

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report August 2015

While the August weather was particularly variable with temperatures fluctuating markedly and some unusual periods of rainfall the birdlife on site was similarly mixed with some exceptional records of birds passing over and a generally good passage of waders that peaked towards the end of the month.

The month got off to a flying start when a juvenile **Black Stork** appeared over the Flats and then over the village soaring over the maze before drifting off down



the Humber on the afternoon of the 3rd. No birders were on site but the bird was seen at Blacktoft Sands and then photographed by Derek Brunt as if soared over the caravan site (see photos below by Derek). Black Stork is still a rare bird in Britain with 233 occurrences to the end of 2013 but it has been increasing in frequency in recent years with birds now breeding in Belgium and northern France. In fact there was something of an influx of juvenile birds in early August with at least five different individuals recorded along the east and south coasts. Two of the birds found in Aberdeenshire and at Spurn



Point had been ringed in the same nest in north-east France in June 2015. The latter bird went on to make an extended stay in east Yorkshire and even ventured into Lincolnshire on two occasions and is still present at the time of writing. Why this bird failed to find the Flats to its liking is a bit odd given the abundance of **Little Egrets** and **Spoonbills** on site during the month. **Spoonbills** numbered seven on the 1st and then peaked at nine on the 15th but numbers varied daily from five to eight in between times. One colour-ringed bird seen from the 7th



onwards had been ringed on May 31st 2012 as a chick at Vlissingen, Sloegebied, the Netherlands and recorded at various sites in the Netherlands to September 10th 2012 and then it was not seen again until it appeared at Alkborough Flats on June 13th to the 15th then headed north to Findhorn Bay, Morayshire, Scotland where it arrived on June 17th 2015 being seen there until July 29th then at Cresswell Northumberland on August 5th before moving south to Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire on the 6th and returning to Alkborough Flats on the 15th. Immature Spoonbills do wander widely before they settle to breed at five years or older but this bird was clearly travelling up and down the east coast at random. All of the large **Little Egret** counts came from roosting surveys with peaks of 44 on the 2nd, 50 on the 4th and 39 28th – 29th but

during the daytime there were up to 12 birds on site on most days including at least two colour-ringed birds. To complete the large white heron roll call the **Great White Egret** also put in a few appearances roosting with the Little Egrets on the 4th, 7th, 16th and 28th – 29th when it



was also seen feeding on the Trent Flash again.

Wildfowl built up quickly with 1200 **Greylag Geese** on the 10th and 390 **Barnacle Geese** from the 3rd – 10th. An **Egyptian Goose** on the 9th was notable but **Shelduck** numbers were amazingly low with less than ten birds throughout. Two **Wigeon** were back on the 10th but there were no more than six by the end of the month in contrast to **Teal** that built up from 74 on the 3rd to 570 by the 17th. There was an exceptional count of 340 **Mallard** on the early month spring tides on the 4th and a good passage of **Pintail** for August with two on the 16th and 23rd then 15 on the 26th, 16 on 29th and a peak of 30 on the 30th while the expected increase in **Shoveler** saw 39 present on the 3rd then 87 on the 10th with a maximum of 110 on the 23rd. Two late broods of **Little Grebes** looked set to fledge on the reedbed after a poor early season.

Marsh Harriers became far less numerous during the month with one to three birds being typical rather than the six to ten that is the norm in spring. The **Montagu's Harrier** pair continued to make odd visits to the Flats with the male last seen on the 9th and the female on the 17th. The two local pairs of **Common Buzzards** fledged two



young each and the birds often wandered out over the Flats. A **Merlin** arrived back on the 8th and was present for three days but not seen again before the month end. One or two **Hobbies** were seen on several dates during the month along with one or two **Peregrines** but a minimum of three different birds were involved with two being juveniles and one adult.

Not to be outdone by the long legged birds the second record of **Bee-eater** this year came on the evening of the 5th when one was seen above the stables and the village before disappearing never to be seen again. Single **Short-eared Owls**, possibly all the same bird, were seen on 5th – 9th, 16th and 30th with 1-2 **Kingfishers** appearing from the 10th and the last **Swift** thus far was seen on the 16th. a gathering of 150 **Swallows** on the 9th, a **Redstart** on the 30th, and three **Whinchats** on the 28th were all notable passerines as were single **Willow Tits** on the 6th and 30th.

Waders are the staple diet of the Flats birding scene and it was a pretty good month; the highlight was a moulting adult **Grey Phalarope** that appeared all too briefly on the evening of the 9th. Only the second occurrence on the Flats this bird was rather unusual in its timing with most records being in the period September – December but it is not unprecedented in the local area with a very similar looking moulting bird having occurred thirty years previously at Barton pits from August 12th – 13th 1985.

Avocet numbers were typically highest just after the high spring tides with a peak of 590 on the 16th but less than 20 at the end of the month. **Little Ringed Plovers** continued to be regular with a peak of four juveniles on the 16th – 17th but odd birds were still around to the 31st. a small passage of **Ringed Plovers** saw up to 26 present



in mid month and a peak of 45 on the 29th while **Dunlin** numbers remained low with maxima of only 40 on the 15th and 54 on the 17th. A single **Grey Plover** occurred on the 4th and there were up to 600 **Lapwing** daily but the number of **Knot** records was higher than usual with singles on the 23rd, 26th and 29th then an unusual 25 birds on the 31st. An adult **Sanderling** on the 20th and one to three juvenile **Little Stints** from 15th to the 24th completed the *calidris* list for the month. It proved to be



a good month for Ruff with 15 birds including the first juvenile on the 1st then 25 with three juveniles on the 5th – 9th before further influxes saw 32 on the 13th 40 on the 17th and 81 by the 23rd. The high percentage of juveniles suggests the species had a good breeding season. **Black-tailed Godwits** were present daily with the first fledged juveniles arriving on the 8th and a peak of 257 occurring on the 30th. A single juvenile **Bar-tailed Godwit** was present 6th – 8th and there was just one record of **Whimbrel** on the 15th but up to 318 **Curlew** could be found on the best days. **Spotted Redshank** numbers rose to a maximum of 20 on the 23rd, there were up to 96 **Redshank** and 12 **Greenshank** with a maximum of 10 **Green Sandpipers** on the 30th. The 3rd produced a total of 10 **Common Sandpipers** and there was a notable



influx of juvenile **Wood Sandpipers** after the first on the 20th with two or three between the 24th and 30th. To complete the month gull records included a peak of 4000 **Black-headed Gulls** on the 10th, up to three **Mediterranean Gulls** between 2nd and 23rd and a maximum of ten **Yellow-legged Gulls** on the 4th.

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