

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report April 2016

Strange springs seem to be more of the norm in recent years than expected weather and April 2016 was mainly more akin to mid-winter than spring particularly in the latter half of the month when persistent cold, northerly winds pegged back temperatures and held up north bound spring migrants on the continent.

The wintery theme saw a flock of 11 **Whooper Swans** on the Humber on the 3rd and a single on the Flats on the 16th while a single, presumably injured, **Pink-footed Goose** was present all month with the **Greylag Geese**. The **Barnacle Geese** also continued to visit the Humber side grasslands with 1400 present on the 9th in spite of the fact that many of the birds would have been already nesting at this time. Adding to the plastic wildfowl theme was a single **Egyptian Goose** on the 10th a species that is increasing rapidly in Eastern Britain following a long period of being restricted to their original release areas in east Anglia. **Shelduck** never exceeded the 91 birds counted on the 6th with birds increasingly moving away from the inundation area onto the flooded grass fields and the adjacent hillside where they indulged in displays and territorial squabbles. Following the good **Wigeon** presence in March most had departed by April with a peak count of 96 birds on the 6th following which there were 50 on the 9th but few thereafter. The winter was exceptional for **Gadwall** and they continued to provide a strong showing in April with a maximum of 55 present on the 10th and 34 up to the end of the month. **Teal** continued to vary in numbers as they moved between Trent Falls, the Trent and Humber and the Flats but there were generally around 250 birds in the first week with 254 counted on the 10th. Regular scrutiny of the **Teal** flocks makes it very unlikely that a vagrant **Green-winged Teal** would go unnoticed so when a drake was found on the 7th it was almost certainly newly arrived. This Nearctic vagrant has



been recorded on the Flats on no less than 13 occasions with single drakes making some protracted stays over winter periods between 2007 and January 2012 but it is likely that many of the records involved a single returning bird though two were present on November 15th 2008. Since January 2012 all of the four records have involved birds located on spring migration in April – May thus April 7th 2012, April 24th to May 4th 2014, April 24th to May 12th 2015 and this years bird that stayed from the 7th through to the 17th. Could the fact that it arrived earlier and left earlier than the bird noted in 2014 and 2015 suggest that it was a different individual? Without direct evidence we cannot be sure and as wildfowl are generally quite long lived it is probably more conceivable that the last three records do relate to the same bird. Pairs of **Pintail** were seen on the 2nd and 12th with a drake on the 13th and the last day of the month saw the arrival of a fine pair of **Garganey**. There was the possibility of breeding on the site in 2014 but not even one record in 2015 so this is a welcome arrival and it would be good to see the birds attempt to breed as the site is much wetter than



usual with many suitable feeding areas for the birds this spring. Completing the wildfowl round up there were up to 10 **Shoveler** in the first week but only an odd pair remained after this date while on the reedbed 10 **Pochard**

on the 3rd and 12 **Tufted Ducks** on the 13th were both unremarkable counts after the March arrival. At least six **Little Grebes** were displaying and pairs of **Coots** broke out from the new reedbed and Trent Flash to forage in flooded grass fields and even within the deeper water of the inundation area.

Up to 16 **Little Egrets** were roosting on the site with eight or nine foraging around the receding waters in the field edges where they were joined by six to eight **Grey Herons**. The most exciting news on the large fish eating bird front though concerned a **Bittern** that was present from the 17th to at least the 20th and was heard booming on two evenings. This is the first time that this behaviour has been recorded on the site and although it



may have involved a bird breeding on one the adjacent reedbed sites in the upper estuary it shows that the site may eventually hold this rare breeding bird in summer. The first **Spoonbill** of the year arrived for an all too brief sojourn on the 15th but proved to be yet another colour ringed bird presumably from a Dutch or German colony. Two pairs of **Marsh Harriers** settled to breed and there were regular visitations by other birds and some ongoing aerial displays. The first-winter **Hen Harrier** was seen almost daily throughout the month becoming very worn and faded by the end of the month. Being a first year bird it is not likely to breed this year and thus would be in no great rush to move off to its potential breeding area. A



pair of **Sparrowhawks** is again nesting just off the Flats with another pair nearby and in a similar vein **Common Buzzards** are also occupying two different territories along the hillside with these birds and occasional immatures wandering out over the Flats on a regular basis. A **Merlin** was noted on the 3rd and there were a few sightings of **Peregrines**, mainly immature birds.

There were seven **Oystercatchers** on the 13th but four for the rest of April while **Avocets** peaked at 160 on the 1st. The first **Little Ringed Plover** record of the spring involved a multiple arrival of four birds on the 2nd and somewhat oddly there were also four on the 21st and



29th. Up to nine **Ringed Plovers** were also present on four dates while wintering **Dunlin** numbered 40 on the 3rd with 60 on the 9th but passage birds in summer plumage arrived from the 21st with 22 on the 29th. A flock of 60 **Golden Plovers** flew over on the 9th and a single bird was on the grass fields on the 13th when a **Grey Plover** was also flying around the site. The wet grass fields also proved to be attractive to a few displaying **Lapwing** that will hopefully be more successful than in recent years. An extensive walk on the foreshore on the 13th revealed the presence of 40 **Common Snipe** and a single **Jack Snipe** but more intriguing was a Common Snipe in brief drumming display on the 18th when two birds were

present. Only one **Ruff** was seen during the month on the 6th but the number of smart black plumaged **Spotted Redshanks** increased to a peak of 15 on the 24th and



the first **Greenshank** on the 21st involved the arrival of a flock of six birds with one or two on subsequent dates to the month end. The pre-departure build up of wintering **Common Redshank** saw an increase to the year's high of 148 on the 19th. The cold northerlies held up the departure of the Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits with 194 birds on the 9th and 180 still present on the 13th. A party of five Bar-tailed Godwits added to the wader species list on the 22nd with the first Whimbrel arriving on the 16th. The wet grass fields then proved attractive to this beautiful *numenius* species with a peak of 15 recorded on the 30th. **Curlew** were also still in good numbers in the first half of April with 354 on the 13th prior to a sudden mass departure. Finally on the wader front the **Green Sandpiper** was seen through the month and the first **Common Sandpiper** arrived on the 19th with two present on the 23rd.

One or two **Short-eared Owls** hung on until the 27th. Spring migrants filtered in slowly mainly in low numbers but **Sand Martins** were an exception with 200 feeding on the 3rd and 300 on the 4th; the first two **Swallows** arrived on the 3rd but were predated by a **House Martin** on the 2nd. Three **Yellow Wagtails** and seven **White Wagtails**



on the 3rd heralded the start of a brief spring passage with peaks of 12 Yellows on the 6th then 16 on the 14th while there were 10 Whites on the 10th and 12 on the 21st. A **Wheatear** on the 9th was followed by three on the 13th then two on the 30th and a pair of **Stonechats** were still present from 3rd to the 6th. The earliest ever **Sedge Warbler** appeared on the 3rd, a **Willow Warbler** 7th with a **Reed Warbler** 17th, **Whitethroat** 23rd and **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Swift** 30th. Finally **Cetti's Warbler** was first recorded on the Flats in November 2012 with the first



summering bird, that may well have bred, being noted in 2015 but the 2015 – 2016 winter saw at least six birds on the site and three males were in song in early April but only two seemed to be present in the latter half of the month though at least one of them seemed to have a mate and was hopefully breeding.

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