorded for the first time at Alkborough in the last three years were found to be increasing and breeding on the pools; up to 10 **Hairy Dragonflies** patrolled the reed fringes while several pairs of **Red-eyed damselflies**



were ovipositing. Adding to the species variety on the 16th were **Azure** and **Common Blue Damselflies**, **Blue-tailed Damselfly** and several **Four-spotted Chasers**. Completing the species tally for the month were a fine male **Broad-bodied Chaser** and a teneral **Common Darter** on the 25th.

With most adult raptors breeding in June there is less chance of wandering birds appearing but young **Red**

Kites often spread around the country at this time and one on the 6th was the fourth record of the year on the site. The breeding **Marsh Harrier** failed but hunting birds were seen daily along with the local **Common Buzzards** and **Kestrels**. Of particular note were the observations of a male **Montagu's Harrier** on five dates from the 11th. This particular bird is the male of a pair that are breeding at Blacktoft Sands just across the Trent. This species



is the rarest breeding raptor in Britain and has seldom nested as far north as the Humber in the past three decades so the presence of these birds is particularly exciting. **Hobbies** were also noted frequently and single **Peregrines** returned on the 25th and 29th. Breeding **Water Rails** were audible from several parts of the site. The only breeding waders were two pairs of **Lapwing** which both hatched two small young from second clutches on the 25th but it appeared that all of these perished as the pools they were feeding on rapidly dried out at the end of the month. Large numbers of **Avocets** had also clearly failed in their breeding attempts with the number of birds building up from 84 on the 11th to 316 by the 25th when four fledged young also appeared, then 545 by the 28th. **Lapwings** move early following the breeding season and there were 194 on site by the 29th joined by a single **Golden Plover**. A small influx of first-summer **Bar-tailed Godwits** saw 67 arrive on the 4th accompanied by 14 **Knot**; the latter birds were not seen again but the godwit flock gradually dwindled to 12 by the 14th with three still present on the 25th. A single male **Ruff** arrived on the 29th with the first female **Spotted Redshank** on the 13th and six birds present by the 24th with 1-2 **Greenshank** from the 16th. A **Whimbrel** on the 16th was early but **Black-tailed Godwits** started returning en cue from the 23rd with 38 birds on the 25th. The first **Green Sandpiper** was back on the 16th while a **Wood Sandpiper** on the 29th was the first of the year. Single **Little Gulls** on the 11th and 26th were eclipsed in rarity value by a **Little Tern** on the 5th only about the 3rd record for the site.

On the passerine from an adult **Cuckoo**, a **Kingfisher** and a spotty juvenile **Stonechat** all on the 29th were all notable. On the breeding bird front a pair of **Yellow Wagtails** nested after a gap in 2014, **Reed Buntings** and **Reed Warblers** continue to increase and **Bearded Tits** also seem to be doing well with several broods of fledged young appearing from mid month. The male Cetti's Warbler continued to sing throughout and hopefully has bred for the first time. Finally two parties of **Common Crossbills** passed over with three north on the 21st and two south on the 27th while two **Siskins** on the 28th were part of a widespread passage of this species apparently following a large pine crop failure in Scotland.

Roe Deer are always present on the Flats but the introduced **Muntjac** are increasing but seen less often; the individual below was close to the lower car park on the 29th.



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