

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report September 2015

September is normally the best month of the year for passage waders as the young of the year join the adults on their first migration and the totals of birds occurring and the chances of encountering a slightly off course juvenile are optimal but clearly this year was not a good one for breeding waders. It seems that the Arctic summer may have been poor for breeding waders and this would follow the four year lemming cycle as there were abundant lemmings in 2013 with a crash following in the next two



years. When lemmings are scarce predators turn to birds and generally wader and wildfowl productivity declines; if these years coincide with late spring snow melt then some species rear hardly any young. Amazingly there has not as yet been a single record of Curlew Sandpiper on the Flats this year; in 2008 the autumn peak was 30 birds with 15 – 22 in 2009 – 2011 but only three in 2012 with 13 in 2013 then only six in 2014. There were also no records of the sympatric Little Stint in September 2015. The rapid morphological changes to the inundation area and more particularly the colonisation of the mud by saltmarsh plants and reeds is also reducing the area



available to feeding waders. Flooding of some of the grass fields during the higher spring tides provided a short-lived feeding boost for some species particularly Ruff, but in general the rapid loss of favoured habitat is clearly have a detrimental effect upon most of the wader species. In contrast to several species it looks like Ruff, that breed further south in Scandinavia and the Baltic states, had a good breeding season with a high number of juveniles being seen on site. At the start of the month



there were 95 birds present but this rose to a peak of at least 103 on the 5th when only 23 birds were adults. Demonstrating the challenge of counting species over a large site like Alkborough was the count of only 50 Ruff on the 6th of which 35 were adults; so where did all of the other juveniles go but also with 12 more adults present there must have been at least 115 birds in total. All of the birds on the 5th were foraging in flooded grass fields where they were accompanied by at least one juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper first seen the previous evening. Being much smaller than even the female reeves the Pectoral Sandpiper was mostly hidden in the long grass. At one point there appeared to be two birds present but this was not confirmed 100%. After flying west with two Ruff late morning on the 5th it was never seen again. The flooded grass fields also proved popular with Common Snipe and a census one of the best fields on the 9th revealed a total of 69 birds suggesting that there may well have been in excess of 100 individuals on the Flats

that day. Up to 40 Dunlin were seen on a few dates but generally there were less than 20 birds present daily. The last Little Ringed Plover, a juvenile, was present during 6th – 9th. Avocets flooded onto the site in the first part of the month with a peak of 1150 on the 9th being the highest ever September count for this species but numbers declined from mid month with less than 100 on



most dates thereafter. Golden Plovers stages a small build up with up to 400 by the 30th but Lapwings were in better numbers than have been seen for a few years with a maximum of 1600 on the 22nd; only 2008 produced a higher total when 2200 were present. A single Knot was seen on the 7th and two juveniles on the 22nd. Black-tailed Godwits never exceeded 224 but looking back at the nine years of data for the site there has only been one higher September count of 260 in 2014 with all the record totals occurring in July, August and October. There were no records of Whimbrel but Curlew totalled at least 258 though no roost counts were undertaken when peak numbers usually occur. The flock of Spotted Redshanks continues to do well with a maximum of 25 birds on the 7th; supporting the theory of a poor breeding season for several species only two of these birds were juveniles. Up to 78 Redshanks were a daily feature but Greenshanks peaked early in the month with 11 birds on the 1st after which there were typically less than seven



for the rest of the month. After five Common Sandpipers on the 1st there were no other records but one or two Green Sandpipers made it to the month end.

The first Pink-footed Geese flocks returned to the upper Humber on the 26th with 200 present by the 30th. Shelduck numbers remained low with the monthly peak of 156 on the 5th being by far the highest total. Wigeon built up slowly with 76 on the 9th then 185 on the 16th and a peak of 460 on the 30th. The latter was over twice the previous highest September total of 200 recorded in 2009. The count of 37 Gadwall on the 9th was never exceeded; additional dabbling duck counts included 100 Mallard, up to six Pintail and a maximum of 156 Shoveler from 3rd – 5th. The Shoveler count is the highest ever total by one bird beating the 155 recorded in August 2012. The



increasing area of sea aster and other saltmarsh plants is proving to be highly beneficial for feeding Teal with autumn numbers increasing each year. The counts in September 2015 rose from 1480 on the 1st to 2280 on the 30th just below the previous September peak of 2323

recorded in 2012.

The Little Egret roost still held 30 birds early in the month with at least 22 on the 30th. up to eight Spoonbills were a daily feature of the Flats to the 16th when the years maximum of ten birds was recorded including the colour



ringed bird that was first seen in June. After the 16th the birds departed en masse.

A juvenile Hen Harrier was seen on the 15th and up to six Marsh Harriers became a daily feature again with one or two Peregrines and up to four Kestrels hunting the site. A male Merlin was seen on the 5th – 6th and again on the 16th with a juvenile on the 7th while the last Hobby was recorded on the 6th. The local breeding



Common Buzzards frequented the Flats more regularly with the pale adult occasionally sitting in the hedges on the southern part of the site inviting confusion with other large pale raptors. A Barn Owl was hunting on several evenings and there were an impressive three Short-eared Owls on the 29th with two the following evening. Up to three Kingfishers were dashing around the site. The last Sand Martin was noted on the 5th when 20 House Martins were present but more notable was a gathering of 700 Swallows feeding over the flooded grass field on the morning of the 16th.

A Yellow Wagtail lingered to the 22nd and odd Grey Wagtails were around the sewage works with two Whinchats on the 9th and a Wheatear on the 6th being the only scarce chats on show. The singing male Cetti's Warbler was present all month in addition to which a calling bird was by the hide from the 22nd and a stuttering male by the tower hide on the 30th taking the day total to at least three birds a new record. Three late juvenile Sedge Warblers were still present on the 17th and at least one Reed Warbler to the 30th. A foraging flock of finches held up to 80 Goldfinches and 200 Linnets. An finally Bearded Tits seem to have enjoyed another



fruitful breeding season with a minimum of 100 birds around the site in the last week of the month.

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