

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report November 2015

The November **Teal** peak of 3404 birds, although down by over 1000 on the exceptional October high was still the highest ever count for the month maintaining the record late autumn numbers in 2015. The sudden effects of a short snap of cold weather were very obvious though over the 20th- 24th. Two successive hard frosts on the nights of the 21st and 22nd saw all of the water on the Flats frozen and Teal numbers dropped from 3200 on the 18th to nil on the 23rd but as the site quickly thawed off and



spring tides raised water levels the birds returned with 2242 counted on the 26th and 3300 on the 29th. Like Teal, **Wigeon** numbers were also high with November seeing the third consecutive highest ever monthly count of the species in the nine-year study when 1725 birds were counted on the 4th and **Mallard** also increased with 200



present on the 19th and 207 on 28th – 29th while **Shoveler** numbers slowly declined from 60 in the first half of the month to 35 by the 26th. It was also encouraging to see **Pintail** present on many dates through the month with typically 9 – 15 birds present but a peak of 23 on the 18th was a good total for November. But one species of duck that is suffering from the reduced area of foraging mud is the **Shelduck** with 2015 seeing some of the lowest monthly counts of this species. Both of the October and November peaks were in fact the lowest of the nine-year series in months when the species has typically been much more abundant as birds return to the estuary from their summer moulting area.

Greylag Geese also beat all November records with 1280 recorded for most of the first half of the month. This is also the highest ever winter total. **Whooper Swan** records were limited to six flying over on the 17th and four on the 27th as most of the birds on the move seemed to follow the east coast no doubt many being drifted out by the predominantly strong westerly winds. The Humber saw record numbers of **Pink-footed Geese** present in October and although there was a lot of onward movement of flocks in November there were still 11,580 on the 16th when 7100 were roosting on Whitton Sand. Flocks were noted passing over the Flats on a daily basis but the largest count of birds joining the resident geese was of 130 on the 5th. The Whitton Sand **Barnacle Goose** flock reached 2000 birds during



the month after another apparently successful breeding season and with reduced disturbance part of the flock began to frequent the Flats pastures on a regular basis with numbers topping out at 1480 on the 5th but 1010

present on the 26th. **Canada Geese** were also in higher than average numbers with a peak of 220 on the 12th – 18th and to complete the list of dubious geese there were three **Egyptian Geese** on several dates and six on the 12th. The best goose though left it to the end of the month to put in appearance; a White-fronted Goose seen on the afternoon of the 28th was not identified to race but it reappeared in the gales on the 29th and was easily identified as an adult **Greenland White-fronted Goose**. This rare goose has only occurred on the Flats



on one previous occasion when a flock of six adults were present in January and nearby on Whitton Sand in February 2012.



Two **Little Grebes** lingered all month and there were up to ten **Little Egrets** though as usual the highest counts were all made as birds came into their night-time roost. While the numbers of wildfowl that benefit from the spread of the seeding saltmarsh vegetation continue to increase the rapid spread of the same saltmarsh across the open mudflats is having a detrimental effect upon many of the wader species that rely on the open mud to feed but also to roost and loaf. **Golden Plovers** in particular seemed to be avoiding the site with the November peak being the lowest ever total for this month during the nine winters that the site has been surveyed; gales and heavy rain on the 29th produced a total of 3400 birds onto the grasslands by the Humber but this compares with previous all time November peaks of 14,500 in 2011 and 12,000 in 2012. **Lapwing** were more frequent visitors during the month with early peaks of 2666 on the 4th and 3000 on the 12th before 5140 on the 29th was actually the second highest ever November count for the species only being beaten



by 5500 in 2011. **Avocet** records were very limited with 30 on the 4th but then just a single injured bird on the 12th suggesting that most of the Humber flock had departed for their winter quarters but a brief reappearance by a flock of 156 birds on the 19th was unusual; there were no subsequent records in the month. Following a very bleak autumn **Dunlin** numbers started to pick up with successive high counts of 300 on the 12th, the maximum of 465 on the 18th and 260 in the last week but the year remained free of any records of Curlew Sandpiper the first such blank year since the surveys began. The flooded grass fields attracted a good feeding flock of

waders in the first half of the month with **Ruff** building up to 30 on the 4th then 38 from the 5th – 12th but thereafter there were only two on the 26th and one on the 29th. Most of the **Black-tailed Godwits** also fed on the pastures; numbers were fairly stable with 160 from the 4th and a one off peak of 275 on the 18th. A walk of the wet grassland on a survey carried out on the 26th located 38 **Common Snipe** and the first Two **Jack Snipe** of the winter. Up to 290 **Curlew** and the flock of seven **Spotted Redshanks**



were seen on many dates but **Redshank** remained in low numbers with the early part of the month seeing the only counts in excess of 20 birds when there were 66 from 4th – 5th and 56 on the 10th. A single **Greenshank** lingered to the 4th and one **Green Sandpiper** was still in the area on the 26th.

It was a particularly good month for **Marsh Harriers** with six to eight different birds being seen daily around the Flats with obvious movements between the site and the adjacent areas of the estuary. What was quite surprising was the number of males, mainly 2cy birds, that were recorded outnumbering the juveniles and females which is contrary to what has always been expected in the winter when female and juveniles were considered most likely



to winter this far north due to their ability to kill larger prey in the harsher conditions they face in the winter months. Sadly the fate of the **Hen Harrier** continues to be dire with more and more birds being illegally killed on grouse moors and by consequence with no young being reared there are less and less birds wintering further south and only a single bird was recorded during the month a ringtail on the 26th. Rounding off the raptor tally adult and juvenile **Peregrines** were recorded with a particularly feisty juvenile apparently being robbed of its prey by a Marsh Harrier on the 12th and subsequently taking out its frustration by attacking nine different Marsh Harriers, Greylag and Canada Geese and two Carrion Crows on Whitton Sand and the eastern end of the site. Up to three **Short-eared Owls** put in occasional appearances as did one or two **Barn Owls**.

On the passerine front one or two **Kingfishers**, **Green Woodpeckers** on the 4th and 26th, a late **Swallow** and **Rock Pipit** 12th plus one or two **Water Pipits** from 4th to the month end were all noteworthy. A male **Stonechat** was seen from the 4th being joined by a female from the 17th and at least four and possibly five **Cetti's Warblers** were scattered around the site as were small parties of **Bearded Tits** but the latter became far less visible than they were during the autumn. A flock of 30 **Siskins** were in the lone alder by the tower hide on the 4th and small numbers of **Lesser Redpolls** were noted with **Goldfinches**, **Greenfinches** and **Linnets** varying in number from 10 to 30. At least 50 **Reed Buntings** were present throughout and there were 10 **Yellowhammers** and a single **Tree Sparrow** on the 26th.

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